Engagement in doctoral dissertation discussion sections written by English native speakers

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ABSTRACT

Academic writing is seen as an attempt to involve interaction between writers and readers; hence, academics are required to not only produce texts representing external realities but also use language to recognize, build and exchange social relations. The present study was conducted to analyze how native English speaker, Ph.D. students in the field of TEFL position their texts intertextually when writing their doctoral dissertations' discussion sections. To this end, ten discussion sections were selected and meticulously analyzed based on the Engagement subsystem of the Appraisal Framework. The frequency of occurrence of every dialogic Engagement resource was identified, and its functionalities were explicated and exemplified. The results indicated that the examined writers used various dialogic resources to engage themselves in dialogue with their potential interlocutors. They also preferred to limit the possibility of being rejected or challenged by using dialogically contractive Engagement resources more than dialogically expansive ones.

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1. Introduction

Academic writing is no longer considered an "objective, faceless and impersonal form of discourse" (Hyland, 2005, p. 173). According to Bakhtin's (1981) notion of "intertextuality," academic texts -like any other type of text-are dialogic. Thus, although academic writers are required to produce texts representing external realities, they should simultaneously use language to recognize, build and exchange social relations (Hyland, 2007). In other words, academic writers need to use interpersonal linguistic resources effectively in order to introduce their authorial voice, engage with alternative viewpoints, and consequently, convince their readers and establish solidarity with them (Ling-Lam & Crosthwaite, 2018). This requirement can be met by academic writers' proper use of evaluative linguistic resources. The importance of evaluative language in academic writing is highlighted in the work of a number of scholars (Hunston, 1989, 2000; Hyland, 2000; Martin, 2000; Pounds, 2015; White, 2002) as it plays a crucial role in the textual construction of interaction between authors and readers (Mei & Allison, 2003). In this context, evaluative language is used to refer to the linguistic choices through which writers position their texts in relation to other knowledge and other knowers (Ravelli & Ellis, 2005). Thus, evaluative writing is a dynamic process of positioning throughout the text, done via the strategic distribution of linguistic resources of interpersonal meanings (Ravelli & Ellis, 2005). These linguistic resources have been studied in the literature under different headings such as 'evaluation' (Hunston, 2000), 'attitude' (Halliday, 1994), 'epistemic modality' (Hyland, 1998), 'metadiscourse'

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(Crismore, 1989; Hyland & Tse, 2004), 'stance' (Biber & Finegan, 1989; Hyland, 1999), and more recently, 'appraisal' (Martin, 2000; White, 2003), which is the concern of the present study.

In the Appraisal Framework (Martin & White, 2005), language can be used as a tool to express writer's/speaker's opinion about people, things, and situations (Wu, 2013). This framework provides a systematic account of linguistic resources used to express emotions and attitudes (Attitude); evaluate the play of voices within and across texts (Engagement) and analyze the intensification of both Attitude and the degree of Engagement (Graduation) (Ngo & Unsworth, 2015). Although these three sub-systems of the Appraisal framework work simultaneously in the construction of a text, the present study focuses only on the Engagement subsystem of the Appraisal Framework. This subsystem deals with authorial 'voice' and 'stance-taking,' which are often used interchangeably in the literature. From a dialogic perspective, stance and voice can be considered as author's intersubjective positioning concerning external voices or alternative value positions (e.g., White, 2003 & Wharton 2012). This dialogic perspective on stance and voice can be considered as the author's engagement with readers' value positions (Cheung, 2017).

As an example of academic texts, doctoral dissertations -written by native speakers of English and monitored by highly knowledgeable professors-can be considered authentic texts for analyzing how highly educated scholars in the field of TEFL fulfill the requirements for academic writing and the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. These scholars, at the highest educational level, are required to undergo the demanding task of writing doctoral dissertations and creating original extended texts contributing to their field of study. The value of their texts, however, not only relies on the presentation of "absolute truth, empirical evidence or flawless logic", but also the proper deployment of "social and linguistic conventions that colleagues find convincing" (Hyland, 2012). In the context of Ph.D. dissertation writing, after the presentation of all figures and data in the Result section, writers need to use various devices to boost the persuasiveness of claims they make based on those findings in the Discussion section. This persuasiveness, as Hyland (2012) argues, is achieved by the deployment of "disciplinary and genre-specific conventions", requiring academic authors to "project themselves into their texts to communicate their integrity, credibility, involvement and a relationship to their subject matter and their readers" (Hyland, 2009) (i.e., stance-taking). In line with this view, understanding how successful Ph.D. dissertation writers 'take a stance' or 'express their voices' in the discussion sections of their dissertations can have implications for the development of EAP/ESP courses for more explicit instruction (Cheung, 2017).

According to the mentioned points, the present textual analysis was conducted to examine how native-speaker doctoral dissertation writers in the field of TEFL use evaluative linguistic resources in the discussion sections of their dissertations to develop shared knowledge through discourse and in dialogue with other knowledge and other knowers.

The study's research question was answered by using the Appraisal Framework's Engagement system and based on the perspective of an Iranian critical reader.

2. Analytical framework

2.1. Appraisal Theory

In the 1980s, the researchers in the Write It Right project set out to uncover the reading/writing requirements of the discourses of science, technology, the media, history, English literature studies, geography and the visual arts (e.g., Iedema, Feez, & White, 1994). The outcomes of this project led to the formation of Appraisal Theory, now considered as an extension of one of the meta-functions in Systemic Functional Linguistics (i.e., interpersonal meta-function) (Wang & Guan, 2013). As mentioned, the Appraisal Framework has three subsystems of Attitude, Graduation, and Engagement, the latter of which is the concern of the present study. In the following sections, the Engagement subsystem of the Appraisal Framework will be explained in more detail.

2.1.1. Engagement and engagement resources

According to Martin and White (2005), the Engagement system provides an opportunity to characterize the different possibilities for writers'/speakers' stance-taking, to investigate the rhetorical effects of their positioning and to explore what is at stake when one stance is preferred over another. Thus, the Engagement system is applied to identify the diverse range of linguistic resources by which writers/speakers adjust and negotiate the arguability of their utterances. This system of language analysis is highly influenced by Bakhtin's/Voloshinov's notions of 'dialogism' and 'heteroglossia' (multi-voicedness), indicating that all verbal communication is 'dialogic.' The dialogue in this sense does not imply only face-to-face vocalized verbal communication; it also includes verbal communication of any type, including a one-sided speech or any written text (Martin & White, 2005). Bakhtin (1981: 279) contended that every discourse -including rhetorical and scholarly- "cannot fail to be oriented towards the "already uttered," the "already known," the "common opinion" and so forth." He further explains that "the dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course, a property of any discourse" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 280). Therefore, as Voloshinov (1995: 139) has also stated, any written or printed text can be considered a dialogue between writer and readers because "it responds to something, affirms something, anticipates possible responses and objections, seeks support and so on." From the SFL viewpoint, a writer plays an important role in establishing and maintaining an interpersonal relationship (or dialogue) with the readers (Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks, & Yallop, 2000; Lemke, 1992; Martin, 1995) and every instance of writing is "an interactive event, a social exchange of meanings" (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). Thus, considering the dialogic nature of all utterances, the Engagement analysts are involved in the exploration of the degree to which speakers/

writers engage with prior knowledge, acknowledge previous knowers, and anticipate potential responses of the readers (Martin & White, 2005).

Within the Engagement system, as outlined by Martin and White (2005), various 'attitudinal' or 'stanced' linguistic resources are available to position the authorial voice concerning other voices and alternative positions. In other words, this system is directed towards providing a systematic account of how different voices interact linguistically within a particular discourse community. These linguistic realizations have traditionally been studied under such headings as 'modality,' 'polarity,' 'evidentiality,' 'intensification,' 'concession,' and 'consequentiality.'

Hence, the resources included within the Engagement system are all dialogistic in the sense that they are all means by which writers/speakers represent themselves as being more or less engaged in a dialogue with prior voices and alternative viewpoints. However, a distinction must be made between 'heteroglossic' and 'monoglossic' locutions. Following Bakhtin (1981), all locutions represented as but one view among a range of possible views are labeled as 'heteroglossic', whereas locutions labeled as 'monoglossic' do not obviously reference other voices or do not recognize alternative positions. Monoglossic locutions or 'bare assertions' have regularly been characterized as 'intersubjectively neutral,' 'objective' or even 'factual' (Martin & White, 2005, p. 99). Therefore, a fundamental choice in the Engagement system is between heteroglossic (acknowledging the heteroglossic diversity of the utterance) and monoglossic (ignoring the heteroglossic diversity of the utterance) options.

The heteroglossic locutions, as Martin and White (2005:102) stated, can be divided into two broad categories of "dialogically expansive" and "dialogically contractive" regarding their intersubjective functionality. Accordingly, when an Engagement resource actively allows dialogically alternative positions and voices, it is considered as dialogically expansive and when it fends off or restricts the scope of the dialogue, it is labeled as dialogically contractive. An overview of the contractive and expansive Engagement resources used in the current study is presented in Figure (1).

As shown in Figure (1), Engagement resources for dialogic contraction are Disclaim and Proclaim while those of dialogic expansion are Entertain and Attribution. Those who are familiar with Martin and White's (2005) framework will notice that there are slight differences between the Engagement categorization applied in the present study and the one originally introduced by Martin and White (2005:134). Following Martin and White's explanations of Entertain resources (2005: 105), those resources were divided into two groups of Likelihood -including writers' assessment of likelihood- and Evidence -including evidence/appearance-based postulations-in the present textual analysis. Moreover, to the Engagement category of Attribution that included two subcategories of Acknowledgment and Distance in Martin and White's original framework, an extra layer of Hearsay was added in the present study. This inclusion of Hearsay as a separate subset of Attribution was made following Martin and White's explanation concerning the attribution of a proposition "where no specific source is specified" (2005: 112). Since the source is not specified in Hearsay while it is mentioned in both Acknowledgment and Distance, Hearsay was considered to be a different class of Attribution in the current study. In the following sections, the Engagement categories will be explained in more detail, and examples from the corpus will be presented to help readers better understand the functionality of each Engagement subcategory.
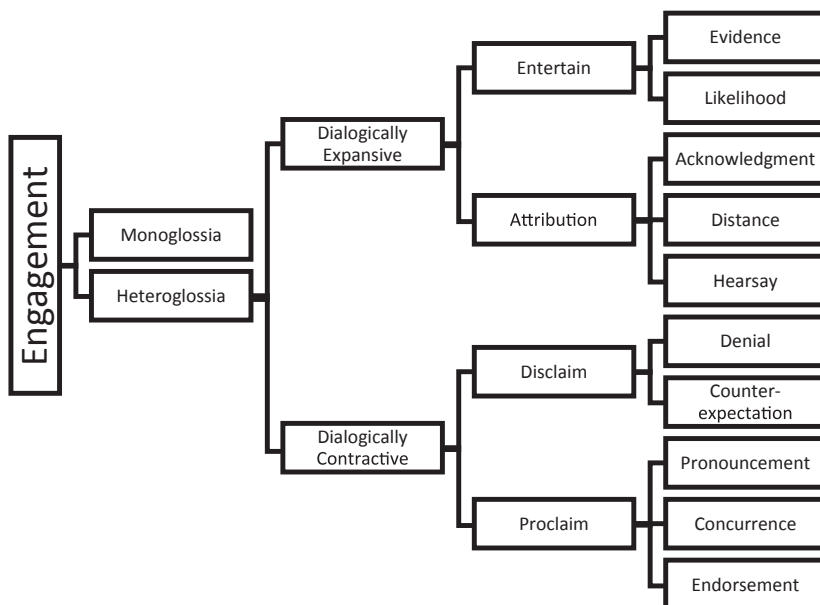

Fig. 1. Dialogistic resources: contractive & expansive according to Martin and White (2005)

2.1.1.1. Engagement resources for dialogic expansion: Entertain and Attribution. 2.1.1.1.1. Entertain. By using Entertain resources, writer/speaker shows that his/her view is only one of the possible positions/proposals; thus, s/he dialogically opens up space for other possibilities. In other words, "the authorial voice entertains those dialogic alternatives" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 104). From a dialogic perspective, these linguistic resources are used by writers/speakers to make the subjectivity of their views more explicit and thereby provide a dialogic space for the negotiation of alternative views. In other words, by using these linguistic resources, writers/speakers project for their texts an audience, which may not collectively share the value positions being advanced. By recognizing and dialogically validating the opposing views, writers/speakers enhance the chance of solidarity with those who hold those views (Martin & White, 2005, pp. 108−109). As mentioned, the Engagement category of Entertain included linguistic resources of Likelihood and Evidence in the present study. In the following sentences, which are taken from the present study's corpus, instances of Likelihood and Evidence can be observed:

> *Text 2/Sentence 10 (T2/S10): It **may [Entertain: Likelihood]** well be that ELL writing is simply poorer overall, and that surface errors and high frequencies of errors merely serve to distinguish good from poor writing.*
> *T2/S26: ELL students who can approximate American-English proficient paragraphing **appear to [Entertain: Evidence]** benefit in terms of their score.[1]*

2.1.1.1.2. Attribution. By using Attribution resources, the writer/speaker disassociates the proposal from the text's internal authorial voice (intra-vocalization) by attributing it to some external source (extra-vocalization). This attribution is mostly done through "the grammar of directly and indirectly reported speech and thought" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 111) (or quotations, citations, references). Resources of Attribution are apparently dialogic in that they associate the propositions being advanced in a text with external voices; however, Acknowledging and Hearsay Attributions are used in a text when the authorial voice stands neutral to the proposition being advanced, whereas Distancing Attributions are used to "mark explicitly the internal authorial voice separate from the cited, external voice" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 113) or to detach authors "from responsibility for what is being reported" (Caldas-Coulthard, 1994: 295). Examples of these Attribution resources can be observed in T3/S6, T4/S25, and T3/S9:

> *T3/S6: […], Dweck and others who have advanced this idea **have offered [Attribution: Acknowledgment]** a theoretical package that …*
> *T4/S25: As* Lowe and Williams (2004) **claimed [Attribution: Distance]***, Weblogs are interactive …*
> *T3/S9: However, the multifaceted benefits of the growth mindset are succinctly and compellingly conveyed by **the "mind is a muscle" metaphor [Attribution: Hearsay]**.*

Instances of Attribution can also be 'assimilated' or 'inserted'. In the case of assimilated Attribution, although the name placed in parentheses shows that the words are borrowed from an external source, the authors avoid taking any responsibility for the truth value of those propositions. In other words, the authors do not use any quotation verb in the clause itself to show that the proposition is actually borrowed from an external source. By using this strategy, the authors present propositions as only related to their own discussions, without signaling support for them. On the other hand, by using inserted Attribution, the authorial voice provides its audience with actual words of the external source, and therefore, dissociates the authorial voice from the external voice. T5/S7, T9/S153, and T10/S75 are examples of these two types of Attribution:

> T5/S7: Students are given three opportunities to pass the TAKS, or they will be considered for retention in the 3rd grade (Office of Texas High School Education Critical Issues Report 2001; Texas Education Agency, 2004) [Attribution: assimilated Acknowledgment].
> T9/S153: Wilson (1996) cautions, however, that such idea development is "normal" and "seems to perform an important function" [Attribution: inserted Acknowledgment] (p.181).
> T10/S75: Wennerstrom (2000) found a 0.85 correlation between SPEAK ratings of fluency and comprehensibility and claimed that "the fluency score is a strong component of overall language ability in the perception of raters" [Attribution: inserted Distance] (p. 107).

2.1.1.2. Engagement resources for dialogic contraction: Disclaim and Proclaim. 2.1.1.2.1. Disclaim. By using Disclaim resources, writer/speaker directly rejects alternative positions or represents them as inapplicable/inadequate. This rejection is contractive since alternative positions have been presented as unjustifiable and consequently of no use. The Disclaim resources are divided into two categories of Denial and Counter-expectation. In Denial (or Negation), writer/speaker positions the alternative view into the dialogue, thereby acknowledges it and then rejects it and in Counter-expectation, writer/speaker represents the existing proposition as "replacing or supplanting, and thereby 'countering', a proposition which would have

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[1] More examples and more delicate analysis of Engagement resources detected in the present corpus will be presented in the Result section.

been expected in its place" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 120). In T3/S15, Denial and Counter-expectation are used in a single sentence by the author:

> T3/S15: **While [Disclaim: Counter-expectation]** *exposure to the growth mindset frame (literally or metaphorically)* **did not result in [Disclaim: Denial]** *participants accepting more challenging learning tasks or passing on fewer difficult items, exposure did result in higher overall performance scores than the scores of those in the control condition.*

2.1.1.2.2. Proclaim. By using Proclaim resources, writer/speaker confronts, challenges, overwhelms or even excludes contradictions to limit the scope of dialogistic alternatives. These resources are dialogistic in the sense that they introduce writer/speaker as engaged in a dialogue with his/her audience. They are also contractive in that they present a shared value as universal and accepted-by-all and simultaneously exclude any alternative positions from the dialogue. In that sense, these locutions are similar to monoglossic utterances, and what distinguishes them is that the proclaim resources make the contracting of the dialogue explicit by shutting it down. The Proclaim resources are divided into three categories of Concurrence, Endorsement, and Pronouncement. Engagement resources in the Concurrence category are used by writers/speakers to overtly announce their agreement with their audience. Endorsement resources are used by writers/speakers to indicate that propositions sourced to external voices are correct, acceptable and valid. These resources can also be 'assimilated' or 'inserted'. Assimilated Endorsement is somehow similar to assimilated Acknowledgment in that it occurs when the authors include external sources' words or ideas in their texts without signaling the presence of an external source in the main clauses; however, the difference between assimilated Acknowledgment and Endorsement is that, in the latter, there are some linguistic indicators in the sentence showing that the authors are supportive of the assimilated propositions. On the other hand, inserted Endorsement occurs when the authors use exact words of the external sources within double quotation marks and simultaneously show their support for those propositions. T2/S6 and T4/S91 are examples of these two types of Endorsement:

> T2/S6: *In fact, measures that take into account the presence or absence of errors are particularly relevant in distinguishing poor from good quality writing (*Perkins, 1980*) [Proclaim: assimilated Endorsement].*
> T4/S91: **Gousseva (1998) pointed out** *in her study that* **"the act of writing is critical as one learns to write by reading" [inserted Proclaim: Endorsement]** *(p. 1).*

Endorsement resources are dialogic in that they are used by speakers/writers to retrospectively engage with voices of previous knowers. On the other hand, the anticipatory function of Endorsement resources is superficially similar to that of Attribution Resources. Therefore, it must be noted that Attribution resources are used by speakers/writers to dissociate a proposition advanced by an external source from the authorial voice whereas Endorsement resources are used to associate an external-sourced proposition with the subjectivity of the authorial voice. Finally, Engagement resources in the category of Pronouncement are used by the writer/speaker to explicitly intervene or interpolate in the dialogue. Instances of Pronouncement are dialogistic as they acknowledge the presence of counter positions and are contractive as they challenge, confront or resist those counter positions (Martin & White, 2005). In T3/S46, T4/S79, and T4/S122, examples of these Proclaim resources are presented:

> T3/S46: *In this case, options of "pass" or "don't know" are* **definitely [Proclaim: Pronouncement]** *incorrect.*
> T4/S79: *Guerrero and Villamil* **showed that [Proclaim: Endorsement]** *collaboration on editing and revising caused ESL college students to engage actively in the learning process as a reader and a writer and that L2 learners provided reciprocal guidance and support.*
> T4/S122: *Nestor,* **of course [Proclaim: Concurrence]***, had a purpose that was directed by his preference to work on his papers with minimal contact from other students.*

3. Engagement and academic writing

Several text analysts have examined academic texts based on the Appraisal framework's Engagement system as an effective analytical tool for the analysis of stance-taking techniques and ways of establishing interpersonal relationships with readers. Among these text analysts, Liping (2005) explored the delicate evaluation strategies of the genre of academic reviews written in English by conducting an Engagement analysis. Doing so, he analyzed the intra-vocalize resources in the Evaluation stage of ten linguistic reviews and found different frequencies. Correspondingly, the most common intra-vocalize resources were Evidence, Concurrence, and Counter-expectation, and the least common ones were Hearsay and Pronouncement. Pascual (2010) investigated how non-native speakers of English position their texts intertextually when writing their grant proposals. She conducted an Engagement analysis on two successful proposals and found that they were highly heteroglossic and that numerous Engagement resources, particularly expansive ones, were applied to address a potentially varied audience. She concluded that such findings could help writers become aware of how to position themselves intertextually and align their audience when writing proposals. Fryer (2013) examined Engagement features in different parts of medical research articles. He reported the frequency of expansive resources as being twice as many as the frequency of contractive resources.

Table 1
Frequencies and percentages of Engagement locutions in T1-T10.

Types of Engagement resources			Frequency	Percentage	Frequency per 1000 word
Dialogistically Contractive	Disclaim	Denial	166	21	6.0
		Counter-expectation	189	24	6.8
	Proclaim	Concurrence	23	3	0.8
		Pronouncement	42	5	1.5
		Endorsement	72	9	2.6
Total			492	62	17.8
Dialogistically Expansive	Entertain	Evidence	64	8	2.3
		Likelihood	174	22	6.3
	Attribution	Acknowledgment	51	6	1.8
		Distance	18	2	0.6
		Hearsay	3	0.0	0.1
Total			310	38	11.2

According to his results, Entertain and Disclaim were the most common Engagement resources in his examined texts. Amornrattanasirichok and Jaroongkhongdach (2017) investigated Engagement resources in literature review sections of articles published in Thai and international journals in the field of applied linguistics. They reported that dialogically expansive resources were more prevalent than dialogically contractive ones in both corpora. Ngongo (2017) qualitatively analyzed ten undergraduate theses, written by students who got 'A' thesis grade in the field of TEFL, based on the Appraisal framework. He found that the examined students tended to use the expansive Engagement resources (i.e., Entertain & Attribution) four times more than the contractive ones (i.e., Disclaim & Proclaim). He concluded that the appropriate use of evaluative language should be taught in universities. Finally, in the most similar study to the present one, Geng and Wharton (2016) investigated Engagement resources in a relatively small corpus of doctoral discussion sections written by Chinese-speaking and native speakers of English. They found that native speaker writers preferred Disclaim over Proclaim and Entertain over Attribution resources.

According to the above-mentioned and other similar studies (e.g. Wu, 2007; Swain, 2010; &; Brooke, 2014), it can be concluded that the strategic use of Engagement resources is an important aspect of academic writing, and that successful, or internationally-published, academic writers may have a preference for using expansive Engagement resources more than contractive ones.

4. Methodology

In this study, an Engagement analysis of a rather small number of representative texts was conducted. Doing so, ten doctoral dissertation discussion sections, written by American Ph.D. students whose nationalities were specified in the biography section at the end of their dissertations (2004−2009), were randomly selected out of the TEFL Ph.D. dissertations uploaded to the University of Texas at Austin Electronic Theses and Dissertation database.[2] The University of Texas at Austin has provided researchers with open, online access to the products of the university's research. The initial phase of the study started by coding the instances of Engagement in the examined texts. Each text was coded manually by two of the present study's researchers to remove every possible inconsistency and have a more reliable and valid dataset. The quantitative data related to the frequency of each Engagement resource in the examined corpus were provided, and then, to avoid repetition and add something relatively new to the framework, only those formulations which were rare, or less emphasized elsewhere, were explicated. Since the lengths of the examined discussion sections were not identical, a frequency per 1000 words was counted for each category of Engagement. In the Findings section, the sentences taken from the corpus are presented in italics and the formulations under consideration in italics/bold.

5. Findings

The total number of words and Engagement resources in the examined corpus were respectively 27558 and 802 (i.e., 29.1 per 1000 words or one occurrence of Engagement in every 34 words). The frequency, percentage, and frequency per 1000 words of each Engagement resource, used by the examined Native American Ph.D. dissertation writers in their discussion sections, are presented in Table (1)1.

The ratio of contractive to expansive Engagement resources (492:310, 62%: 38%) indicates that there were almost 1.5 times as many dialogically contractive Engagement resources as dialogically expansive ones.

In the following sections, the most/least frequent Engagement resources in the corpus will be discussed.

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[2] https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/4.

5.1. The most frequent engagement resources in the corpus

The highest to the lowest frequencies/percentages of Engagement subcategories are presented in Table (2).

As shown in Table (2), the Engagement category of Counter-expectation (n = 189, 23.5%) had the highest frequency in the examined doctoral dissertation discussion sections. The countering propositions were mostly conveyed via the conjunctions 'however' (n = 53, 28%), 'but' (n = 40, 21%), 'although' (n = 12, 6%), 'while' (n = 12, 6%), 'even though' (n = 11, 5.5%), and the adverbs 'even' (n = 11, 5.5%), and 'yet' (n = 10, 5%). The mentioned countering locutions have been discussed extensively in the literature (e.g., Fryer, 2013; Geng & Wharton, 2016; Cheng & Unsworth, 2016; and; Cheung, 2017); therefore, we focus here only on the less emphasized instances of Counter-expectation in previous studies. One of these instances is the use of the adverb 'despite' (n = 3, 1.5%) and its related phrase '*in spite of*' (n = 2, 1%):

T1/S12: *The qualitative findings from the interviews with six students and two English teachers revealed that the students have as their almost solitary goal for their English classes in the last year of high school the passing of the university entrance examinations,* **despite** *the fact that they professed to have numerous other mostly distal goals for learning English that were either unrelated to university entrance or were related in an indirect manner.*

In T1/S12, the Counter-expectation is conveyed via the adverb '*despite.*' The countering relationship here exists between students' claim that '*their almost solitary goal for their English classes in the last year of high school [is] the passing of the university entrance examinations*' and '*the fact that they professed to have numerous other mostly distal goals for learning English.*' The author uses '*despite*' to surprise his readers with the fact that the students professed that they also have other probably equally important goals for learning English which contradicts what they initially stated that their most solitary goal was the passing of entrance exams.

T1/S11: **In spite of these findings**, *the questionnaire also revealed that many students possessed an individualistic and competitive stance toward their studies and toward others …*

The mentioned findings in T1/S11 are that '*the students overall [are] cooperative with regard to their classmates and their studies*' and that most of them '*regarded themselves as being cooperative and not competitive.*' Being cooperative is at odds with the students' individualistic and competitive stance toward others revealed as a result of further questionnaire analysis. Therefore, the adverbial adjunct '*in spite of these findings*' is used to indicate that although the students explicitly acknowledged that maintaining friendships is more important than the results of the exams, they implicitly tried to overtake their classmates.

The other instance of Counter-expectation worthy of being mentioned is the use of the adverb 'instead of' (n = 2, 1%):

T1/S22: **Instead of** *looking into themselves, they look to others as a means to generate said motivation.*

People are expected to look into themselves and their abilities first and then enter into a competition. However, the author uses the adverbial phrase '*instead of looking into themselves*' to convey a Counter-expectation. Accordingly, the study's participants (i.e., the examined Japanese students) were different in that they looked to others' abilities and potentials as a source of motivation.

The connective 'rather than' (n = 2, 1%) was also found to convey a Counter-expectation:

T9/S16: **Rather than** *being prescriptive, my aim in presenting these findings is to induce the key patterns that appeared to facilitate the funding and practice of the teacher's collaboration, as well as those patterns not apparent (at least not in great abundance).*

The T9 author uses '*rather than*' to initially counter an expectation that the study's findings are prescriptive. However, there is a sense of negation in the connective '*rather than*' by which the author excludes the prescriptive nature of his findings. In

Table 2
The highest to the lowest frequencies/percentages of Engagement subcategories in T1-T10.

	Engagement Subcategories	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency per 1000 words
1	Counter-expectation	189	24	6.8
2	Likelihood	174	22	6.3
3	Denial	166	21	6.0
4	Endorsement	72	9	2.6
5	Evidence	64	8	2.3
6	Acknowledgment	51	6	1.8
7	Pronouncement	42	5	1.5
8	Concurrence	23	3	0.8
9	Distance	18	2	0.6
10	Hearsay	3	0.0	0.1

other words, the connective '*rather than*' can be coded as both Denial and Counter-expectation (a Disclaim resource in any case); but since it mostly supplants what is expected by the readers, it is coded as Counter-expectation.

While the most frequent Engagement resource used was contractive, the second most frequent was expansive (i.e., Likelihood; n = 174, 22%). The propositions conveying Likelihood mostly contained the modal auxiliary verbs 'may' (n = 57, 33%), 'might' (n = 20, 11.5%), 'could' (n = 11, 6%) and 'can' (n = 7, 4%), the modal adjuncts 'perhaps' (n = 17, 10%), 'probably' (n = 3, 2%), and 'possibly' (n = 2, 1%), and the modal attributes 'likely' (n = 13, 7.5%) and 'possible' (n = 12, 7%). There is an important point about coding the auxiliary verb 'can' as an instance of Likelihood: 'can' is used as an indicator of general ability in most cases (e.g., T3/S5), but it is an indicator of possibility in some cases (e.g., T3/S37).

> T3/S5: [...] students **can** achieve mastery of any subject -statistics included-if they conceive their intelligence as malleable.
> T3/S37: *Perhaps further applications of the "mind as muscle" metaphor* **can** *continue to improve upon these disparities.*

In T3/S37, '*can*' is considered as an instance of Likelihood as S37 starts with another Likelihood resource, namely '*perhaps.*' In other words, the whole sentence is an assumption on the part of the T3 author. There are also two other interesting formulations coded as cases of Likelihood in the present study:

> T9/S18: *In addition,* these findings also relate to **my hypotheses** presented in Chapter One.
> T9/S140: *Here,* **I am making an assumption of** "*better*" ideas.

The bolded parts in T9/S18 and T9/S140 are considered instances of "in my view type" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 105). The definitions of the terms '*hypothesis*[3]' and '*assumption*[4]", as provided by Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, denote Likelihood and Contingency. Thus, the author's hypotheses and assumptions are, in fact, in his contingent subjectivity and open to being challenged by others. In other words, these instances are communicatively synonymous with expressions such as 'I think' or 'I suppose.'

The third set of highest frequency Engagement resources in the examined corpus was related to the category of Denial (n = 166, 20.5%). Most of these instances were conveyed by simply negating various propositions, and thereby, presenting the authorial voice as rejecting some opposing positions. Such negations are performed in the following formulations.

> 'not + adjective' (e.g. 'not intense', 'not enough' & 'not sacrificed');
> 'verb + not' (e.g. 'did not,' 'was not,' & 'can not');
> 'not + adverb' (e.g. 'not completely');
> moreover, 'no + noun' (e.g., 'no reference to')

There were also two attention-grabbing cases of Denial in the examined corpus, which were conveyed via the correlative conjunctions 'not only ... but also' (n = 6, 3.5%) and 'neither ... nor' (n = 3, 2%):

> T3/S22: *All in all, it seems that* **not only** *do feedback mechanisms in computer programs matter, but also the content, quality, and embedded messages of that feedback also matter.*

In T3/S22, the T3 author uses '*not only*' to reject the position that considers '*feedback mechanisms in computer programs*' as the only important factor in learning outcomes. Nonetheless, he shows his commitment to the value position that considers '*feedback mechanisms*' as one of the important factors in learning outcomes by stressing on the auxiliary '*do.*' Thus, while he admits the importance of '*feedback mechanism,*' he still introduces other equally important factors that might be ignored or unexpected by some of his putative readers. However, by using an '*it seems*' framer, this author does not reject that position forcefully by placing it in his subjectivity which is open to further negotiations. According to this explanation, all other similar instances of 'not only, but also' cases in the present study data are coded as instances of Denial followed by Counter-expectation.

> T5/S38: *However, when asked specific questions from the CARR: RMS on those particular topics she answered "No" that she* **neither** *liked reading books that had characters that talked liked [sic] her* **nor** *did Adina want to read stories about events or things in her community.*

T5/S38 can be rephrased as 'she did not like reading either book that had characters that talked like her or stories about events or things in her community.' Therefore, the underlying meaning behind the *neither ... nor* framing is Denial.

5.2. The less frequent engagement resources in the corpus

So far, we explained three subcategories of the Engagement system that constituted a significant proportion of dialogic resources in the examined texts (n = 529, 65.5%). The instantiations of other, less frequent Engagement subcategories in the present study's corpus will be briefly discussed in the following paragraphs.

Instances of Endorsement (n = 72, 9%) were mostly conveyed via the verbs 'find' (n = 18, 25%), 'show' (n = 15%), 'demonstrate' (n = 4, 5.5%), and 'indicate' (n = 4, 5.5%). There are also seven instances of assimilated Endorsement and eleven cases of inserted Endorsement in the examined corpus. As already mentioned, assimilated Endorsement occurs when the authors include external sources' words or ideas in their texts without using any dialogic resource in the main clauses and inserted Endorsement occurs when the authors use exact word of the external sources within double quotation marks and simultaneously show their support for those propositions. For example:

T3/S25: *While females tend to outperform males in mathematics through elementary and junior high school, the trends reverse in high school, college, and beyond (see Hyde, Fennema, & Lamon, 1990 for a meta-analysis).*

In T3/S25, the T3 author implicitly shows his support for what has been found by other scholars by assimilating it into his text, with no overt indication of intertextuality, except for the names written in parenthesis.

T6/S105: *Those myths are that "study abroad ensures miraculous linguistic gains" and "increased non-classroom interaction in the target language is inevitable during a stay abroad" (p. 44).*

In T6/S105, the T6 author mentions two of the myths, sourced back to Mendelson's exploration of '*a series of myths about language learning abroad,*' directly and within quotation marks and appreciates those myths as relevant to her study.

The critical point in the coding of such indirect/direct propositions, as either Endorsement or Acknowledgment, can only be done by considering the co-text and other implicit or explicit indications of the authorial support or lack of support. For example, in the case of assimilated Acknowledgment instances in the corpus (n = 7), although the name placed in parentheses shows that the words are borrowed from an external source, the authors avoid taking any responsibility for the truth value of those propositions. For example:

T1/S27: *It is well known that such instruction, **which includes juku, yobikô, and private instructors (Blumenthal, 1998)**, provides students with extra information on examination subjects and examination-taking techniques.*

The bolded part in T1/S27 is coded as an instance of assimilated Acknowledgment. Although the name placed in parentheses (i.e., Blumenthal) shows that the words are borrowed from an external source, there is no indication of heteroglossia in the main clause. It must be noted that the T1 author remains neutral only with regard to the extra information he provides within two commas, while his commitment to the rest of the sentence is obvious as he uses the Concurrence framer '*it is well known that*'.

On the other hand, by using inserted Acknowledgment (n = 7), the authorial voice provides its audience with the actual words of the external source, and therefore, dissociates the authorial voice from the external voice. For example:

T6/S6: *She [Valdés] explained that these results in the field not engaging in [sic] "the examination of instructed language acquisition beyond L2 learners or to address the most challenging issues and problems that arise in various educational contexts for the most vulnerable minority language speakers" (p. 411).*

In T6/S6, the authorial voice directly reports the words of an external source (i.e., Valdés) without showing her support or lack of support for the attributed proposition. Therefore, the proposition placed within double quotation marks is coded as an instance of inserted Acknowledgment. Furthermore, the reporting verb '*explained*' is an indication of Acknowledgment in the Appraisal framework.

Other instances of Acknowledgment were conveyed via the reporting verbs 'describe', 'explain', 'define', 'assert', 'believe', 'contemplate', 'call for', 'report', 'discuss' and 'offer', and the nouns 'assertion' and 'notion'.

Instances of Evidence (n = 64, 8%) in the present study's corpus were mostly conveyed via the typical framers of Evidence resources (i.e. 'it appears/appeared to' (n = 20, 32%) & 'it seems/seemed that' (n = 18, 28%), whose functionalities have been discussed in the Methodology section. There were also instances of deontic modals that represent the authorial voices' assessment of some obligations, for example:

T5/S1: *Because the design of the study is pre-experimental, the results **should be** viewed as preliminary and descriptive.*

In T5/S1, although the T5 author has justified the mentioned obligation, it is still contingent, individually-based and open to being challenged by other communicative partners.

Instances of Pronouncement were mostly conveyed via the typical Pronouncement framers such as 'in fact' (n = 13, 31%), 'the fact that' (n = 5, 12%), the adverbs 'indeed' (n = 2, 5%), 'definitely' (n = 3, 7%), the auxiliary verbs 'did' and 'do' (n = 6, 14%), and formulations such as '[the results] directly provided an answer to … ', '[the results] proved to be … ', [the results] confirmed that … ' 'I state that … ', 'I verified that … ', and 'I argue that … ' For instance:

> T1/S17: *These first two conclusions show the interrelated nature of the students' language learning motivation and their obligation orientations and **directly provide an answer to** the research question of this study.*

In T1/S17, the T1 author tries to explicitly intervene in the text and show his support for the value of the conclusions he draws from his study. This explicit support is conveyed by the proposition '*directly provide an answer to,*' showing the importance and warrantability of the conclusions, and therefore, increasing the interpersonal cost of contrary value positions.

> T9/S4: *In the first section below, **I state** and attempt to warrant the findings from this inquiry.*
> T9/S43: *From the start, they talked about**,** and through my observations and participation **I verified**, how important "personality" and having similar "teaching philosophies" were to facilitating their working relationship.*

In both of T9/S4 and T9/S43, the T9 author strictly shows his findings as highly warrantable and sets himself against those who believe that either his methodology or his conclusions are not data-driven and valid. By using the personal pronoun '*I*' followed by the verbs '*state*' and '*verify,*' he accepts full responsibility for the following propositions concerning his findings, and thereby, rules out alternative positions.

Cases of Concurrence (n = 23, 3%) were mostly conveyed via the formulations 'it is clear that … ', 'it is conceivable that … ', 'it is well known that … ', 'there is an expectation that … ', 'it is not surprising that,' and 'what is clear is that … ' along with instances of the adverbs 'clearly,' 'logically,' and 'of course.' There is an important point concerning the coding of 'clearly' as either an instance of Concurrence or Graduation. Accordingly, 'clearly' is coded as a Concurrence resource when it is used by the authorial voice to indicate that it shares some knowledge with its putative readers, but a Graduation resource when it is used by the authorial voice to explain its observation concerning the way in which something is done or happens. This distinction is demonstrated in T8/S45 and T4/S94:

> T8/S45: *The development of speaker selection **clearly [Proclaim: Concurrence]** involves <u>greater</u> subtlety than the Guidelines represent.*
> T4/S94: *All of the participants **clearly [Force: Intensification (a circumstance of manner)]** stated that they were aware of their audience, and, as a result, wrote with their audience in mind.*

Instances of Distance in the present study's corpus were conveyed via the word 'claim,' used as either verb or noun. As mentioned, these dialogic resources are used by authors to explicitly distance themselves from the words of thoughts of external sources.

Finally, the Engagement Category of Hearsay had the lowest frequency in the present study's corpus (n = 3, 0.5%). Hearsay is not typically expected in doctoral dissertation discussion sections as such texts are academic and formal. In T3, however, there were three instances of Hearsay:

> T3/S9: *However, the multifaceted benefits of the growth mindset are succinctly and compellingly conveyed by the **"mind is a muscle" metaphor**.*
> T3/S17: *Second, and perhaps most central to this study, it was found that using **the "mind as muscle" metaphor** as feedback was more effective than literal growth-oriented feedback or neutral feedback …*

The T3 author places the '*mind is a muscle*' and the '*mind as muscle*' within double quotation marks, which are *not* used "to highlight a key term or phrase" in a text (American Psychological Association, 2020, p.158). According to the APA (2020), italics is used -instead of double quotation marks- "when it is most appropriate to draw readers' attention to the term or phrase" (APA, 2020; P. 170). This may indicate this author's lack of attention to the APA style rules; nevertheless, in the present study, these instances are considered quotations of an unspecified external source and coded as instances of Hearsay. Not considering the APA style rule concerning the use of double quotation marks, it still seems plausible that the '*mind as muscle*' metaphor must have originated from somewhere or been coined by someone. Therefore, as there is no indication of the source of this metaphor, it seems logical to code it as an instance of Hearsay.

T3/S34: *Some of our <u>brightest</u> minds in these areas <u>may be</u> missing representation in the field because of socially-constructed limitations of their intellectual potential, such as the fixed mindset belief that "**women <u>can't do</u> math.**"*

Similarly, the source of the double-quoted belief that '*women can't do math*' was not specified in S34, and therefore, it was coded as another instance of Hearsay in T3.

6. Discussion

The present study was conducted to examine how native English speaker Ph.D. students in the field of TEFL dialogistically position their texts in relation to other voices, and the potential effects of their linguistic choices on their audience. Doing so, ten doctoral dissertation discussion sections were selected as the study's corpus and analyzed meticulously based on the Engagement system of the Appraisal framework.

The highest to the lowest frequencies of the four Engagement categories in the texts of the examined doctoral dissertation discussion writers are presented in Table (3):

These results indicated that the examined writers tended to use dialogistically contractive Engagement resources (n = 492, 61%) more than dialogistically expansive ones (n = 310, 39%). Accordingly, the examined authors had a preference for restricting the scope of alternative value positions. This preference can enhance writer-reader solidarity when readers have already been convinced that the author has greater expertise in some area than them, or when they have no reason to reject the author's value position; but it can reduce writer-reader solidarity when readers are resistant, more knowledgeable than the author, or have strong evidence against the author's positioning. This result was consistent with the results of Geng and Wharton (2016) study, in which the frequency of contractive resources was reported as 50% more than that of expansive ones. Although the size of the corpus and frequencies of Engagement resources were different in the two studies, the results were almost the same. However, contrary to these findings, Fryer (2013) found a higher percentage of dialogically expansive linguistic resources than contractive ones (i.e., 66.51%: 33.49%) in a corpus of medical research articles. The higher preference of medical researchers in Fryer's (2013) study for expansive linguistic resources and of the present study's doctoral dissertation writers for contractive resources are in contrast with Becher and Trowler (2001) of the characteristics of hard (Natural and Mathematical disciplines, including Medical Sciences) and soft (Social Sciences and Humanities, including TEFL) sciences. They believed that the nature of discipline would affect the nature of knowledge and the language representing that knowledge. Considering their categorization, the tendency to make more tentative propositions (or expansive resources in the context of Engagement system) in soft disciplines (like TEFL and Linguistics) and more definite propositions (or contractive resources in the context of Engagement system) in hard disciplines (like Medical Sciences) would be expected, which was not the case in Freyer's (2013) and the present studies. Amornrattanasirichok and Jaroongkhongdach (2017) reported a higher ratio of expansive resources in the literature review sections of internationally published articles in the field of linguistics (i.e.,61%: 39%). The difference between their study's results and results of the present study may be related to the present study's Ph.D. dissertation writers' lack of experience in the use of cautious language. It also may indicate a higher level of assertiveness of native speakers (Americans in the case of the present study) compared with that of international academic writers with diverse native languages and cultural backgrounds. The other possible reason, or the most logical one, may be related to the present study's Ph.D. dissertation writers' more defensive position towards their readers compared to scholars who publish their studies internationally.

The frequency of Engagement resources (in the overall corpus) per 1000 words (i.e., 29.0) indicated that the examined authors used a variety of dialogic resources to engage themselves in having dialogues with other voices, and thereby, consider their readers as active participants in the academic community to which they were related. On the other hand, if considering each text individually, we found that T1, T4, T5, T6, T7, and T9 were highly contractive, T2 and T8 were rather contractive, and T3 was equally contractive and expansive. These results indicated that it is not easy to generalize such findings to even a specific academic domain, let alone the academic writing in general. Indeed, each academic text has its dialogic features which are determined based on the consideration of its topic, methodology, and potential audience. The vital issue when writing an academic text in general, and a Ph.D. discussion in particular, is to use dialogic/interpersonal linguistic resources available in the Engagement system appropriately, adequately, and persuasively. This is clearly an essential part of the communicative competence of native speaker and non-native speaker academic writers.

Considering the highest to the lowest frequencies of Engagement resources in the current study, the results were not in line with what Liping (2005) reported on the frequencies of Engagement resources in the genre of academic reviews written in English. Liping (2005) reported that Evidence, Concurrence, and Counter-expectation were the most frequent and Denial, Hearsay, and Pronouncement were the least frequent locutions, while in the present study, Counter-expectation, Likelihood, and Denial were the most frequent and Concurrence, Distance and Hearsay were the least frequent Engagement resources. These differing results indicate that the dialogic/interpersonal patterns differ in academic writing according to the academic genre to which each text belongs. To be more specific, even slightly different texts written in the same genre (e.g., Ph.D. dissertation discussion and abstract sections) may dialogically differ as they function differently.

Table 3
The highest to the lowest frequencies/percentages of the four Engagement categories.

	Engagement Categories	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency per 1000 words
1	Disclaim	355	44	12.8
2	Entertain	238	30	8.6
3	Proclaim	137	17	4.9
4	Attribution	72	9	2.6

Ngongo (2017) showed that more than 50% of the overall Engagement resources he found in a corpus of ten undergraduate theses were those of Attribution (158 cases of Attribution of 313 instances of Engagement). He concluded that those undergraduate theses writers were more involved in citation rather than expressing their views. This finding is in contradiction with the present study's finding that the native speaker doctoral dissertation discussion section writers were more involved in expressing their views rather than quoting and paraphrasing the words of external sources (72 cases of Attribution of 802 cases of Engagement). This difference between undergraduate (in Ngongo's study) and graduate theses writers (in the present study) highlights the importance of considering the dialogic and interpersonal nature of academic writing in the development of advanced undergraduate writing materials.

Among the limitations of the present study, small corpus size, the availability of only two text analysts, and the study of academic texts in a single academic discipline can be mentioned. Researchers interested in discourse analysis might conduct similar Appraisal-based studies cooperatively, on academic texts in other fields of study, and on bigger corpora.

7. Conclusion

The overall results of the present study indicated that the native English speaker doctoral dissertation discussion writers examined here could comfortably reject ideas or present them as unexpected; they readily expressed their presence in texts and did not hesitate to share their views with their readers, and they were also more inclined to include external voices, of which they were supportive than those to which they decided to remain neutral or detached. The results of this study, especially the explanations provided based on the perspective of a non-native Ph.D. student on the usages of dialogic resources used by native English speaker Ph.D. students, can be used as an educational tool by native English speaker scholars who want to know how their preferences in the use of dialogic resources are realized by non-native speakers from different cultural backgrounds, and by scholars who are interested in discourse analysis or the development of ESP/EAP courses materials for undergraduate and postgraduate native and non-native students.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Zahra Loghmani: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization. **Behzad Ghonsooly:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Supervision. **Mohammad Ghazanfari:** Validation, Supervision.

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Appendix I. Bibliographical Information of Texts Used in the Analysis

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