



The Comparison of Appraisal Resources in Argumentative Essays Written by Students with Different Proficiency Levels

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Abstract

This study aimed to explain the appraisal resources manifested in argumentative essays written by undergraduate students with high and low proficiency level, as well as their similarities and differences of using appraisal resources. This study employed qualitative research in the form of written discourse analysis. The appraisal resources checklist adapted from Martin and White (2005) is used to determine the distribution of appraising items of attitude, engagement and graduation in argumentative essays written by high and low proficiency students. Out of 16 students chosen as the sample, 8 students are categorized as having high proficiency level, and the others eight belong to low proficiency level. The results of this study revealed that both groups of students utilized all subsystem of appraisal resources. However, high proficiency students dominantly used engagement rather than attitude and graduation. Meanwhile, the lows one utilized more attitude than engagement and graduation. In term of attitude, high proficiency students produced more appreciation. It showed that the argumentative essays written by high proficiency students are more appreciative than emotional and judgmental to align their personal voices in conveying their thoughts and opinions. In addition, in term of engagement, both groups dominantly applied entertain item in which it showed that both groups of students are successful to show their authorial voice towards the topic given. Finally, in graduation feature, force is dominantly used by both groups of students which means that they tried to intensify and quantify their arguments to build strong persuasion.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing in English becomes a great challenge for foreign language learners. It is considered as the most difficult skill to be mastered in learning English. Unlike the other skills, writing as one of productive skills attempts the learners to have such good consideration about organization, grammar, word choice, language use, as well as mechanics of their writing. Through writing, the learners could share their personal stories, experience, opinions and thoughts. The most important thing is the learners should be able to catch the readers' attention through their writing.

In academic context, undergraduate students are demanded to be able to produce an academic writing. Yuliana and Gandana (2017, p. 613) stated that academic writing is notably one of the most important skills students need to develop at the tertiary level of education. It means that the students at the university level should be capable of presenting their opinions and arguments through different genre of persuasive writings.

Under Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) tradition, there are three genres of persuasive writing namely analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, and discussion or commonly termed as argumentative essay (Emilia & Christe, 2013; Gerot & Wignell, 1994; Martin, 1989). Those three genres of text are basically similar, but they are different in term of presenting the arguments or opinions about an issue. Analytical and hortatory exposition text present only one sided of an issue. Meanwhile, argumentative essays consider at least two points of view about an issue (Gerrot & Wignell, p. 214). At the end, it requires the writers to give conclusion or recommendation to the readers about the issues they have presented. Therefore, departing from the function of argumentative essay above, the undergraduate students are intended to present their clear position and voice towards an issue by providing some compatible proofs to support it.

In order to express their opinions in the argumentative essays, the students have their own intention through their language use. Solihah and Warsono (2018, p. 108) stated that the language use will affect the acceptance of information for the readers in which it lies on the meaning of language use and word choice. According to Ghasani and Sofwan (2017, p.150), the same words do not always make the same meanings if they are used in a different communicative function in a different situation.

Under the framework of Systemic Functional linguistics, interpersonal meaning has widely developed into the evaluation of language use known as appraisal theory. According to Martin and Rose (2003), appraisal theory relates to negotiate the social relationship between the writer and reader. This theory clearly explains the meaning of lexical words that are used by the writers. So, it deals with the use of evaluative language.

Referring to Martin and White (2005), appraisal theory is divided into three big domains namely attitude, engagement and graduation. Then, those three domains of appraisal are composed of its specific subsystems. Attitude deals with the interpretation of speaker/writer's feelings, emotional reactions, judgments of someone's behavior and evaluation of things. It comprises affect, judgment, and appreciation. While engagement deals with sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse. It then comprises disclaim, proclaim, entertain and attribute. Moreover, graduation deals with grading phenomena whether the feelings are amplified or categories blurred. It is composed of force and focus items. The clear illustration of appraisal resources can be seen in the following figure;

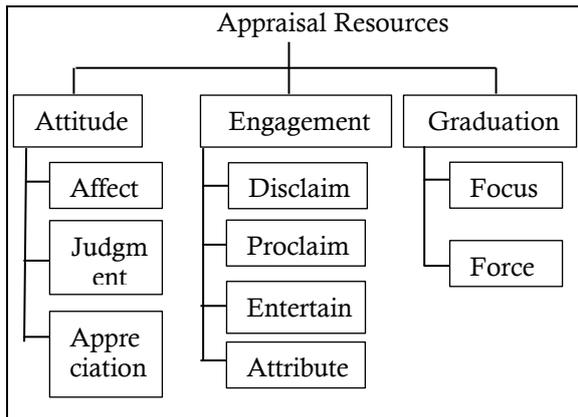


Figure 1. Illustration of Appraisal Resources

Studies on appraisal have been conducted by some researchers in various field of discourse such as medical discourse (Gallardo & Ferrari, 2010), political discourse (Mazlum & Afshin, 2016; Novi & Fitriati, 2018). In addition, on the field of education, some researches have also been widely conducted under the topic of English Research Articles (Pascual & Unger, 2010; Wigunadi, 2014; Yang & Lv, 2015), and students' argumentative speech (Ghasani & Sofwan, 2017; Solihah & Warsono, 2018). The last, previous researchers have also conducted some research on persuasive writing in term of argumentative essays (Mei & Allison, 2003; Liu & Thompson, 2009; Lee, 2015; Yang, 2016; Cheung & Low, 2017; Lam & Crosthwaite, 2018).

The previous studies mentioned above especially studies conducted on argumentative essays only focus on analyzing certain subsystems of appraisal like attitude or engagement only. Moreover, the studies are only conducted to investigate the students from countries that consider English as their first language (L1) and second language (L2). There is still no research conducted on investigating all three domains of appraisal in argumentative essays produced by EFL students.

In addition, EFL students writing proficiency level are different from one to another. They can be categorized into high and low proficiency level. This reason also becomes the starting point to investigate the appraisal resources produced by undergraduate students with different proficiency level. Therefore, this

study aimed to analyze the argumentative essays written by high and low proficiency students in order to explain the similarities and differences of appraisal resources (attitude, engagement and graduation) realized by both groups of students. The last, this research paper hopefully could give new insight for the future research on interpersonal meaning especially appraisal resources.

METHOD

This study belongs to qualitative study and designed as a discourse analysis. This study focused on analyzing written form as the data of this study in term of argumentative essays. The objects of this study were argumentative essays from 16 undergraduate students at IAIN Bengkulu. They are majoring in English education, and they were in the fourth semester students in the academic year 2018/2019.

There are some steps conducted to gather the data. First, the researcher give one topic about 'Indonesian Presidential Election 2019' to the students. They are required to write at least 3-4 paragraphs of argumentative essays. They have to finish the writing in 120 minutes and collect it to their lecturer.

Before starting the analysis, the researcher firstly classified the result of students' argumentative essays into high and low proficiency level by using argumentative essay rubric adapted from Heaton (1998). After classifying the students' argumentative essays, the researcher used the appraisal resources checklist proposed by Martin and White (2005).

The data were divided into clauses or clause complexes as unit of analysis. They were analyzed and classified as the 'appraising item' that were included into appraisal resources in this study. After finishing the analysis, the researcher calculates the occurrence of each subsystem of appraisal found in the argumentative essays written by both groups of students. After that, the researcher put the findings into some tables and did some interpretation into some paragraphs to show the similarities and differences of both groups. To

minimize the subjectivity, the researcher needs the triangulation that uses more methods of data collection. In this study, the researcher used investigator triangulation by asking one of lecturers in a local university in Semarang, Indonesia. Moreover, the researcher also asked five inter-raters who are experts in writing classes to categorize students' score into high and low proficiency level. Therefore, the researcher used expert judgment not only to validate the findings and data analysis but also to give the students' score of argumentative essays by using Argumentative Essay rubric.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the argumentative essays rubric adapted from Heaton (1998), the result was that there are 16 students in which eight students are categorized as high proficiency level, and the other eight are low proficiency students. The overall distribution of appraisal resources distribution of appraisal resources in argumentative essays written by both groups of students is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Distribution of Appraisal Resources Among Students with High and Low Proficiency Level

Appraisal Resources	High Proficiency Students	Low Proficiency Students
Attitude	60	65
Engagement	78	60
Graduation	55	43
Total	193	168

Based on table 1, the students with high proficiency level produced 193 appraising items covering 60 items of attitude, 78 items of engagement and 55 items of graduation. On the other hand, the students with low proficiency level produced 168 appraising items which consist of 65 items of attitude, 60 items of engagement and 43 items of graduation. The table above also showed that high proficiency students dominantly produced engagement items rather than attitude and graduation.

Meanwhile, the low proficiency students produced more attitude than engagement and graduation. These results clearly show that high proficiency students are able to more successfully exploit the resources necessary for constructing a well-argued text and show a stronger sense of authorship. The detail explanation for each subsystems is explained in the following section.

Attitude

Attitude is concerned with the speaker/writer's feelings, emotions, and judgment toward something in conveying meaning/information during the interaction (Martin & Rose 2003; Martin & White 2005). Under attitude, meaning is concerned with the mapping of feeling in which it covers three regions: emotion (affect), ethics (judgment), and aesthetic (appreciation). The distribution of attitude in argumentative essays written by students with high and low proficiency level can be seen in the following table:

Table 2. Distribution of Attitude Features

Attitude Features	High Proficiency Students	Low Proficiency Students
Affect	12	8
Judgment	22	33
Appreciation	26	24
Total	60	65

Based on the table 2 above, it can be seen that the distribution of appreciation is more than judgment and affect in the argumentative essays written by students with high proficiency level. This finding is in line with the studies conducted by Lee (2015), Liu & Thompson, (2009); Liu (2013), Ghasani and Shofwan (2017), and Solihah and Warsono (2018). It indicates that high proficiency students make their essays that are related with the topic given by using appreciation resources because they appreciate and evaluate things/phenomena, especially the topic given. In addition, the dominant distribution of appreciation in students' argumentative essay is a characteristic of

argumentation (Lee, 2015; Liu & Thompson, 2009; and Liu 2013). It is in line with the genre that is investigated in this study, namely argumentative essays. The example of appreciation used by high proficiency student is as follows:

- (1) *In my opinion, both candidates are as well as to become president because they have great missions and visions to develop Indonesia.*

In the example above, the writer applies the word ‘great’ to appreciate the visions and missions of both presidential candidates. In this phase, such situation is seen as the natural phenomena in which the writer paid attention for. So that, it is verified that the word ‘great’ is classified as the positive item of reaction

On the other hand, low proficiency students produces more judgment features rather than affect and appreciation. This result shows that low proficiency students tend to judge someone’s behavior which is in this case relate to the presidential candidate. The example of judgment can be seen as follows:

- (2) *Jokowi is more popular because he has proven when Indonesia was hit by disaster, he went straight down to the place where the disaster happened.*

The existence of word ‘popular’ in the clause above is identified as the positive normality of judgment. The writer uses this item to mean that the first candidate of presidential election, in this case Jokowi are very well-known. Because of the fact that the word ‘popular’ in the above clause means ‘how special someone/something is,’ therefore such word belongs to positive normality (Martin & White, 2005, p. 52).

Engagement

According to Liu and Thompson (2009, p. 6), engagement is concerned with the diverse range of linguistic resources whereby writers adjust and negotiate the arguability of their utterances. The distribution of engagement items in the argumentative essays written by high and low proficiency students is set out in table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of Engagement Features

Engagement Features	High Proficiency Students	Low Proficiency Students
Disclaim	27	15
Proclaim	8	9
Entertain	38	34
Attribute	5	2
Total	78	60

As the table 3 maps out, entertain exceeds other engagement appraising items of engagement resources in the students’ essays. The second place belongs to disclaim with 27 items and proclaim takes up 8 items while there is a very little distribution of attribute with only 5 items. The example of the occurrence of entertain items as engagement features can be seen as follows:

- (3) *From many experiences and challenges he has been through for long time since 2014, make me believe that he is a good president for Indonesian country in the next period.*
- (4) *I believe Prabowo will not do that if he will become president in the future*

According to Mei and Allison (2003), entertain uses the option of entertain as the “writer suggests a possible alternative to an implicit belief”. By using modal, she adds that entertain “indicating dialogic space”. Furthermore, using entertain means “dialogically expand manner” (Mei & Allison, 2003). Since the students’ essays belong to persuasive writing, the writer needs to expand their arguments by producing sentence that acknowledges a proposition as one possibility amongst others through the use of modals (Mei & Allison, 2003). This result confirms the study done by Pascual and Unger (2010). In their study, the most frequent type revealed in the grant proposals by Argentinean researchers is entertain. It indicates that the speaker “elected to open up dialogic space, representing the proposition as one of a range of possible positions” (White, 2002; Pascual and Unger, 2010).

Graduation

Graduation relates to the grading phenomena in which the writers' feelings are amplified and categories blurred. According to Martin and White (2005, p.136), graduation is central to the appraisal system. It can define the attitudinal meaning. It can also be a feature in engagement system. The distribution of graduation items in the argumentative essays written by high and low proficiency students is set out in table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of Graduation Features

Graduation Features	High Proficiency Students	Low Proficiency Students
Focus	12	5
Force	43	38
Total	55	43

Based on the table above, force items are more dominantly used by the students with high and low proficiency level rather than focus items. the words categorize as force in the students argumentative essays can be seen in the following example:

- (5) *That is a little reason¹ why I choose Prabowo Subianto for a better² Indonesia*

Looking at the above example, the item of force is shown through the words 'a little reason' and 'better.' The words 'a little reason' used by the writer to provide for the imprecise measuring of number in which it shows quantification – isolation and infusion. Meanwhile, the word 'better' is kind of force by using modes of intensification – isolating. According to Martin and White (2005, p.142), force can be realized via comparatives and superlatives. It is done in order to localized or relative scaling with respect to intensity. Below is the example of force found in argumentative essays written by low proficiency students:

- (6) *Candidate 1 has its own fans where Indonesian people say that as long as he leads Indonesia increasingly prosperous.*

Looking at the above example, the item of force is shown through the word 'increasingly'. This word used by the writer to provide for the

imprecise measuring of number in which it shows quantification – maximisation. According to Martin and White (2005, p. 142), force can be realized through the use of maximisers in order to up-scale the highest possible intensity.

Since this study reveals that the students use 'force' rather than 'focus', it confirms the result of study done by Liu (2013) which reveals that the high use of graduation of force in his study. He states that 'the frequently employment of graduation as force are to express meaning when the speaker describes the situation or complain about problem'. Therefore, by building up persuasion in describing situation by using graduation of force, the writer can articulate her/his position about topics that matter to her/him with solid logic and reasoning (Liu, 2013; Yang, 2016; Cheung & Low, 2017; Lam & Crosthwaite, 2018).

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the analysis and discussion of this present study, there are some conclusions that can be drawn as follows: Firstly, the appraising items were used by both groups of students in spite of it is vary in number depending on their proficiency level in writing. Among the three items of appraisal, engagement has the highest number in argumentative essays written by high proficiency students compared with graduation and attitude. In term of attitude item, it is found that the distribution of appreciation exceeds other items. The use of appraising items of appreciation makes the students' argumentative essays become more appreciative than personal and emotional.

Moreover, there is a high occurrence of entertain as a subsystem in engagement then followed by disclaim, proclaim, and attribute. As the main goal of argumentative essays is to persuade, the writers need to expand their arguments by producing words which represent the current proposition as replacing or supplanting. In graduation as system for scaling the meaning, both groups of students apply more force than focus. It verifies that the

students express meanings for describing the situation or complaining the motion and build up persuasion by assessing the degree of intensity and quantity.

The conclusions explained above lead the researcher to provide some suggestions. It is beneficial for the English language learners to pay attention toward the interpersonal meaning, especially appraisal resources. They need to explore about appraisal resources in order to convey their personal voices effectively and efficiently. Moreover, the English teachers can increase the students' writing skill by using appraisal resources to build their personal voice in order to establish persuasion in their essays. The present study still has weaknesses because it only focuses on investigating the appraisal resources in argumentative essays written by high and low proficiency students. Therefore, further studies can explore similar cases by comparing among high, average, and low proficiency students in earlier level of education involving the students of Junior or Senior High School to know their language use to express their arguments and ideas through analytical or hortatory exposition text. Furthermore, the further studies can also be carried out to compare and investigate some genres in writing in order to know the distribution of appraisal resources among different genres.

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