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Agency in scientific discourse

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In recent times, the trend of aiming for objectivity and reproducibility in science has arrived in linguistic discourse. A critical point in this debate is the agency in speakers' language use and, simultaneously, in the researchers' description and interpretation. The aim of objectivity demotes, by default, the role of the subjects, often by imposing structures to limit agency. We can see various scenarios where researchers can purposefully bend rules, thus exerting their agentive stance in the research endeavour. This paper aims to address issues pertaining to agency as opposed to the goal of reproducibility, where the researchers' and consultants' agency on different aspects of the research process shape its outcomes. Training early career researchers and students in using their agencies responsibly is a necessary step in passing on the practices of our field.

Key-words: *metascience, scientific writing, socio-pragmatics, research design, reproducibility*

1. Introduction

In our daily work, we as researchers make decisions. Whether or not these are deliberate, we decide on various factors influencing our research and the dissemination of its outcomes, either by ourselves or together with our colleagues. This serves to show that there is a discursive element to our decision making processes, to which we can also count decisions influenced by the traditions and norms of our field or sub-discipline, the training we received, or trends within linguistics. This view of the researcher and their agency to act and interact with data and texts defines the context in which this paper aims to discuss agency in linguistic discourse.

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2. Motivation

There are several reasons motivating this discussion. First, we believe it is imperative for researchers to constantly review and question the decisions we make while supporting our peers (colleagues, students) in decisions on their own projects, e.g. in supervision, review procedures, trainings, citing literature. This interaction is a necessity for science, as it supports the standing of science within society, fosters credibility of our claims, and creates useful networks for the advancement of our goals. Second, we are both dealing with multiple agencies in our own work or the data we are using. Tobias Weber has been working extensively with legacy materials, i.e. data collected by other researchers who left their artefacts for posterity. Using this type of source does not only benefit from investigating and questioning agencies and decision-making processes, it requires it! The discourse on these decisions does not take place in person, as the original researchers may have passed on, but through the artefacts created by our precursors and our critical engagement with them. Mia Klee is conducting research on polyphony in communication by means of Conversation Analysis, a methodology where a researcher's stance and position is part of the exposition. As with legacy materials, the researcher becomes a part of their descriptions and their research on the whole. Third, we are both teaching various courses at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München on research methodology and scientific writing. The practices we teach shape the perspectives and positions our students adopt on their own research, and on their discipline in general. Being critical and reflecting on our own practices ourselves helps us to educate a new generation of future researchers who are aware of traditions and common practices in their field but also dare to question and innovate these practices, thereby ensuring a reflexive stance situated in the respective research context and not in the simplified textbook contexts. All in all, we believe that a scientific discussion on agency and the ways in which we act is highly topical and helps to progress our discipline. We will revisit each of the aforementioned aspects in detail in the following sections.

3. Agency and structures

Agency appears as a buzzword in publications of the social sciences with every discipline highlighting different aspects of this elusive concept. This broad applicability leads to a bulk of literature and theoretical descriptions aiming to define and describe this concept (see Emirbayer and Mische 1998) – a full review would go beyond the scope of this paper, we refer the interested reader to the

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referenced literature. Instead we will outline the central aspects of this concept with regard to the topic of scientific discourse. First of all, as the etymology suggests, agency has to do with action, something being done. This simultaneously implies that there are instances conducting or affecting the action, agents or actors (we shall use the terms synonymously despite terminological differences in the literature). These agents are often humans, though a juridical person may also be imagined in this role. This aspect highlights a division in the literature on agency between a practical, human-focused use of the term and the abstract use in economics or law. At the same time, a focus on agents makes the concept of agency attractive for social scientists, whose aim is to describe and analyse social systems, human behaviour, and the interplay of actors in a network. Secondly, a higher-order implication follows from the existence of this concept of agency. If we can outline agency, what does the negation of agency look like? Is agency an absolute concept or are there counteracting forces? Intuition tells us that the idea of agency always constructs a limit of such agency. If there were no limits, there would be no need to spell out the unlimited possibilities – if there is agency, there is a counteracting concept limiting and defining this agency. Different disciplines have found their individual ways of outlining this delimiter as a concept of tradition, an individual habitus, a social structure, an implicit or explicitly spelt-out contract, or rationality of choices. The concepts employed here contain clues about the nature of the actions and the intentions of the agents in using agency. Especially in situations where agents are not acting for themselves but for or on behalf of others in what is called a fiduciary role in the literature, permissions, expectations, and terms of this agency need to be agreed and fixed for all stakeholders. Lastly, agency and its limitations are linked by a governing principle of monitoring. It follows logically from the socially constructed opposition of agency and its limits – even in an abstract philosophical understanding, an individual monitors its own actions as per the Kantian imperatives. This period of Enlightenment with its focus on the increasing individuation is also the origin of the modern concepts of agency. Besides the philosophical discussion of human freedoms, the theories of social contracts were introduced in this time. The social contract outlines the freedoms of the individual to ensure a functioning society, the individual cedes freedoms to the state in exchange for a peaceful society. The same use of contracts as the explicit outline of liberties against a material motivation can be found in economics or law, as well, with incentives or penalties ensuring the functioning of the contract. This reciprocal nature of agency is further amended by an iterative aspect of the interaction, as in Emirbayer and Mische's conceptualisation of agency as:

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> […] a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its "iterational" or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a "projective" capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a "practical-evaluative" capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment). (1998, 962)

As we will see later in the discussion, agency is in constant negotiation and monitored by past occurrences, e.g. traditions, against the prospective developments, i.e. the potential of using agency within the existing limits in novel ways.

These innovations require us to be aware of the (temporal) context, especially when it comes to the range of freedoms which are traditionally (and currently) not exploited but fall into the permitted limits. These limits have been described in sociology under the term of structure – a necessary concept for the analysis of agency (see Giddens 1979, 1984), whether or not these structures are defined explicitly or developed through social processes. Social scientists, especially those critically questioning existing structures and the individual's role in them, emphasise the functions fulfilled by language as an access point for understanding social structures. Examples range from Critical Discourse Analysis and anthropology to sociology. Meanwhile, scholars of languages and linguistics stress the importance of social contexts for the use of language in their descriptions. The concept of agency and structure is comprehensibly linked through language, justifying the meta-scientific discussion from the viewpoint of linguistics.

If we consider the scientific endeavour, we may conceptualise it as discursive, where researchers communicate their insights with other researchers who review and monitor their results, and, collectively, they advance scientific discovery through adding new descriptions, discussions, or data sets to the literature. This gives us a first glimpse of the agents and their actions, also with respect to the monitoring function. But where are the agencies and structures? We will see examples in the following section but shall understand the agency and structure relation both on a level of scientific work and scholarly communities. Overall, structures create reliability by making results independent from the researchers. This could be a false sense of objectivity, which various disciplines are striving for – an objectively correct set of solutions determined by external structures without the researchers' hand in the process. This restrictive view would tie agency to subjectivity, aiming to downplay the researchers' role in shaping research, deciding on methods, topics for investigation, or defining outcomes and possible findings.

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Across the scientific disciplines, we can consider types of permitting agency or including structure in the research process. This does not mean that one or the other is to be preferred or even "more scientific", as each type brings its own requirements and challenges for the researchers in their writings or within the academic system. Two methodological oppositions shall be discussed here: a data-driven approach and an interpretative methodology. A data-driven approach requires all hypotheses to be tested on an existing, non-hypothetical data set, thereby rendering conclusions and theories falsifiable. Anyone with access to the data can disprove existing claims or offer alternative explanations and solutions on the same data-set. Non-interpretative methodology is characterised by high degrees of standardisation of the research process, favouring formulaic analyses, proofs, and measurable entities over interpretations and theories constructed by the researchers. As a result, anyone with sufficient knowledge of the standards and formalities can reproduce a result.

Table 1. A small typology of linguistic sub-disciplines

	non-interpretative	**interpretative**
data-driven	Phonetics Corpus statistics Neurolinguistics	Descriptive linguistics
not data-driven	Generative linguistics Logic Formal semantics	Theoretical discussions

Table 1 includes a simple typology of selected linguistic sub-disciplines in a matrix. The non-interpretative and data-driven disciplines draw from natural sciences and mathematics, where standardised research methods and original datasets lead to reproducible and falsifiable results. Examples are phonetics or corpus statistics, where sound waves, frequencies, or patterns can be measured and quantified for any given example. As soon as we move away from the physical nature of deriving an answer or the strict mathematical concepts in statistics, we enter the realm of most descriptive linguistic disciplines, from phonology to morphology and syntax. These disciplines work with datasets of natural language, although insights of phonetics or corpus linguistics are amended by an interpretative layer. This may contain meanings, decisions on segmentations, interpretations and judgements on forms, their function, and the semantics, pragmatics, and sociolinguistic orientation thereof. On the side of disciplines which are not data-driven, we find fields working

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with abstract or hypothetical data and examples. While these fields may use original data, it is not strictly required for the formulation and testing of logical statements, semantic concepts, or syntax trees – a frequent criticism of generative linguistics by scholars working on data derived from field work, or investigating social implications of meaning making. Despite these debates, the non-interpretative nature of the methodology leads to reproducible results, even if datasets are needed to support or falsify these claims. Ultimately, there are scientific papers which do not draw from datasets and present interpretative accounts of the object of study – these may be theoretical discussions, for example philosophical debates on the nature of language. No one would discredit these fields as non-scientific, their results are simply not falsifiable or reproducible but constructed and evaluated through scientific discourse.

As we can see, most of linguistic research is falsifiable for being data-driven, but not necessarily reproducible. This does not make the results any less scientific, as they are still based on data, and for those discussions which are not, many follow strict formal outlines to make their accounts reproducible. The distinction between data-driven and interpretative methodologies was not chosen randomly – it serves to illustrate a general distinction between the data underlying a study and the descriptive text which researchers put together about the nature of the phenomenon we study. We can, subsequently, question structures and agency within the textual and the data plane of our research literature (see Weber 2020). In their texts, or other artefacts of the scientific discourse, researchers use their agency to construct and discuss concepts and structures of the research objects, and for social sciences, they define agencies within those structures (see Latour 2005). In exchanging those views and collectively forging scientific knowledge, researchers create a discursive and dialogical ontology (Cooren and Latour 2010).

4. Agency from a socio-pragmatic view

Within the data, those who supplied them (for linguistic research often consultants) bring their own agency into the research process. This can happen in any research setting, with or without the researchers' presence, e.g. data collected on the internet. In any circumstance, as most sociolinguists and pragmaticians will contend, the language data is inherently interwoven with the real-world context of the speaker-listener and their audience (Bakhtin 1984). Making meaning of these data will require more than just access to the linguistic context (or context), but includes information about the situation, the medium, and information about the interlocutors. Without these contextual cues, the meaning of an utterance or a

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textual artefact may remain obscured, or - more importantly - could even be distorted in a different context. The most prominent example for these changes in meaning are nowadays subjected to public debate, namely the use of politically correct language and the subsequent handling of historical texts and speeches. Without trying to offer a solution here, we can observe shifting meanings through time (temporal context), for different audiences (socio-political context), or in different countries and societies (local context). Thus, the need for proper attribution to a context becomes evident. At the same time, we need to emphasise the agency of the speakers, who make context-driven decisions about the verbal, paraverbal, and non-verbal communicative tools they employ to communicate with others. Thereby, language becomes a medium connecting the speaker and the audience in the abstract or concrete time and space of their interaction - it "mediates the living individuals to each other" (Bertau 2014, 528). And as a medium, language itself has no agency, but only the agents using it for their means. Following Bertau's notion of 'language spacetimes' (2014), we must consider the contextual unity of various parameters like interlocutors, location, time, or manner of communication. This ethnographic view of communication has been present in linguistics since Dell Hymes created the famous acronym SPEAKING (1974): Setting/Scene, Participants, Ends, Act Sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genre. If one of these parameters is changed, the context changes, and language is not guaranteed to keep its meaning.

As researchers we need to keep the different contexts of our work in mind. Especially when conducting research in the field, a place spatially removed from our workplace, we face a chain of different language spacetimes, with different contextual properties and interpretative procedures. Clifford (1990) calls these procedures for his anthropological research the inscription *in medias res*, the transcription which abstracts from the inscription, and the description which happens without consultants, the objects of study, or the "field". All of these activities happen in their own spacetimes, with different procedures of meaning making. Since Geertz' work, anthropologists have been alert to consider the different contexts and surroundings which influence the researchers' interpretations. And we are inherently biased in our interpretations, "winks upon winks" with Geertz' words (1973, 9), and require rich contextual information - 'thick descriptions' - to justify our interpretations and claims.

This call for thick descriptions ties the agency of the researcher and the agency of the consultants together - without good accounts of both (as we argue from our ethnomethodological viewpoint), the basis for our claims is lost. Thus, we require sufficient information on the different contexts (spacetimes) in a research project, from fieldwork to transcriptions and peer-review procedures, the

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knowledge generating actions, and all agents and their input to the work trajectory. Under the aforementioned ethnographic view, we shall consider the following examples of agents making use of their agency.

5. Three examples for researchers using their agency

This section presents some examples of researchers using their own agency to illustrate the importance of the present discussion. The goal is not to discredit colleagues, on the contrary, we highlight beneficial or useful consequences of their agency use for science. Some of these decisions were consciously made, while others arose from the trajectory of the research through time. Certainly, as history has shown, researchers might misuse their agencies for non-scientific reasons or overstep boundaries in their work, hence scientific monitoring procedures need to be functioning and alert to uncover problematic viewpoints or publications. The majority of the discursive construction of knowledge, however, arises through the exchange of standpoints, comparison of results, and scrutinising methodological and theoretical approaches. In the following three examples, agency affects the interpretations and conclusions derived from data, the representation of data, and the results of our research. As mentioned, this does not mean that the mentioned research is wrong or unscientific but rather that there is more to the scientific endeavour than conducting textbook-style research.

5.1. Legacy materials

The first example stems from Weber's research using legacy materials on the Estonian Kraasna dialect (see Weber forthcoming). This work with historical sources or the scientific artefacts from the past confronts the researcher with decisions made by the original researchers in a context and time when modern assumptions about science and scientific procedures were different. In order to make sense of these sources, we need to know about the structures at the time and investigate the decisions made between the time of recording data and today. This is not a straightforward procedure, as archivists, grant-givers, political authorities, or researchers in other projects may have altered the original datasets, which may influence our perception of them. To give an example from the Kraasna legacy materials: The speech events were recorded on a phonograph cylinder in 1914, allowing us access to the original situation (at least what was being heard at the time from where the phonograph was located). The consultant had instances of correcting herself, starting over, making comments to a bystander or mumbling to

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herself, which can all be heard in the recording. The researcher who recorded these monologues also prepared a transcription, however, without transcribing these comments and corrections – these transcriptions are contained in manuscript format. This manuscript was copied for another archive, with further decisions made by the transcriber. Furthermore, an edited collection of dialect texts (Mets et al. 2014) made active decisions on which parts of the manuscripts to include in the publications, which sentences would form a text. We see the complex network of agents and the ways in which they applied their agency – none of these decisions are wrong, as the guidelines and recommendations we may use to evaluate them are arbitrary. Recommendations may differ as to whether or not corrections by the speaker should be transcribed, or how many coherent words are necessary for constituting a text. Scientific discourse needs to evaluate these recommendations and guidelines but cannot be used to reduce the validity of the artefacts. And despite being able to prepare new transcriptions following modern standards, these may change in the next century requiring further negotiation in the future.

5.2. Transcription conventions

The second example also deals with the transcription process, as it is a good illustration of agency and structure and a task familiar to all linguists and scholars in the social sciences. The transcription process describes a movement of information from a physical inscription – a raw format like sound waves, bits on a hard drive, or engravings on a physical medium – to a meaningful representation which allows further processing (see Duranti 1997; 2006). The rules and standard for these movements are man-made and agreed upon by the scholarly community; the consistent application of these rules can only be guaranteed, i.e. reproducible transcription, if the process does not involve human decisions. It may be argued that even transcriptions supported by machine learning are not free of human decisions, as the computer can only learn from the data it has been fed. This type of selective agency transfer in the transcription process may be envisioned as the human agent suggesting and selecting examples and data for training the algorithm, while leaving the concrete decision on the representation for a particular input to the computer. What this machine-assisted transcription will not produce is the conscious “breaking” of the conventions, as humans can do. Ignoring or applying a rule to varying degrees can be due to researchers' interpretations, ideas, or theoretical beliefs – these decisions play an important role in the prospective, future-oriented aspect of agency. Innovations which do not comply

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with the standards but are not wrong may lead to new insights, new methodological considerations, or the adoption of a new standard. Consider the following example from Nenets, a Uralic language from the Samoyedic branch spoken in northern Eurasia: being a Uralic language, Nenets is transcribed using the standardised Uralic Phonetic Alphabet which was first outlined by Setälä in 1901. This standard was consequently applied by researchers on Nenets, yet with a few differences in how narrow the transcription needs to be (most visible in the amount of diacritics used). An example of this transcription can be seen in the example from Lehtisalo's folklore texts (1).

(1) Nenets, in Uralic Phonetic Alphabet (Lehtisalo 1947, 30)
ńèβχ̫ᵡ̫”nᵨ ŋàβχ̫ᵡ̫” mᾱ̰l̰eŋkᵡ̫”nᵨ jᾱ̃n̰ʦ̰ʂ̰ērχ̫ᵡ̫”nᵨ ŋōв” ŋārk̆kᵨ tᾱ̰ᵨ̰'eᵦ̰e tᾰͅńńeв̆βᵬ̰
(2) Tundra Nenets, in Salminen's transcription (Salminen 1997, 138)
Syaqni° ngæb°ta ngoq ryes°kam ngøworman°h xørbyeløwiød°q
(3) Tundra Nenets, in adapted Uralic Phonetic Alphabet (Nikolaeva 2014, 30)
xan'ena n'īd°m ŋaq

In 1997, Salminen presented a thorough account of the Tundra Nenets morphology. In order to represent morphophonological peculiarities of the language, as the difference between a glottal stop which does assimilate to a nasal before a velar stop and one which does not (2). The Uralic Phonetic Alphabet which is also used for phonology did not offer a suitable representation of this phenomenon, which lead Salminen to use symbols for the representation which were not otherwise used in the transcription of Nenets <q> and <h>. He furthermore decided to differentiate between a reduced vowel and a schwa based on their morphophonological behaviour, introducing two new characters <°> and <ø>. Other innovations include the transcription of a long vowels as <í> and <ú> instead of using the macron as in the UPA standard, and the use of a digraph for the velar nasal <ng> instead of <ŋ> and for marking palatalisation, e.g. <sy> <ny>, instead of <ś> and <ń>. The innovations introduced to represent the difference between the two glottal stops and the reduced vowels were subsequently adopted by other researchers, e.g. Nikolaeva's 2014 reference grammar (3), while the others were rejected in favour of the UPA recommendations from Setälä. The innovation, while non-standard at the time, lead to an altered standard for the transcription of Nenets and contributed to the scientific toolkit of the Uralicists working on this language. The use of the researcher's agency about the best transcription for the language did not lead to wrong results but even changed the rules we consider as best practice nowadays.

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5.3. Conversation Analysis

Conversation Analysis (CA) and its neighbouring disciplines (talk-in-interaction, Discourse Analysis, Narrative Analysis) relate to ethnomethodology, trying to find out how we use language in spoken or written communication and across various genres of text. As we are dealing with subtle differences in communication, the descriptions and transcripts we use must necessarily be rich and thick. This does not only cover the inscription context or the research context but permeates the data themselves. In order to create "methodological transparency", we must ensure that the data is "available for repeated inspection and analysis" (Clift & Holt 2007, 9), and can still be understood in all of its facets by the reviewers. For Conversation Analysis, there are established transcription rules for verbal, non-verbal (like a crossing of arms, nodding, or shaking the head), and paraverbal cues (like laughter). Despite this, a researcher may add their own notations, transcription rules, and annotation modes - anything which supports the reader to make sense of the transcript. Any rules which are used or altered must be contained and explained in the description text. The discipline itself grants the researcher wide-ranging agency in applying transcription techniques, allowing rules to be bent under the condition that these changes are explained and justified by the researcher. Furthermore, including thick descriptions of the contexts of the interlocutors makes these crucial pieces of information available and aid the researchers' audiences to interpret the transcripts and evaluate the described speech event themselves. This methodological decision ensures that there is no decontextualisation of the speech event and charts the speakers' communicative decisions, their agency. A further development which is starting to be adopted in the field is the inclusion of the researchers' contexts as part of the description, making their actions, decisions, and backgrounds visible as well. This holistic inclusion of consultants' and researchers' agencies as part of the research outputs makes Conversation Analysis a good example for the benefits of ethnomethodological research in linguistics.

6. Possible solutions

As we have seen, there are various ways in which multiple agencies (and different actors) influence scientific discourse. They do so in a productive way, yielding new results and insights, and potentially altering the traditions within a discipline. While some fields appear to be more liberal about the freedoms a researcher may take, the scientific endeavour requires structures to ensure the validity and

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acceptability of our research. There are two prominent ways in which this is done: First, by setting strict rules and expectations about the objective design and rigorous examination of findings. Second, by introducing monitoring systems through other members of the scholarly community, who referee and review outputs of their peers. With respect to the latter solution, we know from practice that these monitoring procedures should only be applied to a certain extent, i.e. a review by hundreds of experts is excessive and most publications do not warrant this extensive examination. Logically, only a few reviewers provide feedback before publication, while other scholars add to the reception and the scientific discourse through their own writings where they cite and discuss the original publication. Larger reviews are required on sensitive, ground-breaking, or highly important topics, or in instances where additional, neutral readers are asked to confirm or decide on an evaluation (e.g. awarding distinctions or degrees).

Yet, while we seem to apply monitoring within some limits, some scholars argue that objectivity should be the only accepted approach to scientific writing. This is not to say that we should engage in judging, adopting positions for non-scientific reasons, or invent data. But even within analytical, theory-based, data-driven research reports, there may be places where a researcher becomes visible. Absolute objectivity would be the invisibility of the researchers, which is not always possible nor desirable. A solution would thus be striving for an inventory of liberties which a researcher may employ in their work, rather than restrictions and strict standards alone. This does not go without a degree of standardisation, although freedoms are more difficult to standardise and classify than rules. The solution here is to standardise ways of recording agency rather than standardising actions – a higher level of control and monitoring which does not apply to the work itself but to the ways in which we contribute and communicate our insights to the scholarly discourse.

The recordings of our agency, the ways in which we as authors shape the outcomes of our research, shall be marked clearly and allow readers – our colleagues – to understand not only which decisions we made but also the reasons behind them. For language documentation, this idea has been discussed under the concept of a meta-documentation (Nathan 2010; Austin 2010; 2013), an accompanying explanation and account of the personal narratives and positions held by all stakeholders. This goes beyond giving credit to consultants and colleagues, but describes our own involvement in the process. A good example about a researcher adopting this reflexive stance is Schapiro's overview article on Agency Theory (2005), where the author devotes several paragraphs to her own stance on the topic, as a way of illustrating the concept of agency. Although the goal is not to have each article start with a biography or situational

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description of the contexts of creation of an article, the underlying openness and discussion of the researchers' involvement in the research process, and their influence on the outcomes and the representation thereof should be covered in each scientific publication.

Certainly, this requires us to be transparent about our research and strive for accessible datasets and publications. Frameworks for Open Science or principles of FAIR data management (findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable; see Wilkinson et al. 2016) already exist but we have been slow and reluctant in adopting them. While we are appealing to all colleagues to consider the adoption and engagement with these frameworks, we need to consider future generations as well. As initially stated, we are teaching courses about academic writing to students at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. A frequent observation is that students feel that they must not show their own positions and thoughts in their work. They rather 'hide' behind textbook rules, instructions by their teachers, or a fallacious security of the truth found in some publications they have read. Certainly, there may be differences between academic systems, community-specific ideals of the teacher-student interaction, or the perceived need to adopt a collective viewpoint, which can all impede on the aforementioned agency in scientific writing. Yet, as discussed above, agency implies structure – but structure also requires agency, at least in the disciplines of the Humanities where we are working. Thus, even in academic structures which seek to limit student agency, the existence of said agency cannot be negated. We call upon the readers to reflect their own work environment to find ways in which student agency in academic writing can be nurtured and students encouraged to become visible in their research. The line between subjective and objective reporting may be difficult to walk, and some will prefer to stay on the safe side of absolute anonymity and objective reporting. Yet, the most beneficial pieces of advice we received as students ourselves, were teachers and professors asking us for our own stance, the reasons behind our decisions, encouraging us to explore different, novel, individual perspectives and ways to view and interact with our objects of study. This is where the exchange between researchers, our discourse, leads to new discoveries and developments in our fields.

7. Conclusions

There are a few issues we would like to emphasise as the central points of this discussion. Agency plays an important role in our scientific work, not just on the level of our consultants' agency contained in the data but also in our own scientific

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writing, as a language-based exchange of positions constituting the discursive ontology. The complexity of the researchers' agency was the focus of this paper, although we cannot offer a final description of it; We understand this article as a basis for further discussion, in which we present some of the aspects we deem crucial going forward.

As researchers, we should aim to find an objective truth and create reproducible results, reported in a neutral way – but we should not force results into being reproducible and conceal our own involvement in the research process. If we cannot guarantee that the result we found is objectively and exclusively correct, we should not report our findings as if they were. This would take away our agency and make research less transparent, both crucial elements of the discursively constituted search for a correct description and depiction of our world (the ontology). We must, certainly, use our agency responsibly, be aware of the implications and motivations behind our work, and question or critically examine not just our colleagues' work in a process of reviewing but monitor our own scientific behaviour. This can be facilitated through comprehensive records of the research complex, containing agents, actions, (limiting) structures, different agencies, and the motivations behind all of our decisions. Such recording goes beyond standardising our research processes to agreeing upon standards for the reports on our actions. As scientific community, we should strive for frameworks of what we can do rather than simply focusing on what cannot be done, while requiring justifications on all decisions. If we understand how we do act as researchers, we can become better teachers to our students, and take on the social responsibility we need to accept as scholarly community. Communicating how we work and allowing for monitoring by colleagues and the public fosters reliability and allows for collectively progressing our goals as scientists and society as a whole.

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