

Engagement in high- and low-rated argumentative essays: Interactions in Indonesian students' writings

Anis Handayani*, Nur Arifah Drajadi, and Ngadiso

Graduate school of English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,
Universitas Sebelas Maret, Jl. Ir Sutami 36A, Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study reports the use of engagement in high-rated and low-rated EFL undergraduate students' argumentative essays. The engagement here refers to one of the aspects in interacting with the readers, which is called metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005a). The data in this study were ten highest-rated and ten lowest-rated argumentative essays written by first-year undergraduate students. The data were coded manually by two raters to maintain data validity. The results reveal that high-rated essays contain less engagement than low-rated ones. However, it also shows that the engagement in high-rated essays was more varied and grammatically sophisticated than those in low-rated essays. Furthermore, while this study reveals that the higher number of engagement used in argumentative essays does not always coincide with the improved quality of the writing, it implies that the writing quality and score do not depend on the number of engagement expressed but more on the ways students use the engagement effectively. Thus, the explicit teaching on how to use engagement effectively in persuasive writings may be useful for the students to build more persuasive arguments as well as to improve their writing quality.

Keywords: Academic writing; engagement; interaction; metadiscourse

First Received:

10 February 2020

Revised:

20 March 2020

Accepted:

17 April 2020

Final Proof Received:

22 May 2020

Published:

31 May 2020

How to cite (in APA style):

Handayani, A., Drajadi, N. A., & Ngadiso. (2020). Engagement in high- and low-rated argumentative essays: Interactions in Indonesian students' writings. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10(1), 14-24. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v10i1.24957>

INTRODUCTION

An argumentative essay is the most common writing university students need to write (Mei, 2006; Wingate, 2012). Writing research articles, undergraduate thesis, and other academic writings require the ability to write argumentative essays. Due to the importance of writing argumentative essays, researchers have taken an interest in studying argumentative essays for recent years. They mainly focused on the assessment (e.g., Preiss, et al., 2013) or the teaching method (e.g., Bacha, 2010). Intensely few studies have investigated the quality of the writing, especially which is viewed from the metadiscourse aspect. Furthermore, building persuasive arguments in argumentative essays is a challenging task for university students (Wingate, 2012). Thus, students need something which makes

their arguments more persuasive since the aim of persuasive writings is to "persuade the readers of the correctness of the central statement" (Hyland, 1990, p.68). Metadiscourse is a critical feature to make arguments more persuasive (Hyland, 1998; Hyland & Tse, 2004). This linguistic resource reflects how writers attempt to guide the readers' perception of a text (Hyland, 2005a).

The last decade witnessed a growing interest in the use of metadiscourse in argumentative essays. Li and Wharton (2012) compared metadiscourse in undergraduate writings written by L1 Mandarin speakers studying in UK and China. Also, they compared the use of metadiscourse in different disciplines, Literary criticism and Translation studies. It showed that the different pattern of metadiscourse was associated with both disciplinary

* Corresponding Author
Email: anishandayani@student.uns.ac.id

and contextual factors. However, it shows that contextual factors influenced more than the disciplinary factors in the use of metadiscourse. Lee and Deakin (2016) explored how the use of interactional metadiscourse is different in L2 successful, L2 less-successful, and L1 successful argumentative essays. They showed that successful argumentative essays, both L2 and L1, used greater hedges (e.g. *possible, might, perhaps*). Furthermore, it proved that L2 students have been reluctant to use self-mentions (e.g. *I, my*) in their writings. Ho and Li, (2018) conducted a similar study. They showed that there was a slight difference in using metadiscourse in high-rated and low-rated argumentative essays. Furthermore, they found that how to use metadiscourse effectively was more influencing than the number of metadiscourse used in the essays. However, the students had difficulties in using it effectively.

The studies on the same research interest continued in the next years. Lotfi et al. (2019) compared the interactional metadiscourse used in argumentative essays written by Iranian and Chinese university students. The differences between those two groups are their native language—Iranian has Persian while Chinese has Chinese, and their cultural background—East Asian and West. Their study showed that there was a significant difference in the use of boosters (e.g. *clearly, obviously*), attitude markers (e.g. *agree, prefer*), engagement markers (e.g. *you, we*), and self-mentions (e.g. *I, my*). However, the participants performed similarly in the use of hedges. In the same year, Shahriari and Shadloo (2019) analyzed the use of engagement markers in argumentative essays written by Iranian EFL learners. It showed that the number of engagement used in the essays did not assure improved quality of the essays. However, they reported that it was due to the absence of explicit teaching of metadiscourse, and that metadiscourse resources were not included in the writing scoring rubrics.

The previous studies revealed that researchers barely focused their studies on engagement in writings. Lee and Deakin (2016) focused on interactional metadiscourse. Meanwhile, others focused on the metadiscourse—interactive and interactional metadiscourse (i.e. Ho & Li, 2018; Li & Wharton, 2012). Lotfi et al. (2019) compared the metadiscourse markers in argumentative essays written by students with different native languages. Their researches focused on all aspects of metadiscourse in argumentative essays. Intensely a study conducted by Shahriari and Shadloo (2019) focused on an aspect of metadiscourse, which is engagement. However, the participants were Iranian native speakers. Furthermore, the studies on engagement in Indonesian students' writings were barely conducted. Thus, to fulfill the gap, this study aims to analyze the use of engagement in Indonesian

EFL argumentative essays in which the participants' native language is Indonesian.

Hyland (2005c) sees engagement as an essential feature in building persuasive arguments. Shahriari and Shadloo (2019) proved that the use of engagement created more persuasive arguments in persuasive writing, specifically argumentative essays. This study gives insights on building persuasive arguments, which students find it difficult to deal with. Furthermore, comparing high-rated and low-rated essays gives insight of how this engagement resource contributes in the students' writing quality and scores. Also, the engagement framework used in this study was proposed by Hyland (2005c). It includes the use of reader pronouns (e.g., *you, we*), personal asides (e.g., *as I believe ...*), appeals to shared knowledge (e.g., *obviously, admittedly*), directives (e.g., *see table 1*), and questions (e.g., *what do you think ...?*). Explicitly stated, the research questions of this present study are as follows:

1. How does the engagement in high-rated and low-rated argumentative essays differ in frequency and variety?
2. To what extent the engagement used in the argumentative essays contributes to the student' writing scores?

Argumentative academic writing

Academic writing is one of important writing genres for university students. Bailey (2011) shows that academic writing is a type of writing which aims to: (1) report on a research, (2) answer questions, (3) discuss a common interest and give the writer's view, or (4) synthesize others' researches. This type of writing may be in the form of notes, report, thesis, paper, and essay (Bailey, 2011). One of the important types of academic writing is argumentative essay which is reported to be the most common writing university students need to write (Mei, 2006; Wingate, 2012). Hyland (1990) defines argumentative essay by "its purpose which is to persuade the reader of the correctness of a central statement" (p. 68). This type of text has three central elements namely thesis, argument, and conclusion.

Academic writing, including argumentative essays, has been seen as a static, faceless, and impersonal of discourse for years (Hyland, 2005c). However, this perspective has been changing recently. Academic writing is now seen as dynamic writing involving interaction between writers and readers (Hyland & Jiang, 2016). Writers may use metadiscourse to transform a lifeless text into a discourse which meets the needs of participants (Hyland, 2005a). Furthermore, He shows that metadiscourse becomes an important feature in successful persuasive writings. Concerning this phenomenon, we attempt to prove the contribution of metadiscourse, specifically engagement, in one of persuasive writings, which is argumentative essay.

We attempt to give more insight in using engagement resources in argumentative essays due to the limited studies researching this topic.

Engagement in argumentative academic writing

Academic writing, especially argumentative writing, aims to bring the readers to agree with the writer's views. It requires abilities to build persuasive arguments to achieve its aim. The key point is to build an inclusive relationship with the readers which is associated with social engagement in texts (Jiang & Ma, 2018). Engagement is the way writers involve the readers in the discourse, acknowledge their presence, negotiate their views, and guide them directly to meet the expected interpretation of texts (Hyland, 2005c). In this view, readers are not passive. They are actively involved in the discourse and guided directly by the writer. Writers construct a 'reader-in-text' by predicting their readers' responses to their views and understanding their different views (Thompson, 2001). It means writers put their expected readers in mind in writing the persuasive writing. They try to make a text which readers find it familiar, appealing, and persuasive (Jiang & Ma, 2018). Furthermore, this is surely a prominent feature in argumentative essays and other persuasive writings (Hyland, 2005c). An appropriate relationship between the writer and his readers is seen as to be effective persuasion as the writer balances

claims for the significance, originality, and correctness of his work against the convictions and expectations of his readers (Hyland, 2002).

Writers involve the readers in the discourse by explicitly mentioning the readers in the text, asking questions, giving suggestions, and guiding them directly (Jiang & Ma, 2018). (Hyland, 2005c) has shown that writers may involve the readers in texts in five ways. To gain a better understanding of these aspects, table 1 presents the aspects of engagement proposed by Hyland (2005b) with some examples gathered from various sources.

Engagement is a feature to explicitly involve the readers in the text. Studies on engagement have been conducted by Hyland and Jiang (2016) on research articles. They found that the use of engagement in research has been changing over the past 50 years. Jiang and Ma (2018) studied on engagement, but it was on postgraduate writing, Ph.D. candidature confirmation report. Shahriari and Shadloo (2019) studied engagement in argumentative essays written by Iranian university students. Their study reported that there was no relation between the use of engagement and the students' essay quality. Thus, this study tries to elaborate on the same research topic, engagement in argumentative essays, in different participants, which are Indonesian university students.

Table 1
Engagement Aspects (Hyland, 2005c)

Aspects	Definition	Examples
Reader pronouns	Addressing the readers explicitly to pull them into the writer's views.	<i>Part of what you are doing in writing a paper is getting your readers onside, not just getting down a list of facts, but showing that you have similar interests and concerns.</i> (Hyland, 2005c)
Personal Asides	Adding personal comments in the writer's arguments to maintain the writer-reader relationship. It is used to show that both writer and reader are in the same track and will lead in the same understanding	<i>And –as I believe many TESOL professionals will readily acknowledge—critical thinking has now begun to make its mark, particularly in the area of L2 composition.</i> (Hyland, 2005c)
Appeals to shared knowledge	Bringing the readers within the same or shared knowledge as the writer, for an example, by using certainty adverbs.	<i>Such purposes are, of course, influenced by personal ambition, private intentions, and individual experience...</i> (Hyland, 2002)
Directives	Instructing the reader to act in a way determined by the writer to come to expected interpretation.	<i>It is important to note that these results do indeed warrant the view that ...</i> (Hyland, 2005c)
Questions	Arousing readers' curiosity and lead them into the writer's views	<i>What are we looking for? From the discussion so far it is clear that academic writing is broadly concerned with knowledge-making and that this is achieved by negotiating agreement among colleagues.</i> (Hyland, 2004)

METHOD

Research context

This present study was undertaken in an academic writing class of a Language Training Center of one Indonesian university. In this university, every non-English major has to join an academic writing class in the language center in the second semester. They have two hours to learn academic writing once a week. Each class consists of 20 students. The

students' class assignment is determined by their TOEFL test scores. This study took place in the class with the highest TOEFL scores in medicine and health program. The participants of this study were 6 males and 14 females of 17-19 years old university students. They are all Indonesian native.

This argumentative essay learning of the academic writing class was carried out in three meetings. Each meeting consisted of learning the

elements of argumentative essays (e.g. thesis statement). The lecturer used inductive learning in the process of teaching and learning process. It began with reading the example of argumentative essay first in the handbook provided by the Language Training Center. Then, the lecturer explained the parts of argumentative essays. The students were, then, asked to try writing a part of argumentative essay (e.g. introductory part). The lecturer would show their writing, in a LCD projector, in front of the class, so other students in the class might read and give feedback to the writing. In the last meeting, the third week, the students were asked to write their final essays—this was a take-home assignment. They were given a week to finish writing and revising the essays. Each essay should be consulted and revised once based on the lecturer's written feedback, which was given through e-mail.

Data source

There were 20 essays submitted in this class. Following Ho & Li's (2018) study, we chose the highest-rated and the lowest-rated ones as the data source. The lecturer decided the scores based on the essay scoring rubric (see Appendix) provided by the Language Center, the material development team. They designed the scoring rubric by constructing the theories from some resources and modifying it to meet the students' needs. Before it was delivered to the lecturers, it was checked first by an expert. After all the essays were rated, we divided the essays into two categories namely 10 highest-rated (henceforth HRE) and 10 lowest-rated essays (LRE). The test writing prompt was as following:

Write an **argumentative essay** with topic of recent medical issues. Your essay should consist of **five paragraphs** consisting of **600- 900 words**. You should **consult** your draft to your tutor **once**. You should **finish** writing and revising your essay within **a week**. Your writing will be evaluated based on five elements of argumentative essay namely introduction, main points, conclusion, organization, style, and mechanics.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed and coded manually under the five elements of engagement which are reader pronouns, personal asides, appeals to shared knowledge, directives, and questions. The researcher did not completely follow the list of potential engagement markers proposed by Hyland (2005c) for two reasons: (1) the list was not exhaustive, and (2) the writers were novice writers of academic writing who tended to use modest words which might rarely be found in L2 context (Ho & Li, 2018). Nonetheless, the researcher only used the engagement model proposed by Hyland (2005b), but not the list. The expressions performed engagement were highlighted, coded, and labeled to reflect the category of engagement which the expressions belonged. The rest of the essays were, then, highlighted, coded, and labeled by two raters to maintain its reliability. An

example of a coded essay is shown below:

Extract 1

So, **is it important that rhesus test should be done before marriage?** (*Questions*) The answer is yes. Because there will be some negative effects if **you** (*Reader pronoun*) don't check your rhesus before marriage. First, if the woman has negative rhesus and the baby has positive rhesus, in the second pregnancy the woman's body will make an antibody and it will harm the baby's body. Second, negative rhesus blood is expensive and difficult to find because people who has negative rhesus blood is in small number. Knowing **your** (*Reader pronoun*) partner's blood type is an essential requirement before getting married, as it may determine the health of **your** (*Reader pronoun*) child.

After all the essays were coded, we put the data into table to make it easier to interpret. Then, we compared the number of the engagement obtained with the writing's scores to determine the contribution of engagement in essay's quality and scores.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This shows the results of data analysis under the two research questions. Two raters coded the essays manually and put the results in the table to make the interpretation easier.

Research question 1: How does the engagement in high-rated and low-rated argumentative essays differ in frequency and variety?

We analyzed 20 argumentative essays written by 20 undergraduate students. The essays contain 10 HRE and 10 LRE. We present our findings in Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4. Table 2 shows the frequency of engagement found in HRE and LRE. Table 3 shows the distribution of engagement elements in HRE. Meanwhile, table 4 shows the distribution of engagement elements in LRE.

Table 2 shows the frequency engagement in HRE and LRE. It shows that the number of engagement used in two categories of essays is different. The HRE students used fewer engagement markers than LRE students. This finding is in line with Lee and

Deakin's (2016) findings that students with grade A in essays used less engagement than the ones with grade B in essays. It implies that LRE students recognized the important of engaging readers in the discourse more than HRE students. However, it does not imply that the students neglect the importance of engaging readers in discourses. To present more detailed analysis, we present the results of the analysis for each engagement element in turn.

Reader pronouns

Following Hyland (2005b), writers used reader pronouns to include the readers as discourse participants by mentioning them in the text explicitly.

LRE students used more reader pronouns than HRE students. It indicates that LRE students attempt to include the readers more in the discourse than HRE students. Furthermore, the reader pronouns *we* (1, 3) occur more frequently than reader pronoun *you* (2, 4) in LRE. There are 79 reader pronouns *we* and 17 *you* in LRE. It indicates that the students tried to show authority as well as solidarity to their readers by using inclusive *we* to guide them through the discourse into expected interpretation (Hyland, 2008; Shahriari &

Shadloo, 2019). This inclusive *we* helps writers to secure agreement with the readers in the topic being discussed (Jiang & Ma, 2018; Lee & Deakin, 2016). Meanwhile, reader pronouns *we* appear less frequently than *you* in HRE. There are 25 reader pronouns *we* and 45 *you* in HRE. It seems that the students with proficiency tend to include the readers as a separated-individual discourse participant. However, this type of reader pronouns is lack of involvement (Hyland, 2005c).

Table 2

Frequency of the Use of Engagement in the Argumentative Essays

No.	Category	Reader pronouns	Personal Asides	Appeals to shared knowledge	Directives	Questions	Total
1.	HRE	70 (82.4%)	0 (0%)	4 (4.7%)	9 (10.6%)	2 (2.4%)	85
2.	LRE	96 (63.6%)	0 (0%)	11 (7.3%)	23 (15.2%)	21 (13.9%)	151

Table 3

Distribution of Engagement in HRE

No.	Category	Introduction	Body	Conclusion
1.	Reader pronouns	6	46	18
2.	Personal Asides	0	0	0
3.	Appeals to shared knowledge	0	4	0
4.	Directives	3	2	4
5.	Questions	1	1	0

Table 4

Distribution of Engagement in LRE

No.	Category	Introduction	Body	Conclusion
1.	Reader pronouns	6	24	15
2.	Personal Asides	0	0	0
3.	Appeals to shared knowledge	2	9	0
4.	Directives	6	9	8
5.	Questions	8	7	6

- (1) ..., **we** also can help the poor to get a better health services. (HRE-2)
- (2) Teenager is the age where **you** get curious about stuff and always want to try new things, ... (HRE-1)
- (3) In addition, the vaccine is also useful for those who around **us**. (LRE-2)
- (4) But it will enable **you** to take proper medical care if required. (LRE-3)

Viewed from the frequency, it shows that reader pronouns are the most frequently used engagement in the argumentative essays (Hong & Cao, 2014; Lee & Deakin, 2016; Shahriari & Shadloo, 2019). It indicates that the students tend to interact with the readers by mentioning them explicitly in argumentative essays. The results show that the students use reader pronoun *we* more frequently than *you*. It is comparable to Jiang and Ma's (2018). It shows that students mention the readers to show solidarity as collaborators who have the same issues with the writer rather. Furthermore, the students consider pronoun *you* as informal language, so they tend to avoid using it in academic writings (Jiang & Ma, 2018).

Table 3 shows that HRE students used reader pronouns least frequently in the introduction and most frequently in the body of the text. The same results for LRE students are shown in table 4. The students, irrespective of the linguistic proficiency, tend to involve the readers in the body and conclusion of essays.. It seems that students attempt to interact all over the text. The difference in number may be caused by the different lengths of the introduction and body of the text.

Personal asides

Personal asides are a writer's personal comments on their arguments. They use it to strengthen their arguments, show their views, and guide the readers into the expected interpretation. All 20 argumentative essays analyzed in this study show no expression of personal asides. It indicates that the students tend to hide their personal comments to stay "fair" in the arguments. This matter is comparable to the study conducted by Lee & Deakin (2016) in which there are no personal asides in the essays. This perhaps indicates that the students, irrespective of the linguistic proficiency, are not interested in getting too familiar with the readers by using personal asides which may cause serious consequences to them

(Shahriari & Shadloo, 2019). Also, in this study, the students did not receive explicit teaching in using personal asides, so they were reluctant in using it. This is as found by Hong & Cao (2014) that the use of personal asides may be influenced by teaching methods, culture, and transfer from L1.

Appeals to shared knowledge

Appeals to shared knowledge attempt to make writer's statements to be automatically accepted by the readers. by using appeals to shared knowledge, writers presuppose that the readers already know or will readily accept the arguments (Jiang & Ma, 2018). HRE students used *usually* (5), *generally* (6), and phrase *it is true...* (7) to express shared knowledge. Meanwhile, in LRE, it is expressed using phrases *as we know* (8) and *almost everyone has heard* (9), and certainty adverbs *usually* (10), clearly (11), and *naturally* (12).

- (5) The non-BPJS patient **usually** gets better services than the BPJS patient. (HRE-2)
- (6) ... the posterior vaginal wall **generally** done by a midwife ... (HRE-5)
- (7) **It is true** that many parents still have opinion that sex education is taboo for their teenagers. (HRE-4)
- (8) **As we all know** that we, Indonesian, uphold our five national principle which is Pancasila. (LRE-1)
- (9) **Almost everyone has heard** of the advantages and dangers of childhood vaccines. (LRE-2)
- (10) **Usually** they won't talk to other people why, ... (LRE-5)
- (11) It is **clearly** that LGBT is deviating from religious teachings. (LRE-1)
- (12) **Naturally**, the body will react by stimulating erythrocytes in the form of antibodies or antirhesus ... (LRE-3)

Table 2 shows that the HRE students used fewer appeals to shared knowledge than LRE students. It indicates that HRE students are rather careful in using certainty adverbs and other certainty phrases. However, it also infers that they have little confidence in their statements. It is comparable to Hyland's (2001) that the use of engagement is highly influenced by individual factors such as confidence and/or experience. Also, it seems that the students are aware of their novice status and the superiority of the reader, which is the lecturer, that they choose the linguistic resources they use carefully (Jiang & Ma, 2018; Lee & Casal, 2014). However, Jiang and Ma's (2018) study also reported that the lecturer wants students to impress the readers more regarding their claims in persuasive writing. Contrary, the results show that LRE students are more 'bold' in expressing shared knowledge. It seems that they are more confident in their claims than HRE students. However, another study reported that the use of engagement is a matter of preferences (Shahriari & Shadloo, 2019). Irrespective to their linguistic

proficiency, the students may or may not use it depends on their preference.

Directives

Writers use directives to instruct readers to something and guide them in the discourse. Directives help writers show their control of the arguments and their understanding of the topic in persuading the readers to accept their arguments (Hyland, 2002). The frequency in using directives is the same for both HRE and LRE. HRE students express it using the phrase *it is important to ...* (13, 14). Meanwhile, LRE students express it using directive sentences (15, 16).

- (13) So, **it is important to give** the information about sex education and reproductive health for teenagers at their early age (HRE-4)
- (14) **It is important to stop** making women's bodies and choices as male privileges ... (HRE-5)
- (15) **Please consult first** if you are pregnant, ... (LRE-2)
- (16) **Forget Horoscopes!** (LRE-3)

Table 2 shows the same frequency of using directives in both HRE and LRE. As mentioned by Hyland (2002), directives appear in three forms: (1) imperatives, (2) modal of obligation, and (3) predicative adjectives expressing the writer's judgment of importance using *to clause*. The findings show that HRE students preferred using statements—*to clause*—to instruct the readers rather than using imperatives. It seems that they do not intend to explicitly instruct the readers to avoid imposing the readers. The writers believe that the things are important or necessary. However, they give freedom to the readers whether they will carry the acts. Furthermore, this form contains less force than imperatives (Hyland, 2002). In contrast, LRE students used imperatives for directing the readers. They guide the readers explicitly using imperatives. As explained before, it indicates that the students strongly impose the readers to perform certain acts as the writer expects (Hyland, 2002).

Hyland (2002) noted that there are three types of directives. The first one is textual acts that can refer to internal (e.g. *see table 1*) or external reference (e.g. *see Smith, 1990*). The second one is physical acts which can refer to research focus (e.g. *the temperature must be set at ...*) or real-world focus (e.g. *you should ask your teacher*). The last one is cognitive acts which can refer to rhetorical purpose (e.g. *consider*), elaborative purpose (e.g. *this should be seen as ...*), or emphatic purpose (e.g. *it should be noted that ...*). HRE students (13, 14) perform mostly cognitive acts with emphatic purposes. As Hyland (2002, 2005b) reported, cognitive acts implied heavy imposition to the readers. The writers attempt to make the topic understood and the convictions recognized. Meanwhile, LRE students prefer mostly used physical acts with a real-world focus. Here, the writers attempt to make their claims understood and

accepted by guiding them to act in real life. It is less imposing the readers than the cognitive ones (Hyland, 2002).

Questions

In persuasive text, writers use questions to arouse the readers' interest in the topic being discussed in the text. It is commonly rhetorical questions (18, 19) or that the writers answer the questions in the next sentences (17, 20, 21, 22) (Hyland, 2005c). HRE expresses two questions while LRE expresses four questions.

- (17) Firstly, **why is it just justified to do so it's because being pregnant isn't only about yourself, ...** (HRE-3)
- (18) **But, how could a woman ask her doctor to perform a husband stitch even if she knows that the sewn itself has many unspeakable risks?** (HRE-5)
- (19) **Is vaccination necessary?** (LRE-2)
- (20) **Do you know that negative Rh (Rhesus) can kill a baby?** (LRE-3)
- (21) **What consequences will she have to endure after the state declares her not a virgin?** (LRE-7)
- (22) **Why does this happen?** (LRE-8)

The frequency of questions in HRE and LRE is different. In HRE, there are only two questions. Meanwhile, LRE has much more questions (see table 2). Furthermore, the questions are rhetorical ones in which the writers make the readers to the judge but expecting no response (Hyland, 2005c). It indicates that the students use questions to show that the readers stand the same as them. However, HRE students used fewer questions than LRE students. It probably because they think their reader, which is their lecturer, is superior. Thus, they tried to avoid using questions. These HRE students are more aware of their novice status than LRE students. This finding supports Jiang and Ma's (2018) finding in which the writers rarely use questions because the readers have a higher status than the writers. Looking at the frequency, it implies that HRE students are more careful in choosing linguistic features than LRE students. Meanwhile, LRE students seem neglecting their novice status. It seems that they consider their readers as the level participants that they frequently used questions in their essays.

The students in the present study, both HRE and LRE students, were proved to use questions least frequently compared to other engagement found. In HRE, the number of questions is 2 (2.4%) while in LRE, it is 21 (13.9%), of all number of engagement markers found in each category. Furthermore, all the questions found was 23 (9.7%) of 236 engagement found in all essays. This number is less than Ho & Li's (2018) finding in which they found 184 rhetorical questions (13.6%) of 1351 engagement markers found. It may be caused the students in this present study did not receive explicit teaching in

rhetorical questions in argumentative essays just like the students in Ho & Li's (2018) study.

Table 4 shows that LRE use questions more frequently in introduction than in the body or conclusion. It indicates that the students attempt to attract readers' interest by giving them questions in the beginning. Thus, the readers go on reading to the last parts of the text. Furthermore, they use questions in the conclusion to make them think about the topic before ending the reading. Meanwhile, table 3 shows that HRE students use questions in the introduction and body. They probably attempt to attract readers' interest by giving them questions in the beginning and continue thinking about the topic in the body of the essay.

In terms of variety of engagement used (see table 1), it shows that both HRE and LRE use four elements of engagement which are reader pronouns, appeals to shared knowledge, directives, and questions, respectively, but surely in a different frequency. It implies that irrespective of linguistic proficiency, the students are aware of the importance of engaging readers in the texts. Furthermore, in both categories, none used personal asides. It indicates that the students avoid overfamiliarity by using personal asides or comments in their statements. Jiang and Ma (2018) also found that students rarely used personal asides in academic writing. Perhaps the students also feel inferior to add comments in their statements just like the students in Jiang and Ma's (2018). In their study, they also found that the students think that comments, phrases in parentheses, or between dashes, are unimportant information. They tend to ignore them. Thus, they did not use it in their writing. This same case occurs in this present study.

Research question 2: To what extent the engagement used in the argumentative essays contribute to the student' writing scores?

Table 5 shows the students' writing scores and the number of engagement found in each essay. In HRE, there are, in total, 85 engagement markers. HRE students just paid attention to the aspects of argumentative essays which were assessed in their writings (see Appendix). Additionally, table 5 shows, 2 HRE essays (HRE-6 and HRE-9) did not express any engagement. They likely neglected using the readers in their writings since this linguistic resource—engagement—was not included in the scoring rubric (see Appendix). Furthermore, the instructor did not explain how to use engagement elements (e.g., inclusive *we*, pronoun *you*, questions, and others) correctly and effectively, so they were reluctant to use it in their writings. Also, they seemed to be aware of their inferior status compared to their reader's status—instructor, as found by Jiang and Ma (2018). They had little confidence in their arguments. Thus, they chose to use a more “neutral” position in their arguments that they hid their presence from the discourse.

Table 5

The Students' Writing Score and the Number of Engagement Found in Each Essay

No.	Essay's category	Writing's score (point)	Number of engagement found	Total of engagement
1.	HRE-1	28	2	
2.	HRE-2	28	7	
3.	HRE-3	28	14	
4.	HRE-4	28	2	
5.	HRE-5	28	5	85
6.	HRE-6	27	0	
7.	HRE-7	27	6	
8.	HRE-8	26	17	
9.	HRE-9	26	0	
10.	HRE-10	25	33	
11.	LRE-1	15	22	
12.	LRE-2	20	11	
13.	LRE-3	20	14	
14.	LRE-4	21	6	
15.	LRE-5	21	4	151
16.	LRE-6	21	8	
17.	LRE-7	22	11	
18.	LRE-8	23	55	
19.	LRE-9	24	10	
20.	LRE-10	24	10	

Looking at the more engagement found in LRE students—151, it indicates that LRE students are more aware of the reader's presence. However, it was not caused by their awareness of the importance of the reader's presence. They likely used those engagement resources to make their writings more varied. Since the instructor did not explain how to use it effectively, they merely used it as they prefer without any consideration of the effectiveness. Furthermore, the students occasionally misused the engagement, reader pronoun (23).

- (23) **Your** doctor will give **you** advice and schedule vaccination for **you**. (LRE-3)
- (24) If **you** are immune to a disease, **you** can be exposed to it without becoming sick. (LRE-4)
- (25) ..., because if **we** wait to long for the halal vaccines the health of **our** children will be threatened in the future. (LRE-4)

The sentences (23, 24, 25) show that LRE students used reader pronoun ineffectively. They used too many pronouns *you* which made the sentence ineffective (23). Additionally, they were not consistent in using reader pronoun *you* or *we* in a text (24, 25). It proves that LRE students may frequently use engagement in their writings, but they do not have adequate insight on how to use it effectively. This is surely caused by the limited exposure of this resource in the class. Ramoroka (2017) also emphasizes that explicit teaching on interactional metadiscourse, including engagement, may bring benefits to the students' writings. Furthermore, LRE students likely used engagement resource unconsciously. They merely used it since they often saw texts used those linguistic resources. The students likely used those engagement resources since they often read similar texts. However, the

student was not aware of the use of those resources effectively.

Considering the number of engagement found and the students' writing scores (see table 5), it shows that the higher number of engagement used in the essays does not merely coincide with the improved quality of the essays. We can barely argue that the use of engagement improves writing quality as well as the scores. This finding is comparable to the previous study's findings conducted by Shahriari and Shadloo (2019) that EFL students do not make systematic use of engagement in their writing. Furthermore, Ho and Li (2018) also found a weak negative correlation between engagement and writing scores. This finding supports Hyland's (2001) claims that the use of engagement is highly affected by individual factors such as personality or experience. Therefore, the students may use the engagement based on their preference.

The result may prove that the engagement used in argumentative essays apparently did not improve the students' writing quality and scores. However, this claim is not accurately correct and provable. The example is, when we only compare HRE-3 and LRE-4 and/or LRE-5 essay, we may claim that the use of engagement contributes positively to the students' scores. It shows that the higher number of engagement found makes the essays' quality as well as scores improved. Thus, to achieve a more accurate and provable result, it still needs to be further researched.

CONCLUSION

This study attempts to gain better understanding of the engagement and persuasion in undergraduate argumentative essays. The findings show different

frequency of engagement used in HRE and LRE. It shows that HRE contains less engagement than LRE. In the case of the variety, there is no difference between those two categories. Both HRE and LRE contain reader pronouns, appeals to shared knowledge, directives, and questions, but personal asides. Furthermore, as found by the previous researches (i.e. Ho & Li, 2018; Shahriari & Shadloo, 2019), the use of engagement in writing, specifically argumentative essays, does not coincide with the improved quality of the writing. However, HRE students seem to be more careful in choosing linguistic features in their writings and use the resource more appropriately and effectively. Meanwhile, LRE students engaged readers more aggressively than HRE students, but mostly in monotonous and grammatically poor forms. It indicates that the writing quality and scores do not only depend on the number of engagement used, but also on how this resource is used affectively.

Here we point out a few limitations of our study. First, the data source of this study is small, so it might not give accurate results. Thus, it may be worthwhile to study the same topic with a larger data source. Furthermore, it might be better to add students' and lecturer's perspectives on engagement in further researches. Second, we analyzed the comparison of the number of engagement found and its writing scores qualitatively. To gain more accurate results, future researches may add statistical computation in the analysis. Also, we only compared the engagement in L2 students' writings. Future researches may thus compare the use of engagement in L1 and L2 students' writings.

To conclude, we draw some pedagogical implications for L2 writing instruction from these results. Writing scholars pointed out that more direct instruction on using metadiscourse is essential in writing courses, especially for L2 students (Crismore et al., 1993; Hyland, 2005b). Additionally, Thompson (2001) showed that the explicit teaching of metadiscourse is important to give insights on how to build strong arguments for persuasive writings. This matter is strengthened by Wingate (2012) which shows that university students often get confused over unclear and insufficient instructions of building arguments in universities. Supporting their concern, we emphasize that explicit teaching on metadiscourse is worthwhile for L2 undergraduate students. Furthermore, we found that the use of engagement in argumentative essays does not coincide with the improved quality of the writing. However, these results might occur because of neglecting the engagement aspects in scoring rubrics. Thus, considering the importance of engagement in argumentative essays, it might be useful to put this engagement resource into the components of scoring rubrics for argumentative essays. Furthermore, we propose that the instructors need to gain more sufficient understanding of argumentation and

metadiscourse to construct persuasive arguments, just as proposed by (Wingate, 2012).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank all the participants of this present study, both the students and the instructor, for supporting this study with enormous data.

REFERENCES

- Bacha, N. N. (2010). Teaching the academic argument in a university EFL environment. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 9*(3), 229–241. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2010.05.001>
- Bailey, S. (2011). *Academic writing: A handbook for international students* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Crismore, A., Markkanen, R., & Steffensen, M. S. (1993). Metadiscourse in persuasive writing: A Study of texts written by American and Finnish university students. *Written Communication, 10*(1), 39–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088393010001002>
- Ho, V., & Li, C. (2018). The use of metadiscourse and persuasion: An analysis of first year university students' timed argumentative essays. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 33*, 53–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2018.02.001>
- Hong, H., & Cao, F. (2014). Interactional metadiscourse in young EFL learner writing. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics, 19*(2), 201–224. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ijcl.19.2.03hon>
- Hyland, K. (1990). A genre description of the argumentative essay. *RELJ Journal, 21*(1), 66–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003368829002100105>
- Hyland, K. (1998). Persuasion and context: The pragmatics of academic metadiscourse. *Journal of Pragmatics, 30*, 437–455. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(98\)00009-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(98)00009-5)
- Hyland, K. (2001). Bringing in the reader: Addressee features in academic articles. *Written Communication, 18*(4), 549–574. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088301018004005>
- Hyland, K. (2002). Directives: Argument and engagement in academic writing. *Applied Linguistics, 23*(2) 215–239. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/23.2.215>
- Hyland, K. (2004). *Disciplinary discourses: Social interactions in academic writing*. The University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.6719>
- Hyland, K. (2005a). *Metadiscourse: Exploring interaction in writing*. Continuum.
- Hyland, K. (2005b). Representing readers in writing: Student and expert practices.

- Linguistics and Education, 16(4)*, 363–377.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2006.05.002>
- Hyland, K. (2005c). Stance and engagement: A model of interaction in academic discourse. *Discourse Studies, 7(2)*, 173–192.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445605050365>
- Hyland, K. (2008). Persuasion, interaction and the construction of knowledge: Representing self and others in research writing. *International Journal of English Studies, 8(2)*, 1–23.
- Hyland, K., & Jiang, F. K. (2016). “We must conclude that ...”: A diachronic study of academic engagement. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 24*, 29–42.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2016.09.003>
- Hyland, K., & Tse, P. (2004). *Metadiscourse in academic writing: A reappraisal, 25(2)*, 156–177. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/25.2.156>
- Jiang, F. K., & Ma, X. (2018). “As we can see”: reader engagement in PhD candidature confirmation reports. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2018.05.003>
- Lee, J. J., & Casal, J. E. (2014). Metadiscourse in results and discussion chapters: A cross-linguistic analysis of English and Spanish thesis writers in engineering. *System, 46*, 39–54.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.07.009>
- Lee, J. J., & Deakin, L. (2016). Interactions in L1 and L2 undergraduate student writing: Interactional metadiscourse in successful and less-successful argumentative essays. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 33*, 21–34.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2016.06.004>
- Li, T., & Wharton, S. (2012). Metadiscourse repertoire of L1 Mandarin undergraduates writing in English: A cross-contextual, cross-disciplinary study. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 11(4)*, 345–356.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2012.07.004>
- Lotfi, S. A. T., Sarkeshikian, S. A. H., & Saleh, E. (2019). A cross-cultural study of the use of metadiscourse markers in argumentative essays by Iranian and Chinese EFL students. *Cogent Arts & Humanities, 6(1)*, 1–14.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2019.1601540>
- Mei, W. S. (2006). Creating a contrastive rhetorical stance: Investigating the Strategy of problematization in students’ argumentation. *RELC Journal, 37*, 329–353.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688206071316>
- Preiss, D. D., Castillo, J. C., Flotts, P., & San Martín, E. (2013). Assessment of argumentative writing and critical thinking in higher education: Educational correlates and gender differences. *Learning and Individual Differences, 28*, 193–203.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2013.06.004>
- Ramoroka, B. T. (2017). The use of interactional metadiscourse features to present a textual voice: A case study of undergraduate writing in two departments at the University of Botswana. *Reading & Writing, 8(1)*, 1–11.
<https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v8i1.128>
- Shahriari, H., & Shadloo, F. (2019). Interaction in argumentative essays: The case of Engagement. *Discourse and Interaction, 96–110*. <https://doi.org/10.5817/DI2019-1-96>
- Thompson, G. (2001). Interaction in academic writing: Learning to argue with the reader. *Applied Linguistics, 22(1)*, 58–78.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/22.1.58>
- Wingate, U. (2012). ‘Argument!’ helping students understand what essay writing is about. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 11(2)*, 145–154.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2011.11.001>

APPENDIX

The Writing Scoring Rubric

	5	4	3	2
INTRODUCTION	Well-developed introduction engages the reader and creates interest. Thesis clearly states a significant and compelling position.	Introduction creates interest. Thesis clearly states the position.	Introduction adequately explains the background, but may lack detail. Thesis states the position.	Background details are a random collection of information, unclear, or not related to the topic. Thesis is vague or unclear.
MAIN POINTS Body paragraphs	Well-developed main points directly related to the thesis. Supporting examples are concrete and detailed. The essay is developed with a consistent and effective point-of-view, showing the facts in detail.	Three or more main points are related to the thesis, but one may lack details. The essay shows facts from the author's point of view using some details.	Three or more main points are present. The essay shows facts, but lacks details.	Less than three main points, and/or poor development of ideas. The essay is under developed, and tells, rather than shows facts.
CONCLUSION	Conclusion effectively wraps up and goes beyond restating the thesis.	Conclusion effectively summarizes topics.	Conclusion is recognizable and ties up almost all loose ends.	Conclusion does not summarize main points.
ORGANIZATION Structure Transitions	Logical progression of ideas with a clear structure that enhances the thesis. Transitions are mature and graceful.	Logical progression of ideas. Transitions are present equally throughout essay.	Organization is clear. Transitions are present.	No discernable organization. Transitions are not present.
STYLE Sentence flow, variety, Diction	Writing is smooth, skillful, coherent. Sentences are strong and expressive with varied structure. Diction is consistent and words well chosen.	Writing is clear and sentences have varied structure. Diction is consistent.	Writing is clear, but sentences may lack variety. Diction is appropriate.	Writing is confusing, hard to follow. Contains fragments and/or run on sentences. Inappropriate diction.
MECHANICS Spelling, punctuation, capitalization	Punctuation, spelling, capitalization are correct. No errors.	Punctuation, spelling, capitalization are generally correct, with few errors. (1-2)	A few errors in punctuation, spelling, capitalization. (3-4)	Distracting errors in punctuation, spelling, capitalization.