

BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES
The Faculty of International Business and Economics
The Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication of ASE
11th International Conference: Synergies in Communication (SiC)
Bucharest, Romania, 26-27 October 2023

THE AUTHOR'S PRESENCE IN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS

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Abstract

This paper reflects my attempt of applying the insights derived from the literature review to the analysis of academic essays produced in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) context. The main focus is on identifying linguistic elements which emphasize the author's presence in argumentative essays. The centrepiece of this research, thus, revolves around the move previously identified in IELTS essays which refers to expressing a personal opinion. The corpus consists of 109 sample essays (38 107 words) selected from various sources, essays which are considered as examples for candidates who want to achieve a Band 7 score. The 109 essays were firstly divided into five categories: Opinion essays, Discussion essays, Problem and Solution essays, Advantages and Disadvantages essays and Opinion and Problems and Solution essays. These essays were analysed using the concordancing programme Antconc but also using manual parsing to focus more specifically on the linguistic realization of the "expressing own view" move within the genre exemplars analysed. Building on similar analyses (Milton, 1999; Hyland, 1990, 2006; Bardi & Muresan, 2014; Muresan, 2011, 2000; Chong & Ye, 2021), in which the researchers tried to identify if different moves and steps were expressed through specific structures, the main aim for the analysis is to explore and highlight salient characteristics at micro-level, in an attempt to correlate these features with the macro-components in the internal structuring of the sample essays.

Keywords: EAP, Academic writing, Genre Analysis, 'Move' structure, Argumentative essays

DOI: 10.24818/SIC/2023/02.04

1. Introduction

In an academic context, in English for Academic Purposes (EAP), writing is one of the most important skills. It provides a transfer route between the students' existing knowledge and its written manifestation. Klimova (2012) stated that writing fosters communication by making the students express their personalities by thinking of logical and persuasive arguments, thus developing cognitive skills. Furthermore, writing is essential in learning a second language.

The highest form of writing requiring complex activities is the argumentative essay. To begin with, the students need to have a clear understanding of the topic to provide arguments for and against the issue proposed for discussion. Secondly, they must plan their writing, synthesize their ideas. At the sentence level, students have to present the events in a logical manner in order to have a clear passage between the introduction, body development and conclusion, using, at the same time, factual and logical examples. This type of essay constitutes a complex cognitive activity, where, according to Elboroloy and Almujaali (2020), writers need to organize their ideas in a logical order, use rational facts and "choose

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the appropriate content that suits the given topic and finally have to handle and master the mechanics of writing, such as punctuation, sentence structure, and spelling.” (Elborolosy & Almujaali 2020, 162)

The main aim for the current paper is to identify and highlight salient characteristics at a micro-level in argumentative essays, in an attempt to correlate these features with the macro-components in the internal structuring of the sample essays in the corpus. This analysis draws inspiration from research carried out by Milton (1999), Hyland (1990, 2006), Muresan and Bardi (2014), Muresan (2011, 2000) and Chong and Ye (2021), who investigated to what extent different moves and steps were expressed through specific linguistic structures.

2. Methodological approach

A similar analysis was carried out by Muresan (2000) in *Genre analysis and economics*, where the author analysed the macro-level structuring, as reflected through moves and steps typical of three different genres used in economics, followed by a comparative micro-level analysis, with a focus on the relationship between the writer’s communicative purposes and the linguistic realization of certain moves and steps in different genres. For instance, inclusive 1st person plural pronouns were more frequent in the textbook genre, whereas the 1st person singular appeared only in examples, such as in articles of economic analysis, where the author wanted to highlight his/her personal opinion. In the study of Chong and Ye (2021) done on IELTS essays, the writers used mostly 1st person plural and 3rd person singular.

In this paper I will analyse a corpus of 109 sample essays (38 107 words) selected from various sources, essays which are considered as examples for candidates who want to achieve a Band 7 score in the IELTS context. I will explore linguistic features of IELTS Task 2 essays to identify connections between the moves and steps, on the one hand, and the vocabulary used by the essay authors, on the other. As already mentioned in Dulgheru and Panait (2022), the essays were subdivided into five categories - *Opinion* essays, *Discussion* essays, *Problem and Solution* essays, *Advantages and Disadvantages* essays and *Opinion-and-Problems and Solution* essays. In other words, this study involves a micro-level analysis of the sample essays included in the corpus, to try to explore possible links between the macro-level structuring and the realisation of the moves and steps at linguistic level.

To be able to do this analysis, I first matched the linguistic realization at micro-level with the corresponding steps and moves found at macro-level. This intermediary stage had the purpose of identifying the relevant parts or sentences within a paragraph which showed the move/step under discussion, e.g. expressing own view. However simple it may seem, this task required overcoming some difficulties. Even if I established the internal move structure and delineated linguistically the moves, I still had difficulties in associating the moves and steps to the words which signaled them in the sample essays, because not all the instances of exemplifications or expressing a personal opinion were expressed by the same cluster of words, and there were times when these parts had to be found through clues offered by the context.

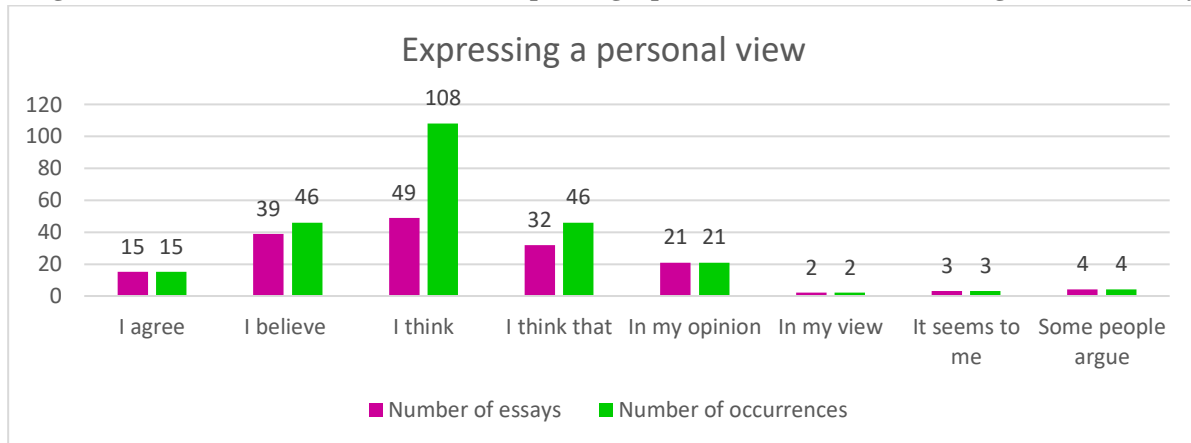
3. Findings and Discussion: ‘expressing own view’ structures in academic argumentative essays

The presence of stance has been addressed in many studies over decades. For example, this issue was tackled by Halliday (2004), Hyland (1998, 1990, 2006), Mele Marrero (2011), Yang (2019), Milton (1999), Bardi and Muresan (2014), Muresan (2011, 2000) and Chong and Ye (2021). Alonso-Almeida (2005, p1) states that "stance is, indeed, a complex concept that includes a large variety of linguistic devices indicating the author’s point of view with respect to a given proposition." Thus, I had to pay attention to the varied shades of meaning which words have and which were revealed by the contexts. According to Biber (1998), the authors use specific words as an overt expression of persuasion, combining the formulation of their personal points of view with the use of argumentation, in order to persuade the readers.

In my sub-corpus of argumentative essays, I was able to notice the use of the pronoun "I", "you " and "we" together with various verbs, and "it" when the writer did not want to have a personal involvement in the issue. Analysis of the essays in my corpus with the help of the AntConc concordancing software, combined with manual parsing, have revealed a preference for the personal pronoun "I" and the verbs "agree", "think" and "believe", when expressing their own views.

As a next step, I wanted to see if their presence in the essays is signaled by other linguistic items. Furthermore, this frequency of usage suggests that the authors express a specific certainty concerning the issues under discussion.

Figure 1- The occurrence of structure for expressing a personal view in Academic Argumentative essay



Starting from the structure "I believe" I have noticed also other forms used by authors to express their opinions and beliefs. Using the adverbs "strongly" or "highly" after paraphrasing the task, comes as a means of reinforcement of the view which will be shortly demonstrated with arguments and examples (e.g. 1). The majority of forms are closely followed by the adverb "that" with which the authors refer to either things or people. The use of modal verbs, more specifically, "would" and "should", comes as advice given by the authors to their readers and also involving them in the issue under discussion (e.g. 2). The fact that this form appears mostly in discussion samples, it emphasizes the need of the authors to set their discussion from the beginning on a specific point of view.

*E.g. 1 This then leads on to whether **I believe that** developed countries have a duty to the developing countries. (P&S6)*

*E.g. 2 While I realize that we cannot stand in the way of progress, **I believe that cities should** try to keep some individuality. (D15)*

Table 1: Occurrences of "believe"

Number of occurrences	Forms	Source Essays
2	It is my belief (that)	D31, D16
1	I strongly believe that	D25
1	I highly believe that	D26
3	I do not believe that...(should)	D6, D8, O5
1	I believe ...would	O15

The authors used the adverb "absolutely" (e.g. 7) or the auxiliary "do" (e.g. 8) together with the verb "think" to firmly state their position on the issue under discussion. Also, some use the modal verb "should" and, thus, give the readers the possibility of choosing what they might do. In three essays, the authors do not respect the rule of not contracting the auxiliary with the negation, so they used the form "don't" instead of "do not". The verb "doubt" is used together with the verb "be" in the future simple, in

an attempt to express a probable future action, or with the conjunction "whether" for expressing doubt or a choice between the alternatives offered. "Hope" is used only twice. It is used in the form of "I hope that in the future" the authors clearly placing the action in the near future, this fact being reinforced by the use of the future simple verbs, "will be" and "will grow" (e.g. 9).

E.g. 7 I absolutely think education comes with mobilization (P&S11)

E.g. 8 I don't think it is possible realistically to reduce car numbers, but I do think that we can change people's attitudes and get them to use different ways of travelling. (P&S5)

E.g. 9 I hope that in the future the next generation will grow up as mature citizens. (O16)

Table 2: Occurrences of "think", "doubt" and "hope"

Number of occurrences	Forms	Source Essays
2	I absolutely/ do think (that)	P&S11, P&S5
3	I don't think...(should)	OandP&S3, P&S5, O19
2	I doubt whether...(should)	OandP&S3, OandP&S4
2	I hope that in the future ...will be/grow	O16, P&S4

Apart from the main verbs used for expressing a personal view, I have found during my manual parsing that the writers prefer using a variety of other verbs, from “know, want, offer, mention, noticed, etc.” to the present simple of the verb “to be”, thus, they are clearly and personally involved in the essay. As for tenses, the authors use present perfect simple to imply something started in the past and finished near the present moment, past simple is used mostly in personal examples in which the authors talk about their personal experiences and last, the use of present simple, with which the authors refer to present situations. In one discussion essay, there is the verb “recommend” followed by the conjunction “that”, it introduces a subordinate clause which expresses the author’s statement (e.g. 10). Similarly, in D9, we have the verb “consider”, followed by the conjunction "that" and linked with the modal verb "might" help the author to provide an example of what may happen if something was chosen as opposed to the other alternative (e.g. 11).

E.g. 10 I recommend that the only sensible way to solve this problem is to educate young people about the dangers of drug use, and to take steps to reduce the pressure of competition placed upon them. (D3)

E.g. 11 I consider that some financial help might be given. (D9)

Table 3: Occurrences of personal involvement

Number of occurrences	Forms	Source Essays
43	I know (that)/ offer/ want	P&S8, O47, P&S9, A&D4, etc
1	I have talked about	P&S6
7	I mentioned/ had/ always dreamed/ noticed	P&S7, P&S8, O31,
8	I am sure/ready/ in favour	D28, O24, O34 P&S8, O10, etc
2	I recommend that / consider that...might	D3, D9

Using the adverb "personally" together with the personal pronoun "I" and the verbs "think", "prefer", "want" and "disagree", the authors express their personal views. However, these forms are not very popular, I found only 17 samples out of 109 essays. Some authors use the adverb "personally" at the beginning of the sentences, clearly emphasizing the nature of the opinion expressed or the examples and explanations given (e.g.12). Others, prefer starting with the personal pronoun "I" and then the adverb showing the personal nature of the entire problem (e.g. 13). In O33, the author uses the structure to give a personal example of what he/ she did in the past (e.g. 14).

E.g. 12 Personally, I think that it is very interesting to learn new, to gain more experience, make new goals and reach them. (D29)

E.g. 13 I personally disagree with that. (O46)

E.g. 14 Personally, when I was a child, I liked to watch cognitive programs about wild animals. (O33)

Table 4: Occurrences of the adverb "personally"

Number of occurrences	Forms	Source Essays
5	Personally, I think (that)	D29, O23, O33, O38, Oand P&S4
5	Personally, I prefer/ believe/ do not like/do not accept	A&D10, O39, D1, A&D4, O37
1	I, personally, do not want	P&S7
1	I personally disagree with	O46
1	Personally, when I was...	O33
4	Personally, for several reasons I think/ which I will explain	O30, O36, O29, A&D8

Apart from "in my opinion" which has a high number of occurrences, other expressions are rarely used. Furthermore, in essay O42, the author adds the adjective "honest" to focus the readers' attention on their statements (e.g. 17). Thus, "according to my opinion" appears only in one *Discussion* essay (e.g. 18). In two essays, the authors replaced the noun "opinion" with a synonym, "experience". Using the verbs "base" and "state", the former appears in two samples, in O22 and A&D9, the latter in only one essay, O28, the authors underline that their opinions are grounded into specific evidence. The last expression shown in the table below is used in 6 samples, in 5 of them the authors use the full structure, meanwhile in one essay, the author considered that it is better to use only "from my everyday experience" (e.g. 19).

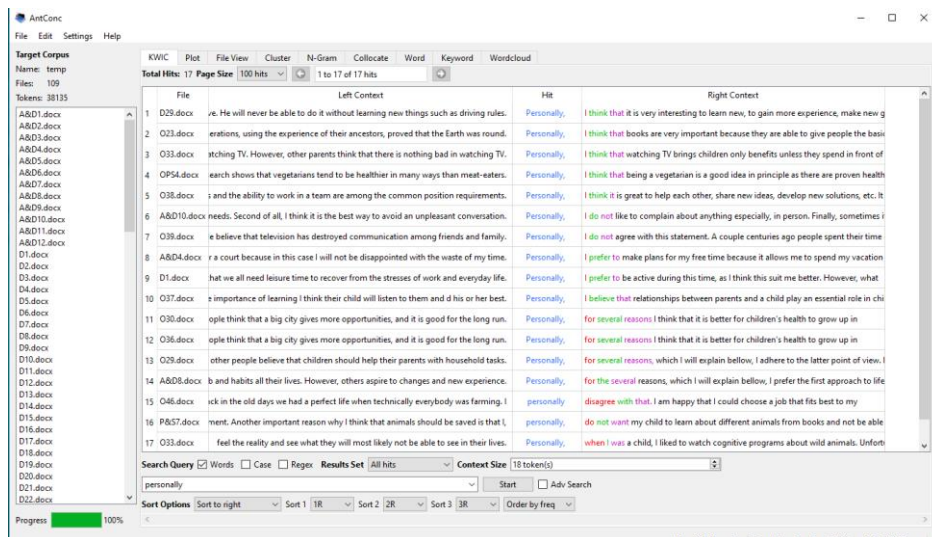


Image 1: The adverb "personally"

E.g. 17 **In my honest opinion**, I strongly suggest that one can choose to act in both situations according to situations. (O42)

E.g. 18 However, there is one topic where, **according to my opinion**, we have too many choices. (O46)

E.g. 19 **From my everyday experience and observation**, I can stand that the best way of learning about life is through personal experience. (A&D5)

Table 5: Occurrences of "my opinion" in expressions

Number of occurrences	Forms	Source Essays
1	According to my opinion	O46
21	In my opinion	O23, P&S3, D33, OandP&S4, etc
2	In my experience	D32, OandP&S4
4	From my opinion	O22, O38, O26, O37
1	In my honest opinion	O42
2	I base my opinion	A&D9, O22
1	I state my opinion on the following points	O28
6	From my everyday experience (and observation)	A&D5, A&D9, A&D11, O24, O25, O31

However, not all the authors want to clearly state their own personal view, so some use the general personal pronoun "it" or its equivalent for generalisations "there" which are closely followed by the adverbs "general/ generally" and the verbs "seem" or "have". Furthermore, the authors use the modal verbs "would", "could" and "can" which express a possibility and advice for the readers.

Table 6: Occurrences of expressing a view in an impersonal way

Number of occurrences	Forms	Source Essays
6	There seems to be It seems to me It does not seem justifiable to me It is clear to me	O43, D35, O2, O35, O3, O18
1	In general terms	D9
1	It is generally accepted	D1
	It has often been said	P&S1
12	It would be/ make/ cause	O11, O25, D33, D26, O18, P&S5, O14, A&D7, O40
4	It can/ could be argued that	O15, D15, OandP&S1, O3
1	It sounds a good idea	O17

In addition, in some essays I have noticed that the authors prefer using the structure "some people think" or "some people believe that...should/could be." (e.g. 27) Apart from the verb "think", there is a preference for the verbs "feel", "say" and "argue". However, the number of occurrences of such structures is low.

E.g. 27 **"Some people argue that the state does not have the right to make parents immunize their children."** (D6)

4. Conclusions

To conclude, expressing a personal view is mostly found in *Advantages and Disadvantages* samples and in *Problem and Solution* essays. In the other three groups, the presence of the author is not so obvious. In *Discussion* essays, the author's personal view is implied by the context, in other words it is indirectly expressed. Meanwhile, in the *Opinion* group, there is no direct opinion expressed, the authors use more formal styles and their presence in the essays is completely missing. Moreover, there are even three *Discussion* essays, and one *Advantages and Disadvantages* sample in which I have not been able to find any form of expressed view, more specifically in D4, D14, D19 and in A&D12.

In this article, I have analysed and identified the micro-level elements of academic essays written in response to Task 2 rubrics in the IELTS context, using the macro-level structures established after a Swalesian genre-based framework. This comparative analysis of the sample tests in each of the sub-corpora have emphasized that there are visible ties between the 'expressing a personal opinion' moves and the linguistic aspects of the essays. Furthermore, authors show a preference for certain discourse markers and verbs or specific structures, thus, some of them appear more than once in an essay, whereas others are used a lot less.

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