

Engagement Markers in Polytechnic Students' Personal Statements: An Appraisal Analysis of Self-Representation

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Abstract

This study investigates how polytechnic students construct self-representation in personal statements through the lens of the Engagement marker of Appraisal Theory. Drawing on Martin and White's (2005) framework, the research analyzes 25 personal statements written by first-year Engineering Technology Management students at a public polytechnic in West Java. Using qualitative methods and corpus-assisted analysis via the UAM Corpus Tool, this study identifies a dominant reliance on monoglossic assertions, with 64% of clauses presenting information as uncontested truths. While such statements convey confidence and clarity, they often lack dialogic Engagement and rhetorical nuance. Heteroglossic resources, namely disclaim, proclaim, entertain, and attribute strategies, appear less frequently but provide critical insights into the students' efforts to enhance credibility, show self-awareness, and align with institutional expectations. This study adds to the expanding literature on L2 academic writing by emphasizing the importance of dialogic positioning in persuasive self-representations.

Keywords: Appraisal Analysis; Engagement Markers; Personal Statement; Polytechnic Students; Self-Representation

INTRODUCTION

Personal statement is considered an academic promotional genre commonly employed in the admissions process (Chiu, 2016), along with other occluded text genres such as cover letters, recommendation letters, grant applications, and many more (Bhatia, 1993). As a self-promotional genre, it allows writers to demonstrate their qualifications, explain their motivations, and share personal background (Kessler & Tuckley, 2023). For students in particular, a personal statement is used to introduce themselves to academic institutions (Jones, 2013), employers, or scholarship committees (Chiu, 2016). In professional settings, this document is not merely a summary of achievements, but a culturally shaped and persuasive text that requires applicants to strategically construct their identities and motivation (Li & Deng, 2019) in ways that align with the expectations of their audience (Ding, 2007). This makes personal statements a powerful tool for self-marketing and self-presentation (Shuker, 2012).

With regard to polytechnic students, who often transition directly into the workforce or pursue further education, personal statements hold particular significance. This group represents a unique and underexplored focus, as polytechnic students tend to emphasize the acquisition of practical skills necessary for workplace performance (Februati, 2019), which may influence the way they present themselves in personal statements. Additionally, the competitive nature of polytechnic admissions and job markets highlights the need for strong communication skills (Zainnuddin & Selamat, 2013), especially in English language skills (Sanmugam, 2013), making this group an ideal subject for exploring personal statements in the context of academic writing.

However, crafting an effective personal statement is not an easy task. Chiu (2016) highlighted that a compelling personal statement requires a nuanced balance of self-promotion and humility, authority and openness, while also engaging persuasively with the reader. Thus, he argued that the writing of a personal statement poses a challenge as it functions as a means of self-representation. Especially in the context of second-language (L2) writing, the challenge is compounded by the need to cope with a different linguistic and cultural framework (Zhao & Liosa, 2008). L2 students frequently struggle with mastering essential linguistic components, such as vocabulary choices, syntactic patterns, and cohesive devices (Jou, 2019), which are crucial for constructing evaluative and persuasive language (Xinghua & Thompson, 2009). In fact, numerous studies have shown that L2 students' writing tends to be less effective and persuasive (Cheung & Low, 2017; Lee & Deakin, 2016; Miller, Mitchell, & Pessoa, 2014; Xinghua & Thompson, 2009). Specifically, their writings are often less persuasive as they lack of interpersonal resources (Lee & Deakin, 2016) necessary to convey a persuasive balance between promoting themselves and staying humble, or showing confidence while remaining open, qualities that are crucial for a strong personal statement.

To understand how students construct such interpersonal meanings, it is crucial to examine the language choices they make, especially those that signal their stance, voice, and engagement with the reader (Latipah & Gunawan, 2021). One useful analytical tool for this interpersonal resource is Appraisal Theory, particularly Engagement marker (Martin & White, 2005). The Engagement framework developed by Martin and White (2005) offers a theoretical lens for examining how writers negotiate multiple voices within a text, which is particularly relevant in personal statements where individuals must position themselves in relation to institutional expectations and imagined audiences. This framework has been widely used to assess the evaluative quality of L2 student writing (Mori, 2017; Miller, Mitchell, & Pessoa, 2014; Latipah & Gunawan, 2020), making it especially relevant for analyzing how students manage self-representation in personal statements.

This engagement framework (Martin & White, 2005), rooted in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), distinguishes between *monoglossia*, which presents assertions without engaging alternative perspectives, and *heteroglossia*, which incorporates multiple viewpoints to create a more dialogic and persuasive text. Within *heteroglossia*, two primary engagement strategies exist, namely *contraction*, which limits alternative voices by asserting authority or rejecting opposing views, and *expansion*, which allows for multiple perspectives and fosters dialogue. Within *contraction*, there are two key types of linguistic strategies. The first is *disclaim*, which involves denying and countering a proposition, and *proclaim*, where the writer strongly affirms their position to assert authority and align the reader with their stance. Meanwhile, there are also two branches of dialogic *expansion* which are *entertain* that representing the writer's attempt to express a judgment or evaluation while still acknowledging the potential for other interpretations and *attribute*, where the writer brings in external voices to align with or distance themselves from a cited viewpoint. These strategies play a crucial role in shaping rhetorical effectiveness, as they determine how writers negotiate meaning, assert claims, and engage with their audience (Cheung & Low, 2017; Zhang, 2018).

Despite the growing body of research on the use of Appraisal Theory in analyzing L2 writing, limited attention has been paid to how students construct Appraisal of Engagement strategies in personal statements. Most existing studies on Appraisal analysis concentrated on other academic texts such as argumentative texts (Miller, Mitchell, & Pessoa, 2014; Latipah & Gunawan, 2021), article reviews (Jou, 2019), essays (Cheung & Low, 2017; Mori, 2017; Zhao & Liosa, 2008), and research articles (Xu & Nesi, 2019), leaving personal statements relatively underexplored from this perspective. At the same time, researches on personal statements have largely addressed issues related to genre structure (Chiu, 2016; Ding, 2007; Imafuku, Hayakawa, & Saiki, 2022), identity construction (Li & Deng, 2019; Shuker, 2012), and

metacognitive genre awareness (Kessler & Tuckley, 2023). However, these studies have not examined how interpersonal meanings are linguistically constructed, particularly using Appraisal analysis. Considering the important role of personal statements as an occluded academic genre, especially for L2 writers such as polytechnic students, this gap highlights a critical area for further investigation.

To respond to the identified gap, this study employed the Engagement system within Appraisal Theory as an analytical framework to examine polytechnic students' personal statements. Specifically, it investigates how these students deploy Engagement resources to position themselves and construct their writer identities. Furthermore, the analysis seeks to uncover how such linguistic choices contribute to the shaping of self-representation and influence the rhetorical effectiveness of personal statements as academic promotional texts.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, which is suitable for investigating how language shapes meaning in an educational and social context (Creswell, 2013). It examines the use of engagement resources in personal statements written by first-year students at a public polytechnic in West Java. Initially, 60 students from two different classes, all enrolled in the same study program, namely Engineering Technology Management, submitted their personal statements as part of an academic writing assignment in the *General English* course. Prior to the assignment, students received instruction and sample materials on how to write an effective personal statement, with emphasis on grammatical accuracy, coherence, and appropriate use of academic and technical language. The writing task was carried out during a structured assignment session lasting approximately 1.5 hours. During this time, students worked under the supervision and guidance of the course instructor to minimize the risk of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty.

From the 60 submissions, 25 texts were purposefully selected for analysis based on criteria of grammatical correctness, clarity, coherence, and adherence to principles of technical and academic writing. These selected texts reflect a range of engagement strategies used by students to articulate their academic achievements, aspirations, and motivations for pursuing their chosen field of study. To ensure confidentiality and adhere to ethical research practices, all statements were anonymized before analysis.

Within the process of data analysis, the texts were first parsed into individual clauses to ensure analytical precision and contextual clarity. Each clause was then coded based on the Engagement framework proposed by Martin and White (2005), which includes categories such as *Monogloss*, *Heterogloss*, *Deny*, *Counter*, *Pronounce*, *Concur*, *Endorse*, *Justify*, *Entertain*, and *Attribute*. Figure.1 provides a clearer illustration of the branches of *heteroglossic* clause.

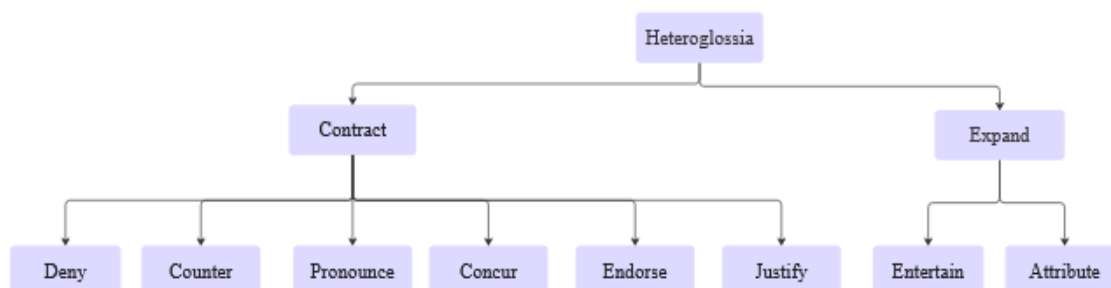


Figure 1. The Heteroglossia System (Martin & White, 2005)

Throughout the clause-level segmentation, this study utilized the UAM Corpus Tool version 3.3 to code the engagement markers in every clause. This tool has been widely used by researchers for text annotation (Latipah & Gunawan, 202; Xu & Nesi, 2019) as it enables

multiple overlapping features to be annotated within the exact text, making it particularly suited for analyzing engagement resources in the appraisal system. The corpus-assisted approach facilitated the identification of patterns and frequencies of engagement resources across the dataset.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Overview of Engagement Resources

This study analyzes 25 personal statements written by first-year engineering students, revealing a recurring pattern in their linguistic choices. The following tables present the key findings of the analysis, focusing specifically on the occurrence and distribution of *Monoglossic* and *Heteroglossic* resources within the texts.

Table 1. Percentage of Monoglossic and Heteroglossic Clauses in Students' Text

Students	Total Clause (N)	Monogloss (%)	Heterogloss (%)	Students	Total Clause (N)	Monogloss (%)	Heterogloss (%)
Students 1	30	57%	43%	Students 14	23	43%	57%
Students 2	75	61%	39%	Students 15	46	67%	33%
Students 3	30	80%	20%	Students 16	32	69%	31%
Students 4	37	68%	32%	Students 17	23	61%	39%
Students 5	39	64%	36%	Students 18	31	77%	23%
Students 6	42	60%	40%	Students 19	30	57%	37%
Students 7	39	62%	38%	Students 20	33	64%	36%
Students 8	33	70%	30%	Students 21	36	53%	47%
Students 9	25	88%	12%	Students 22	35	66%	34%
Students 10	27	78%	22%	Students 23	33	64%	36%
Students 11	31	39%	61%	Students 24	30	77%	23%
Students 12	31	48%	52%	Students 25	34	65%	35%
Students 13	28	54%	46%	Total	853	64%	36%

The data reveals a stark predominance of *monoglossic* assertions (64% of all clauses), in contrast with the lower presence of *heteroglossic* strategy (36%). *Monoglossia*, characterized by presenting statements as absolute truths without engaging the reader or allowing room for dialogue, tends to limit persuasiveness by making the discourse appear one-sided and overly assertive. In contrast, *heteroglossia* uses a variety of linguistic resources to recognize different perspectives and actively involve the reader, thereby opening or closing dialogic possibilities (Martin & White, 2005). This dynamic interplay of voices is fundamental in creating balanced and engaging texts. The balance of the strategies is particularly important in personal statements, where demonstrating both confidence and openness through effective engagement can enhance the overall persuasiveness and impact of the self-presentation.

Monoglossic Dominance and Its Implications

Monoglossic clauses appeared most frequently across almost all samples, with some students (e.g., Students 3, 9, 18, and 24) relying on them for up to 70% of their personal statement content. This dominant use of *monoglossic* resources suggests that most students presented their narratives as uncontested facts, with limited dialogic interaction.

This pattern reflects what Hyland (2005) identifies as a tendency among novice L2 writers to present knowledge as objective and absolute. While this may be perceived as an attempt to demonstrate confidence and authority, it simultaneously limits the interpersonal and persuasive richness of the text (Jou, 2019), thus undermining rhetorical engagement with the audience. This also suggests a consistent pattern of students asserting their motivations and achievements without invoking alternative voices, qualifying expressions, or hedging strategies.

For example, Student 9's personal statement, which is 88% *monoglossic*, filled with lines such as:

"I am trying to be an expert in several things."

"I want to learn about public speaking, organizations in college, and all the subjects I am studying."

"I want to deepen my English skills and take part in competitions."

Those statements reflect the use of an authoritative tone, which helps to convey clarity. However, the overuse limits the writer's engagement with the reader's potential doubts or alternative viewpoints, thus constraining rhetorical sophistication (Cheung & Low, 2017).

Even in more nuanced texts, *monoglossia* lingers as the default. Student 11, whose statement contains the highest *heteroglossic* density (61%), still opens with a barrage of bare assertions. A statement like the one in the excerpt would acknowledge a counterpoint while reinforcing suitability:

*"My ability to communicate and adjust quickly is **what will help me** advance in the organization." or "I was offered a job at the workshop after my internship, **but** I turned it down **since** I wanted to finish my education first."*

In promotional genres like personal statements, readers, whether admissions officers or employers, expect a balance of confidence and humility (Chiu, 2016). According to Shuker (2012), persuasive writing in self-promotional genres benefits from acknowledging multiple voices and perspectives to build credibility. When students present claims as absolute truths, they miss opportunities to engage the reader's potential skepticism. The lack of dialogic expansion also suggests a missed opportunity for students to construct their self-representation in a more nuanced and persuasive manner.

Heteroglossic Glimmers: Breakdown by Subcategories

Despite their lower frequency, *heteroglossic* resources provide critical insights into the students' rhetorical strategies. The 36% of the clauses using *heteroglossia* reveal how students attempt to open rhetorical space. The appearances of *heteroglossia* fall into four key strategies: *disclaim*, *proclaim*, *entertain*, and *attribute*. Among the *heteroglossic* categories, *Proclaim: Pronounce* (61 instances) and *Disclaim: Counter* (58 instances) appeared more frequently than others, suggesting that some students attempted to assert their positions more strongly or to introduce contrast. A more detailed explanation of *heteroglossic* resources is provided in the below explanation.

Disclaim: Deny and Counter

One of the most common *heteroglossic* moves is disclaim (28%), where students concede a weakness before pivoting to a strength. The data presentation for *disclaim: deny* and *disclaim: counter* is organized in the table to illustrate their patterns and distribution more clearly.

Table 2. Percentage of *Disclaim: Deny* and *Disclaim: Counter* in The Students' Texts

Students	Heteroglossic Clause (N)	Deny (%)	Counter (%)	Students	Heteroglossic Clause (N)	Deny (%)	Counter (%)
Students 1	13	8%	15%	Students 14	13	0%	0%
Students 2	29	21%	21%	Students 15	15	7%	7%
Students 3	6	0%	33%	Students 16	10	0%	20%
Students 4	12	8%	17%	Students 17	9	0%	0%
Students 5	14	14%	7%	Students 18	7	0%	0%
Students 6	17	12%	35%	Students 19	11	0%	0%
Students 7	15	20%	40%	Students 20	12	8%	17%
Students 8	10	0%	50%	Students 21	17	24%	24%
Students 9	3	0%	0%	Students 22	12	25%	0%
Students 10	6	0%	0%	Students 23	12	0%	0%
Students 11	19	16%	26%	Students 24	7	14%	0%
Students 12	16	25%	13%	Students 25	12	25%	17%
Students 13	13	8%	8%	Total	310	12%	16%

Disclaim: deny (12%), engagement marker that acknowledges a different, usually positive, viewpoint in order to reject it, using phrases like *no*, *never*, *do not*, or *would not* (Martin & White, 2005, p.118), was used 36 times across the dataset, often in structures such as appeared in the excerpt:

"*I **do not** talk too much which is why I **do not** have many friends and have fewer social connections.*" (student 12)

"*I **am not** at my dream university, but it **will not** deter me*" (student 21)

"*I hate when I **cannot** be good at something, and because of that, I like studying something new*" (student 22)

These expressions introduce dialogic space by acknowledging potential shortcomings, which may enhance credibility and self-awareness, key components in building ethos (Kessler & Tuckley, 2023).

Meanwhile, *disclaim: counter* which refers to a statement where the writer presents their current idea as replacing or challenging an expected viewpoint, effectively offering a counter-argument to what might typically be assumed, often signaled by words like *although*, *yet*, *but*, or *even* (Martin & White, 2005, p.120), appeared slightly more frequently (16%) in the student texts. It is typically introduced with shifts in perspective, as in:

"*This activity **not only** helped me get to know the campus and its facilities, **but also** provided an opportunity to meet seniors and fellow new students.*" (student 13)

"*I don't really know my skill well, **but** I have experience at my grandma's business since 2021 until now as a waitress.*" (student 7)

Within this context, the use of *disclaim* resources, denial and countering, can serve as powerful tools which allows applicants to honestly acknowledge potential concerns or misconceptions while simultaneously reinforcing their credibility and motivation. These strategies help present a well-rounded, sincere, and compelling self-representation that captures the applicant's distinct personality and experiences (Ding, 2007).

Proclaim: Pronounce, Concur, Endorse, Justify

To better capture how *proclaim* resources function in the data, their occurrences and usage patterns are displayed in the following table for clearer interpretation.

Table 3. Percentage of *Proclaim: Pronounce* and *Proclaim: Concur* in The Students' Texts

Students	Heter. Clause (N)	Pronounce (%)	Concur (%)	Students	Heter. Clause (N)	Pronounce (%)	Concur (%)
Students 1	13	38%	8%	Students 14	13	46%	15%
Students 2	29	3%	10%	Students 15	15	13%	40%
Students 3	6	0%	33%	Students 16	10	20%	20%
Students 4	12	33%	8%	Students 17	9	44%	22%
Students 5	14	0%	0%	Students 18	7	14%	29%
Students 6	17	0%	29%	Students 19	11	36%	9%
Students 7	15	7%	0%	Students 20	12	17%	8%
Students 8	10	20%	10%	Students 21	17	0%	0%
Students 9	3	67%	0%	Students 22	12	25%	0%
Students 10	6	33%	17%	Students 23	12	0%	17%
Students 11	19	16%	11%	Students 24	7	0%	43%
Students 12	16	31%	6%	Students 25	12	8%	0%
Students 13	13	38%	46%	Total	310	18%	14%

Proclaim strategies, which account for 37% of the *heteroglossic* resources, enhance the writers' authority but may sound overly as dogmatic. *Proclaim: pronounce* was among the most frequently used *heteroglossic* categories (e.g., *I firmly believe, it is evident that*), occurring 55 times (18%), as in the examples:

*"I **believe** that balancing my studies with these hobbies is crucial for personal development"* (student 14)

*"I **think** we **must** learn how to use machines and software properly because they are very important in the industry"* (student 18)

The students explicitly asserted their own stance in the text to reinforce their arguments and to challenge opposing viewpoints (Miller, Mitchel, Pessoa, 2014). This category strengthens the authorial voice, but when overused without dialogic balance, it can lead to a rigid tone. Some students used these to express conviction, yet lacked sufficient justification or elaboration, potentially weakening their persuasive appeal.

Within the same category of *proclaim, concur* (e.g., of course, naturally, not surprisingly, admittedly, etc.), with 44 instances (14%), is a formulation that commonly signal the speaker's agreement with, or recognition of shared knowledge held by, an implied interlocutor (Martin &

White, 2005, p. 122) as the way to emphasize the writer's perspectives. The examples of the employment of *concur* strategies in the students' text are presented below:

"I am strongly interested in the industrial field" (student 17)

"Of course, practical experience is just as important as theory in manufacturing engineering." (student 21)

These expressions of Proclaim: Concur, such as appeared in the examples, often functioned as attempts to mirror institutional expectations, a valuable rhetorical move, yet frequently lacked contextual elaboration or evidence, reducing their persuasive impact. This strategy allows students to demonstrate growth and resilience, a positive self-representation move that aligns with scholarship and admissions expectations (Chiu, 2016).

Table 4. Percentage of *Proclaim: Endorse* and *Proclaim: Justify* in The Students' Texts

Students	Heter. Clause (N)	Endorse (%)	Justify (%)	Students	Heter. Clause (N)	Endorse (%)	Justify (%)
Students 1	13	0%	8%	Students 14	13	0%	8%
Students 2	29	0%	34%	Students 15	15	0%	20%
Students 3	6	0%	17%	Students 16	10	0%	0%
Students 4	12	0%	25%	Students 17	9	0%	11%
Students 5	14	0%	14%	Students 18	7	0%	0%
Students 6	17	0%	6%	Students 19	11	0%	18%
Students 7	15	0%	13%	Students 20	12	0%	8%
Students 8	10	0%	10%	Students 21	17	0%	12%
Students 9	3	0%	0%	Students 22	12	0%	33%
Students 10	6	0%	0%	Students 23	12	0%	25%
Students 11	19	0%	11%	Students 24	7	0%	29%
Students 12	16	0%	6%	Students 25	12	0%	25%
Students 13	13	0%	0%	Total	310	0%	15%

From all of the students' personal statement, there is no appearance of *proclaim: endorse*, which typically involves valuing propositions from external sources as valid or unquestionably true (Martin & White, 2005). The absence of *proclaim: endorse* in the student's personal statement can be attributed to the nature of the genre itself. According to Martin and White (2005), Proclaim: Endorse involves attributing external voices as valid and authoritative, for example, using phrases like "*X shows that*" or "*X proves that*", to strengthen an argument through sourced evidence (Miller, Mitchell, & Pessoa, 2014). However, personal statements are typically introspective and autobiographical in nature (Li & Deng, 2019). They prioritize the student's own experiences, motivations, and reflections over engagement with external authorities. As a result, students are not expected to cite external sources or academic literature, and thus, the use of *endorsement* is not a conventional feature of this genre. The absence of *proclaim: endorse*, therefore, aligns with genre norms rather than indicating a rhetorical weakness.

The last resource of *proclaim* strategy is *proclaim: justify* (e.g., *because, since, the reason why, etc.*). The use of *proclaim: justify* across student personal statements shows a moderate presence (15% of *heteroglossic* resource), with most students employing this engagement strategy between one to three times. Student 2 stands out with 10 instances, significantly more than others, indicating a strong tendency to explain or rationalize their claims, possibly to enhance

persuasiveness. In contrast, five students (Students 9, 10, 13, 16, and 18) did not use any instances of justification. This uneven distribution may reflect differing levels of rhetorical awareness or confidence in argumentation. Overall, the data suggests that while some students are aware of the value of justifying their statements to strengthen their self-representation, others may still rely primarily on assertions without elaborating their reasoning.

Although Proclaim: Justify appears in many of the personal statements, its usage remains limited and inconsistent. Only one student (Student 2) used it extensively, while most others used it only minimally or not at all. Given that justification functions to explain *why* a student feels or believes something, an important feature of persuasive writing, its underuse could limit the overall effectiveness of students' self-presentation. This pattern may reflect a genre misunderstanding, where students assume that personal statements are simply narratives rather than persuasive documents. Encouraging students to incorporate more reasoned justification, explaining why their interests, experiences, or goals matter, can help build stronger and more convincing personal statements.

Entertain and Attribute

The results of the analysis on dialogic expansion, *entertain* and *attribute*, in students' personal statements are presented below:

Table 5. Percentage of *entertain* and *attribute* in The Students' Texts

Students	Heter. Clause (N)	Entertain (%)	Attribute (%)	Students	Heter. Clause (N)	Entertain (%)	Attribute (%)
Students 1	13	23%	0%	Students 14	13	31%	0%
Students 2	29	10%	0%	Students 15	15	0%	13%
Students 3	6	17%	0%	Students 16	10	30%	10%
Students 4	12	8%	0%	Students 17	9	11%	0%
Students 5	14	64%	0%	Students 18	7	57%	0%
Students 6	17	18%	0%	Students 19	11	36%	0%
Students 7	15	20%	0%	Students 20	12	42%	0%
Students 8	10	0%	10%	Students 21	17	41%	0%
Students 9	3	33%	0%	Students 22	12	17%	0%
Students 10	6	50%	0%	Students 23	12	58%	0%
Students 11	19	21%	0%	Students 24	7	14%	0%
Students 12	16	19%	0%	Students 25	12	25%	0%
Students 13	13	0%	0%	Total	310	24%	1%

Entertain move, used 75 times or 24% of heteroglossic clauses, was one of the more evenly distributed engagement markers, indicating attempts to create dialogic openness through modals or hedging (e.g., *may*, *might*, *possibly*, *modal* verbs). These instances reflect awareness of uncertainty or potential alternatives and are crucial for developing a voice that is both confident and reflective (Hyland, 2005). The examples of students' strategies in using *entertain* can be seen in the below excerpt:

"It seems that my passion for math has grown stronger through each project I've completed." (student 5)

*"I think studying Engineering Technology Management **could** help me understand how to bridge technical work with leadership roles." (student 23)*

Those examples indicate the students' attempt to balance certainty and openness. As stated by Martin & White (2005), an *entertain* resource is an Engagement marker that acknowledges the writer's stance as one among multiple potential viewpoints, thereby allowing varying degrees of dialogic space for alternative positions. This is to avoid alienating the reader by allowing room for multiple voices or interpretations (Miller, Mitchel, Pessoa, 2014).

On the contrary, one of the rarest strategies of *heteroglossic* resource found in the students' text is *attribute* (1%). Only 6 out of 25 students cite external voices (e.g., mentors, awards), as shown in the examples below:

"My lecturer once said that effective management starts with understanding the technology." (student 14)

"My mother said that men should display strength and avoid showing vulnerability" (student 15)

The use of *attribute* strategies appeared in the text narrate the indication of valuing external sources as a way to include multiple views. This type of utterance distances the proposition from the authorial voice by assigning it to an external source (Martin & White, 2005). Such a strategy serves to engage with alternative voices and expand the dialogic space by incorporating diverse perspectives on the topic (Miller, Mitchell, & Pessoa, 2014).

Discussion

The findings indicate that polytechnic students predominantly employ *monoglossic* moves in their personal statements, suggesting a limited awareness of dialogic positioning. While this reflects confidence in asserting personal goals and beliefs, it also reveals a lack of rhetorical flexibility and critical engagement with alternative perspectives. The minimal use of *heteroglossic* resources, especially dialogic *expansion*, suggests that students may not yet view writing as a space for negotiation of meaning. This tendency narrows the dialogic space and may reduce the persuasiveness and depth of self-representation in evaluative writing.

These findings further hold significant pedagogical implications, especially in the context of teaching academic writing to undergraduate students. By analyzing the Engagement of Appraisal framework, this study highlights how students position themselves and negotiate interpersonal meanings in personal statements. The strategic use of engagement resources, such as dialogic *contraction* and *expansion*, enables applicants to assert claims, acknowledge alternative viewpoints, and align themselves with institutional values.

Theoretically, the findings of this study contribute to the growing body of research that connects the engagement system of appraisal theory to lexical usage in written discourse. The analysis of personal statements reveals that applicants consciously select words and expressions to either contract or expand dialogic space, thereby managing the presence of alternative voices and asserting their stance. Thus, this study reinforces the theoretical position that appraisal theory, particularly its engagement subsystem, can be operationalized through detailed grammatical analysis, especially in high-stakes written genres. Lexical items such as "I believe," "because of that," or "this experience taught me" are not only common in personal statements but also function as dialogic tools that open or close space for reader negotiation. By identifying and categorizing such lexical signals, this research demonstrates how language proficiency in written forms is tied to one's ability to engage with implicit readers and institutional expectations. This provides a more nuanced understanding of appraisal beyond its traditional

focus on interpersonal meaning, highlighting the importance of grammatical realization in positioning self and others.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how polytechnic students construct self-representation in personal statements through the lens of the Engagement of Appraisal Theory. The analysis of engagement resources in 25 personal statements reveals a dominance of *monoglossic* over *heteroglossic* strategies, with 64% of clauses reflecting *monoglossic* usage. While such strategy may reflect an attempt to project confidence and clarity, it also constrains rhetorical richness and reader engagement. The less employment of *disclaim* and *proclaim* moves reduces the flexibility and persuasiveness of the personal statement, potentially undermining their credibility in evaluative contexts such as admissions or scholarship applications. However, these instances remain isolated rather than systematically deployed, indicating a gap in students' understanding of how linguistic choices can shape reader engagement and self-presentation. Given the critical role that personal statements play in admissions and employment contexts, particularly for polytechnic students, there is a pressing need for more targeted instruction on the use of evaluative language. Pedagogical approaches that explicitly focus on the lexical realization of Engagement resources in writing instruction would raise the students' awareness of evaluative stance. It also fosters their understanding on how specific lexical items, including dialogic expansion (*I believe, however, strongly, etc*) or contraction (*appear, suggest*) can shape their authorial voice, allowing them to strategically align with or distance themselves from propositions, thereby enhancing both the credibility and persuasiveness of their academic self-representation. Future research might expand this analysis across different institutional contexts or investigate the impact of explicit instruction in appraisal-based writing on students' performance. Further, upcoming studies may expand this approach to other academic genres, strengthening the theoretical and pedagogical relevance of the engagement system in applied linguistics.

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