

Analyzing EFL University Students' Argumentative Essays: A Case Study of Engagement in Saudi Undergraduate Students' Writing

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Abstract:

Background: The semantic Engagement framework, which is part of Martin & White's (2005) Appraisal theory of analyzing interpersonal meanings within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), deals with the use of interpersonal language of negotiation by analyzing the language of discourse as Monoglossic or Heteroglossic, based on whether or not writers consider alternate positions in the discourse.

Purpose: This research paper aims to reveal the Engagement patterns of argumentative essays written by female university (EFL) students in Saudi Arabia. It investigates their use of Engagement resources and, more specifically, which Heteroglossic approach is applied in their writings. The paper further looks at which Engagement is commonly used by these students, and which they use less frequently. Finally, the paper compares how the Saudi university (EFL) students, and other (EFL) English learners use these Engagement resources in their writing.

Methodology: In this study, a total of 28 argumentative essays, comprising 7,873 words, were manually analyzed. Engagement words within the essays were highlighted and classified according to Martin and White's (2005) Engagement framework in Appraisal Theory. The essays were then uploaded to the UAM Corpus Tool for further coding and analysis.

Findings: The findings show that Saudi university students predominantly use Entertainment resources, favoring them over attribution resources to create space for alternate arguments. Disclaiming resources are also commonly utilized, as students employ disclaimers to counter or deny propositions.

Originality: This research contributes to understanding how Saudi EFL students engage with different voices in their writing, offering valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers.

Keywords: Appraisal theory; Engagement framework; Heteroglossic approach; Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).

1 Introduction

Michael Halliday (M.A.K. Halliday) developed a theory known as Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) in the 1960s. The main focus of his theory is not to study grammar through rules, but rather through meaning and function. It is a theory designed to analyze text and their context of use. As Halliday (2004) introduces, people produce texts on a daily basis. Text is "any instance of language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language" (Halliday, 2004, p.3). Grammarians can explore any text in two ways. The first approach is to examine the text as an instrument, which involves investigating the linguistic system of the text. The second approach is to explore the text as an object, which means investigating its meaning, its effect on readers/listeners, and what makes it valuable etc. According to Halliday (2004), the two perspectives complement each other. SFG focuses on meaning, function and context. To SFG the functional basis of language is divided into three areas: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. These are known as the metafunctions of language (Halliday, 2004, p.29). Ideational metafunction is the lexicogrammar of people which its main resource is human experience. Every time people use the language, they are "enacting personal and social relationships" with the people around (Halliday, 2004, p.29). Thus, the relationship between the speaker and the listener, the writer and his audience is known as the interpersonal metafunction. Finally, the textual metafunction is how ideational and interpersonal organized; how people construct their language such as the ability to develop discourse sequences and "organizing a discursive flow" with coherence and cohesion of the text (Halliday, 2004, P.30).

Focusing on the interpersonal metafunction, it consists of Mood, Modality and Appraisal. The Appraisal framework introduces mechanisms on how interpersonal metafunction operates. These mechanisms include *Attitude, Engagement and Graduation*. Engagement in the Appraisal theory is "directed towards identifying the particular dialogistic positioning associated with given meanings and towards describing what is at stake when one meaning rather than another is employed" (Martin & White, 2005, p.79). So, when people speak or write, they either exclude or include any position other than their own. These two positions are referred to as 'Monoglossia' and

'Heteroglossia,' respectively. For example: (1) "The sun rises from the east" shows a Monoglossic proposition, while (2) "As scientists believe, the sun rises from the east" demonstrates Heteroglossia, as it references an external resource. When it comes to students' academic writing, it may be difficult to be neutral. As Cominos (2011) mentioned, in academic writing, dialogistic positioning requires to manage subjectivity and sensitivity to the writer's status and that of the external resource. The choices of words and grammar can indicate the writer's position.

The Appraisal theory and its framework, developed by Martin and White (2005), provides a framework to describe and analyze negotiations. In particular, it is Engagement that clearly describes and analyzes the alternative voices in students' writings. This research paper discusses Engagement; how meanings are delivered by writers. The literature review reveals insufficient research on the use of Engagement resources in EFL argumentative, as limited studies were identified on this topic. Given the significant role of interpersonal language, particularly Engagement resources, in argumentative writing, as it helps writers introduce authorial voice and build persuasive arguments, this paper explores the use of Engagement language in the argumentative essays of Saudi female university students, which is a gap that is intended to be filled. Therefore, this paper serves as a starting point for broader and more in-depth research. It discusses the following concerns:

- Which type of Engagement resources is used in the students' argumentative essay writing.
- How do the findings of this paper align with the findings of other research studies.

Framework of Engagement:

When a writer/speaker uses any linguistic resource, the writer is then adopting a position that can be figured out based on the resource being used. Choosing one linguistic resource over the other reflects the writer's/speaker's point of view. Thus, "whenever speakers (or writers) say anything, they encode their point of view towards it" (Martin & White, 2005, p.92). The framework of Engagement is oriented towards "meaning in context" and "rhetorical effects" (Martin & White, 2005, p.94). Thus, words that are known as being 'headings', such as modality, intensification, attribution ...etc., are grouped together under Engagement. These

words enable the writer/speaker to position his voice with respect to the voices of others. In Engagement framework, for example, modality does not only include modal verbs, but it includes any forms that the writer/speaker use to express his attachment or detachment from an opinion or a view.

Engagement, as presented by Martin & White (2005), is divided into *Monoglossic* which is not to make reference to other voices and *Heteroglossic* which is the opposite. For example,

- a. There is water on the moon.
- b. Scientists in NASA confirmed that there is water at the moon's poles.

In example (a), there is no reference to any external resource, therefore it is an example of a *Monoglossic* instance. But in (b) there is a reference to an external reference which is 'scientists in NASA' and thus it is *heteroglossic*.

Focusing on *Heteroglossic*, meanings can be outlined into a taxonomy that associates each dialogistic word to a specific meaning, as well as describes how employing one word over the other affects the writer's/ speaker's position. *Heteroglossic* Engagement consist of many resources that the writer/speaker employ into their dialogue (see Figure 1). These resources are divided to two types: *Contract* and *Expand*.

Contract is subdivided into two main categories: *Proclaim* (the writer/speaker presents a position and subscribes to it. Comment adjuncts, writer's/speaker's voice, and mood adjuncts are used to express Proclaims) and *Disclaim* (the writer/speaker does not completely agree to the other position. Negation, comment adjuncts, concessive conjunction, prepositional phrase, and mood adjuncts are used to express Disclaims). Each of these two is further divided as well.

Proclaim includes *Concur*, *Pronounce*, *Endorse* and *Justify*. Through *Concur*, the writer states that he/she agrees with the presented voice. Using modal adjuncts such as 'of course', 'certainly' etc. is a way to concur. The following sentence is an example:

- a. Obviously, people don't realize the negative effects of watching TV. Proclaim: *Concur*
Through *Pronounce*, the writer openly intervenes by pronouncing and asserting

the proposition. Examples include 'indeed', 'the fact that...', 'I/we believe...' etc. The following sentence is an example:

- b. There is no doubt that watching TV contribute to weight gain. Proclaim: *Pronounce*
As for *Endorsement*, it is the writer unquestionable believe of an external resource and thus presenting it as being valid and reliable. Examples of endorsement are 'scientists demonstrate...', 'the study reveals...' etc. (Mariana P. & Lidia U., 2010).
- c. As studies have shown, excessive amount of TV affects your health. Proclaim: *Endorse*
- d. *Disclaim* includes *Deny* and *Counter*. The following are examples:
- e. You don't need to watch TV every day to feel happy. Disclaim: *Deny*
- f. Although she watches TV all the time, she gets good grades. Disclaim: *Counter*

The other type, which is *Expand* is divided into two subtypes: *Entertain* and *Attribute*. *Entertain* may be realized in texts through the use of modality. It is used when the writer/speaker acknowledges that there is a range of possibilities to what he is writing/saying. It is used to avoid being challenged and showing that the writer/speaker is aware of different opinions, that others have, to what have been proposed. Mood finites, mood adjuncts and interpersonal metaphors are used to express modality. Examples are 'may', 'might', 'it is obvious that...' (Mariana P. & Lidia U., 2010). The following sentence is an example:

- a. Watching TV may isolate people from socializing with family and friends. Expand: *Entertain*

As for *Attribution*, briefly it means the outside source; when the writer/speaker reports what others wrote or said by *Acknowledging* the external resource or *Distancing* from it. Examples of grammatical resources of *Attribution* are 'state', 'say', 'argue', 'report' etc. Chomsky believes that people are born with innate knowledge of language. Attribute: *Acknowledge*.

- b. Farnsworth claims that TVs are harmless. Attribute: *Distance*.

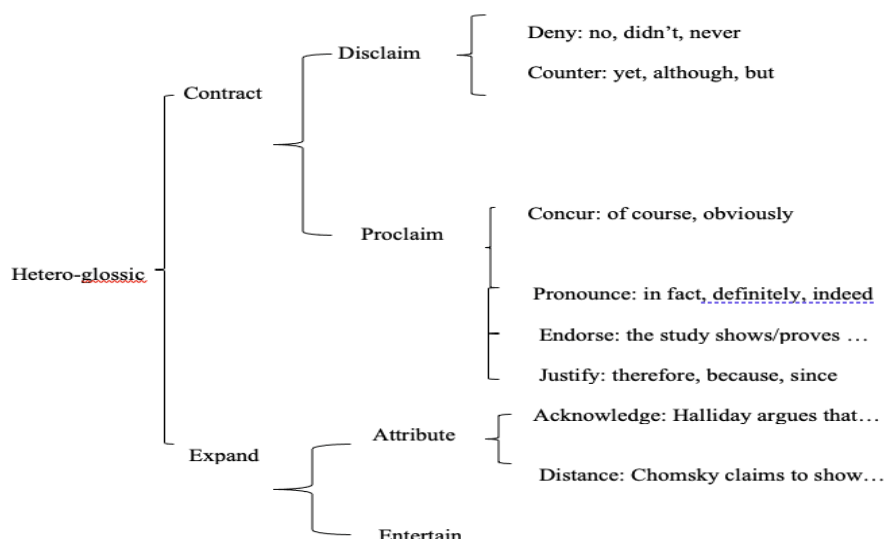


Figure 1: Summary of the Engagement Heteroglossic Subsystem with Examples of Linguistic Realizations
(Martin and White, 2005, p. 134)

2 Literature review

2.1 EFL (English as a Foreign Language) argumentative essays writing

Second language (L2) writing courses can be challenging to both teachers and students, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. One of the most complex writings is argumentative essays. Argumentative essays are “complex cognitive activities” (Elborolasy & Almujaali, 2020, p.162). Students need to be highly skilled and have a deep comprehension of the subject matter in order to argue for or against it. Before writing, students must also perform extensive research in order to be able support their points (Elborolasy & Almujaali, 2020).

To discuss EFL students’ writing further, Javid, Farooq and Umer (2013) evaluated Saudi EFL student’s writing problems. The authors reported that Saudi EFL students experience serious academic writing challenges because of inherent weaknesses in utilizing proper grammar and lexical terms as well as organization of ideas. The learners showed weaknesses in the use of irregular verbs, punctuation, prefixes, suffixes, articles, prepositions, and spelling. These findings are consistent with Ariyanti and Fritiana (2017) results that EFL students face several difficulties, including cohesion and coherence, diction, grammar, paragraph organization as well as vocabulary misspelling (Javid, et al, 2013; Ariyanti & Fritiana, 2017).

Accordingly, Rass (2015) examined challenges facing Arab learners in composing well-developed English paragraphs. For example, learners

transferred Arabic style, which is usually indirect, emotional, and personal in most writing instances. Their sentences were personalized in that they either started with ‘I’ or ‘we.’ Also, Arab students faced challenges in composing cohesive paragraphs. Shukri (2014) also examined challenges and issues in second language culture and writing from Saudi students’ perspectives. Shukri noted that Arab students faced challenges related to cultural appropriateness and topic familiarity in English writing. Some of the key English writing challenges facing Arab learners include strict tradition, cultural resistance to some Western themes, and religious conformity. In addition, Shukri (2014) noted that the key problems emerged in areas related to verb and subject disagreement, over-emphasis on some tenses, inappropriate past tense employment, lack of paragraph unity, cohesion, and coherence.

Elborolasy and Almujaali (2020) argued that learners had weaknesses related to inappropriate argumentative writing. The key problems and difficulties facing many learners from different levels and ages, particularly in writing argumentative essays, included using irrelevant data and the inability to argue the topic, as well as poor and disorderly essay development. Other problems included a lack of writing sustainability and coherence, writing mechanics mistakes, and poorly supported thesis statement. The findings confirms Shukri's (2014) and Ariyanti and Fritiana

(2017) findings that EFL students faced writing problems linked to verb and subject disagreement, over-emphasis on some tenses, inappropriate past tense employment, lack of paragraph unity, cohesion, and coherence. In addition, Ozfidan and Mitchell (2020) investigated common challenges affecting EFL students' argumentative writing. The authors indicated various difficulties in argumentative writing, including setting an academic tone, development and content, structure and organization, academic sources integration, writing mechanisms, identifying evidence, composing counterclaims, as well as writing refutation argument. The challenge relating to poor writing mechanism reinforce previously mentioned studies especially Ariyanti and Fritiana (2017) findings that EFL students encountered misspelling vocabulary difficulties, which contributed to low-quality academic essays and Elborolosy and Almujaali (2020) which indicated that learners have weaknesses related to inappropriate argumentative writing, including lack of writing sustainability as well as coherence, writing mechanics mistakes, and poorly supported thesis statements.

To sum up, the English writings of Arab EFL students show inappropriate logical connection of ideas and organization of their arguments. The notable difficulties students face include challenges in cohesion and coherence, grammar, and vocabulary misspelling. Particular issues found were frequent mistakes in the employment of inappropriate subject-verb agreement, tenses, word order, personal pronouns, sentence fragment, and use of auxiliary and articles.

2.2 Previous studies on the use of Engagement resources in argumentative essays written by EFL students

Research has extensively investigated EFL students' writing through the lens of Appraisal Theory. Several studies have focused specifically on the Attitude subsystem (Myskow & Ono, 2018; Setyaningsih et al., 2023; Valerdi Zárate, 2023), while others have explored the aspect of Graduation (Kuswoyo et al., 2022; Vo & Le, 2025; Zhang & Cheung, 2018). Additionally, some research has addressed Engagement resources. Among the few research papers that focused on the analysis of argumentative essays in terms of Engagement resources is the ones by (Liu, 2013; Lam & Crosthwaite, 2018; Lv, 2015; Yang, 2016; Yuliana & Gandana, 2018). Each of these studies is discussed in the following paragraphs. The study

by Liu (2013) examined the employment of appraisal language between low- and high-rated English argumentative writing by two EFL students in China. The students utilized Engagement resources in presenting their writings. In terms of Engagement analysis, there is an interplay between Deny, Counter, as well as the other Contract resources, especially Pronounce, which showed a strong authorial voice, thus making arguments relatively less persuasive. The frequent employment of Disclaiming resources (Deny and Counter) provides that the low-rated essay carried an undesirable coloring, thus rhetorically ignoring potential refutation from a possibly resisting audience by a powerful textual voice characterizing the poorly written essay. As for the use of Expand resources, the Entertain and Attribute, the students of the low-rated essay used them as well as the Endorse resources, yet the high-rated essay had none. The high frequencies of Entertain, Attribute and Endorse indicates that the writer of the low-rated essay aligns with other voices to support his argument. Liu (2013) concluded by suggesting the need for further attention on EFL students' writing instruction centered on an interpersonal notion. Further research on this field is also required.

The research by Lam & Crosthwaite (2018) evaluated First Language (L1) and Second Language (L2) English writings. The authors purposed to evaluate whether L1 and L2 English students' varied in using Appraisal resources within argumentative writing generated under similar conditions. Overall, L1 English writers used higher Engagement resources compared to Hong Kong L2 English writers. L1 students generated an overtly authorial voice using Pronouncing resources, for example, 'the fact' and 'I agree' and clausal intensifiers like 'really' and 'indeed'. Although the Proclaim resources was the same in L1 and L2 writings, it was reported that L2 writers employed Justify as the principal strategy to validate their proposition by providing rationales inclined to constrain the set of alternatives for other's responses. Such a rhetorical approach was straightforward as well as was realized by utilizing basic connectives including 'as,' 'since,' and 'because,' etc. Lam & Crosthwaite (2018) further noted that L1 writers were more likely compared to L2 writers to use Disclaimers on the topic via Deny resources. The higher incidence of Entertainment (modality) in L1 texts' dialogic expansion indicates that L1 writers were more open to integrating perspectives and voices around an undesirable

issue between readers and the writer. Also, L1 writers constrained the dialogic space employing Endorse more frequently compared to their counterparts in developing arguments. Thus, the primary resource extensively utilized by L2 writers compared to L1 writers was (Proclaim/Justify) within dialogic contraction. L2 writers seemed to employ more intellectual Engagement as the primary approach to convince readers to concur with their notions. The authors concluded that relative over/underutilization of some structures across the evaluative areas by L2 students helps inform instructors concerning the needed interpersonal rationale-making resources that learners need to obtain to expand their collection. Explicit teaching on such Engagement features is suggested.

Lv (2015) in his research aimed to investigate two fundamental challenges: how distinct essay topics initiate diverse evaluative language in L1 and EFL essays; and distinguish L1 and EFL language evaluative language within argumentative essays. The participants were English major Chinese students. Chinese learners utilized more confirming and positive words compared to native speakers in Proclaim. Chinese learners are inclined to employ basic emphasizing expressions (Proclaimers) such as 'truly', and 'really', because they considered them having the capacity to reinforce their arguments. As such, confirming terms (proclaim/Pronounce), including 'I think' and 'I believe' are employed more frequently compared to native speakers. On the other hand, native speakers utilized more negative components in their writings. This prompted researchers to hypothesize that L1 essays' heavier negative coloring may have something to do with the critical thinking approach. Thus, the author suggested that Chinese rationale is different from Western conventions of formal logic systems; English speakers are inclined to think in a polarizing and aggressive ways, yet Chinese tend to moderate extreme arguments and avoid critiquing viewpoints. Therefore, Westerners are inclined to generate counter-arguments (use Disclaimers to Counter or Deny propositions), whereas Chinese tend to support a compromising argument without challenging recommendations or instead utilize Proclaimers.

The study by Yang (2016) evaluated Appraisal resources in 32 English major Chinese university learners' argumentative writing in English. The study compared evaluative resources between

American and Chinese learners' English argumentations to unravel how they articulated their attitudes, positions, and opinions, how they press or open dialogic space, as well as how they attained the aim of persuading and influencing readers. The Engagement resources reflected the writer's objectivity or subjectivity as well as made the discussion more negotiable. Thus, Engagement played a critical function in argumentation. As indicated in the research paper, two categories of learners made complete utilization of diverse engagement resources, although Chinese learners utilized relatively less quantity compared to American students. Within the four Engagement system parameters, significant discrepancies between the two students' categories were reported to entertain and disclaim but no evident difference in attribution and proclaimer. The Disclaim statistics indicated that it is the most utilized resource within the Engagement system by Chinese learners. Entertain is an Engaging resource that Chinese learners frequently utilize and the most utilized Engagement tool among American students. For example, college learners principally utilized modal verbs, adverbials, and modal adjuncts to ensure the propositions are negotiable. The Chinese learners employed more favorable terms, including can, if, will, etc. In contrast, American learners adopt all result possibilities and utilized lexes such as would, should, and may to make their propositions increasingly flexible and realize an improved interpersonal function. In addition, this research indicated that learners from the two groups, America and Chinese, have comparatively low employment of the Proclaim resources. Within argumentative writing, the writer mostly borrows propositions and evidence from a third source, which requires acknowledgment to make more convincing and subjective arguments. However, Attribute vocabularies were the least employed Engagement resource among American and Chinese university learners. The author concluded that the Appraisal framework could be employed to evaluate college learners' writing. The author suggested that future research should be done by expanding the study scope in terms of participants, sample size, and covered genres.

The study by Yuliana & Gandana (2018) explored the use of Engagement resources by second year Indonesian university students to construct written voice. They were divided into three groups based on their different levels of proficiency and writing skills: below average,

average and above average. The result of analysis showed that there are differences among the groups in constructing voice. The bellow average group's writings were expansive, this group used resources of Entertain only which gave a weak authorial voice. The average group used the resources of Entertain, Contract/ Endorse and Pronounce as well as Acknowledge. Finally, the above average students used both pattern of Heteroglossic, Contract and Expand, which gave their writing a strong authorial voice.

To summarize the findings of the mentioned research papers it is clear that within the Heteroglossic system of Engagement, Entertaining instead of Attribution within the dialogic expansion is extensively used by EFL students to create space for alternative arguments. Thus, Entertain is mostly employed by EFL writers. Also, Disclaiming resources are popular among Chinese learners. The use of Disclaim and Entertain indicates that the students' claims are increasingly assertive. It is common for experienced writers to employ a limited extend of interpersonal resources, including strongly affirmed viewpoints. As for Proclaim, research indicate that EFL writers employs Justify as the principal Proclaimer strategy.

3 Methodology

3.1 Data

The data in this research paper come from English argumentative essays written by second year female university students in the English language department in a University in Saudi Arabia. The students were asked to write an argumentative essays on 'the Use of Televisions'. The prompt was for a home assignment for a writing class. A total of 7873 words (531 sentences) from 28 essays were examined. The essays were submitted by the students in October 2020. The essays were analyzed manually at first. The Engagement words were highlighted and classified based on Engagement

framework of Martin and White's (2005) in Appraisal Theory.

3.2 Procedure

The annotation process was completed in two steps. First, it was done manually, and then it was repeated using UAM CorpusTool (O'Donnell, 2008), a software for annotating texts that allows segments to be annotated with more than one feature. In this research, the analysis of the essays followed three steps:

1. The argumentative essays were read thoroughly.
2. As they were read, potential Heteroglossic Engagement words were underlined and categorized into sub-categories.
3. Finally, the essays were uploaded to the UAM CorpusTool for further coding.

A key criticism of Appraisal Theory is its subjectivity. Written and spoken utterances can be interpreted in various ways, depending on the subjective positions of the readers/ listeners. This awareness of subjectivity has prompted analysts to consider meaning more carefully and to reflect on their own social positions during the evaluative language analysis process (Amornrattanasirichok & Jaroongkhongdach, 2017). This research paper has a limitation in that the reliability of the analysis was not verified, as the data were coded by the writer, a bilingual Arabic/ English speaker. To enhance the accuracy of the analysis and minimize the risk of subjectivity, a reliability check could be conducted in future research.

4 Finding and Discussion

The purpose of this research paper is to investigate the Heteroglossic resources of Engagement in argumentative essays written by university English language learners in Saudi Arabia. The results of this investigation are presented below, highlighting the patterns in the use of Heteroglossic Engagement words as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Percentages of Heteroglossic Engagement subfields in the female Saudi university students in argumentative essays

Heteroglossic Engagement	Texts
Feature	Percent
Contract	% 56
Expand	% 44
CONTRACT-TYPE	
Disclaim	% 33
Proclaim	% 23
DISCLAIM-TYPE	
deny	% 24
counter	% 9
PROCLAIM-TYPE	
concur	% 5
pronounce	% 7
endorse	% 3
justify	% 8
EXPAND-TYPE	
Entertain	% 42
Attribute	% 2
ATTRIBUTE_GATE	
acknowledge	% 1
distance	% 1

4.1 The Distribution and preference of heteroglossic categories

The results of the analysis indicate that the total use of various Heteroglossic words in the twenty-eight argumentative essays that have been coded is 303

words (N = 303). Table 2 shows the number of words and the percentages for the two main subtypes of Heteroglossic.

Table 2: Number of Heteroglossic Engagement words employed by female Saudi university students in argumentative essays.

Feature	/	/
<i>Total Units</i>	N = 303	% 100
CONTRACT- TYPE	170	% 56
-disclaim	101	% 33
-proclaim	69	% 23
EXPAND- TYPE	133	% 44
-entertain	127	% 42
-attribute	6	% 2

The most used resources of Heteroglossic Engagement are Entertain and Disclaim, (%42) and (%33) respectively. The language of Entertain that is used by the students are mainly modal verbs which are the following: can, may, might, and must, if and questions (as presented in table 3). Apparently, the students used positive words to present a negotiable proposition. As for Disclaim, the students frequently used the language of deny (%24) and counter (%9). Their use of these contradicting resources seems to have made a strong authorial voice. However, the infrequent use of Attribution, of only (%2), made the arguments less convincing. It is interesting to note that Attribute vocabularies, which include Acknowledge and Distance, such as "Cruse

claims..." and "Lee argues...", were the least used resources by the students. Their limited use of Acknowledge (1%), Distance (1%), and Endorsement (3%) indicates that they did not refer to external voices to support their claims and arguments, contributing to a less persuasive sense in their writings.

After Entertain and Disclaim comes the students' use of Proclaim language. Their use of Proclaim accounts for (%23). Within Proclaim, the most frequently used phrases include Pronounce (e.g., "I/we believe," "in my opinion") with 7%, and Justification language (e.g., "because," and "therefore") with 8%. Endorsement is the least used in Proclaim with only (%3).

Table 3: Statistics on Entertain vocabularies in Female Saudi University Students' Argumentative Essays

Entertain word	Frequency
Can	%48
Could	%1
Might	%12
May	%12
Must	%9
Should	%1
If	%9
Question	%8

Thus, the analyzed essays indicate that students use Entertain resources when they want to promote and lengthen the dialogue. Also, they use modals to give their point of view in a less assertive manner, as it gives space for other opinions. However, Proclaim and Disclaim are used to give authorial voice which may weakens their argument.

4.2 Comparing the findings of this research to other research papers

Researchers indicate that Heteroglossic resources is the widely used type of Engagement framework in argumentative writing by students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This is because Heteroglossia creates a lot of room for discussions and negotiations to be made. The study by Yang (2016) shows that Chinese (EFL) college students mostly used Disclaim and Entertain in their argumentative essay writing. They frequently used the Entertain resources more than other resources. This suggests a strategic choice to create a more collaborative tone, which can enhance the persuasiveness of their arguments. The Entertain vocabulary used by Chinese (EFL) are positive modals which made their writing negotiable. This is similar to what have been shown by the analysis of the data of the current research. As for the abundant use of Disclaim resources, it indicates that Chinese (EFL) students are good at aligning themselves with readers. Such alignment fosters a connection that can lead to stronger engagement with the audience. Also, it is shown that Proclaim resources, for both Saudi and Chinese EFL students, have a relatively low usage whereas it is Attribute vocabularies that has the least usage by those (EFL) students. This raises questions about the students' willingness to assert their authority in their arguments, potentially reflecting cultural differences in communication styles. As for Liu (2013) research, the Disclaim resources, especially Deny, in low-rated Chinese students' argumentative essays were more than other resources. However, Liu's finding contradicts the

finding of this research in term of the use of Pronounce resources. According to Liu (2013) Pronounce are used frequently in an attempt of authorial voice, yet it is not used as much by Saudi EFL students. This discrepancy may suggest that Saudi students are exploring different ways to establish their voices, opting for fewer direct assertions.

To conclude, the Heteroglossic resources that students used in argumentative essays include Entertain, Disclaim, Proclaim, Attribute. Disclaim as well as Proclaim are used in dialogic contractions, which involve narrowing down of space for certain dialogue. Disclaim involves denial through negation by using items like never, no, not etc. It also involves countering through taking contrary positions using adverbs likes although, however, but etc. Proclaim involves Justify and Pronounce words like indeed (Miller et al.,2014).

On the other hand, Attribute, and Entertainment are used for dialogue expansion. In Entertain, the use of modal verbs is the most by EFL, to give a negotiable proposition (Miller et al.,2014), whereas attribution resources are not used as much. This suggests that while students effectively create space for discussion, they may struggle with directly referencing others' ideas. Consequently, their arguments could be less persuasive due to the lack of cited support.

5 Conclusion and Implication

When writing an argumentative essay, students are required to master the intuitive skills of academic writing such as spelling, structures, and punctuation along with organizing ideas logically and presenting facts rationally starting from an introduction, body, and finally the conclusion in order to convince readers. In argumentative writings, it is essential to use interpersonal language properly, as well, to persuade and construct a critical voice. Within the Appraisal theory, Attitude is the most studied subfield,

whereas Engagement is given little attention. Therefore, this paper focused on Engagement resources in University EFL argumentative writing. This subtype of Appraisal theory by Martin and White (2005), is very important as far as making argumentative writing or speeches is concerned. It provides ways through which people express their views with a lot of ease. Attention must be given to making EFL students aware of such resources. Introducing the Engagement resources and teaching students how to make use of them in their writing will help the students' writings express clearly and comprehensibly the diverse positions in their writing.

As introduced in the literature at the beginning of this paper, EFL students have many challenges in argumentative writing, such as, how to set an academic tone, develop the content of their writing, integrate other academic sources, identify evidence, compose counterclaims, as well as writing refutation argument. This indicates the need to provide instructors with precise knowledge concerning students' weaknesses, which will support and assist them in overcoming their weaknesses in argumentative essay writing. Therefore, there is a need to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in writing classrooms (Alharbi, 2022).

Ozfidan and Mitchell (2020) suggested that argumentative writing (or related courses) instructors need to alter the course design structure, teaching strategies, as well as course materials in order to design their lessons more efficiently. This implication relates to Elboroloy and Almujaali's (2020) study implications that knowledge on EFL students' weaknesses is beneficial for instructing learners how to compose argumentative essays using contemporary approaches appropriately. Rizvic-Eminovic and Dervic (2025) emphasized the necessity of explicit instruction to enhance academic writing skills, demonstrating significant improvements in essay-writing performance among students. Additionally, Tsiriotakis et al. (2020) reinforce the idea that effective strategy instruction can lead to better text production performance, demonstrating positive outcomes for students across varying proficiency levels. Thus, as shown by Nguyen (2024) and Zhao (2020), the use of the Appraisal framework as a pedagogical tool can enhance effective English academic writing among non-native English students, who often struggle with expressing stances and constructing coherent arguments. Notions of Appraisal theory

such as Attitude, Graduation, Voice, and Engagement resources should be added to the writing course syllabus and taught explicitly in order to improve students' ability to manage dialogic interactions, integrate sources, and express their personal stance more effectively in academic discourse.

In conclusion, it is recommended that future researchers examine the effects of explicitly teaching the notions of Appraisal theory on the improvement of EFL writing skills. This investigation may provide deeper insights into the practical applications of the framework and its impact on student outcomes in different academic contexts.

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