

## A Comparative Study of Dialogistic Language Employed by English and Persian Writers in Academic Writing

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### Abstract

Academic writing is typically encoded by relatively negotiable and arguable resources indicating the potentially dialogistic nature of its discourse community, and has been the area of investigation from different perspectives. One of these perspectives has been the way that determines dialogistic resources in the rhetorical formation of textbooks. Thus, this study is conducted to explore and explain the strategies which are applied by writers to expand or contract the dialogistic voices of written texts. To this end, four texts of applied linguistics writers, two Persian and two English, were selected and then analyzed on the proposed framework of the *appraisal* by Martin and White (2005), particularly the one which is about *engagement*. Results showed that this dialogistic positioning, i.e., *engagement*, is relatively equally favored by both English and Persian applied linguists which indicate that both English and Persian writers are inclined to establish and maintain writer/reader interactional relationship, make allowance for other voices, and observe collegial deference. In respect to the subcategories of *engagement*, the result showed that in both English and Persian textbooks writers show a marked difference for coding *engagement* as *entertain* than other subcategories. The reason comes from the fact that by utilizing instances of *entertain* the writer indicates its position is but one of possible positions, so makes dialogistic space for any other possibilities.

**Keywords:** Appraisal Framework, Engagement Resources, Dialogistic Language

### 1. Introduction

One kind of academic texts which plays a central role in educational settings is textbooks. Textbooks are the primary means by which epistemological concepts and ideological assumptions of a particular academic culture can be identified and acquired (Hyland, 1999). As far as textbooks have been considered as the salient and essential aspect of educational settings; therefore, they have been the focal area of investigation under various topics including EAP textbooks (Barzegar & Hemmati, 2014; Jianbin & Fang, 2013), ESL/EFL textbooks (Miekeley, 2005; Tok, 201; Rashidi & Kehtarfard, 2014; ), ESP course-books (Najafi Sarem, Hamidi, & Mahmoudie, 2013; Yaghoubi Nezhad & Atarodi, 2013), and institutes' textbooks (Sahragard, Rahimi, Zaremoayeddi, 2008; Nasiri & Ahmadi, 2011).

A recently considered important aspect of academic writing, in general, and textbooks, in particular, is the growing interest and inclination towards the establishment of interactive communication among writers and readers. That is, academic writing is not any more considered as merely having the role of conveying disciplinary content (Hyland, 2002), but employing rhetorical choices for negotiating engagement of writers and readers in the construal of its textual production (Hyland, 2007). In other words, the representation of knowledge in terms of objective and impersonal form of discourse has been gradually replaced by the cumulatively observable presence of writers' involvement and attitude in the construction of knowledge in terms of subjective, evaluative, and personal form of discourse. Therefore, the presence of writers in negotiating and building their arguments in terms of subjective and personal form of discourse as well as the elevation of the active and effective presence and role of readers in the unfolding of discourse is considered as a major step in the constitution of persuasive writing resulting in the increasing amount of interaction of writers and readers (Hyland, 2005). Thus, researchers have shown interest in investigating the concept of evaluation and interpersonal choices in academic texts.

Because of the significance of interpersonal communications between addressers and addressees (Lemke, 1998), evaluation, which is concerned with interpersonal aspect of language, received considerable attention in the recent field of research. It has become an increasingly fascinating area of research under various labels as *evidentiality* (Chafe & Nicholas, 1986), *hedging* (Hyland, 1998; Salager & Meyer, 1994), *evaluation* (Hunston, 1994; Hunston & Thompson 2000), *appraisal* (Martin, 2000; Martin & Rose 2003; Martin & White, 2005), *point of view* (Simpson, 1993), and *metadiscourse* (Crismore, 1989; Hyland & Tse, 2004).

A recently developed framework in evaluation that roots in systemic functional linguistic (SFL) is the *appraisal* framework which its focus of study among textual, interpersonal, and ideational metafunctions is on interpersonal metafunction. The aim of this framework is to identify, describe, and explain the role of interpersonal meaning choices and attitudinal assessments in the realization of linguistic resources for evaluation (White, 2001b).

The *appraisal* framework includes three main categories which have their own sub-categories. Among its three categories, i.e., *attitude*, *engagement*, and *graduation*, *engagement* includes a systematic account of the evaluative linguistic choices that account for the dialogistic nature of the discourse. Based on the *engagement* system proposed by Martin and White (2005), the aim of the present study, therefore, is to provide readers with an insight into the role, effect, and employment linguistic resources which dialogistically signal the negotiation of writers and readers in the formation of Persian and English textbooks. That is, the

purpose of this study is to see whether both Persian and English academic writers make use of *engagement* resources in the construal of their books.

Engagement system deals with the dialogistic nature of the utterances, writer/reader communicative exchange, and interaction which rhetorically employed for the increase of negotiations among writers and readers (Hood, 2004, 2010; Martin & White, 2005; White, 2001a, 2001b). The *engagement* system proposed by Martin and White (2005) includes dialogically expansive and contractive linguistic resources in the prosodic patterning of the textual organizations. *Entertainment*, as one of the dialogically expansive category of *engagement* system, includes locutions which allow space for other alternative voices (Martin & White, 2005, p. 104). Another dialogically expansive category of *engagement* system includes *acknowledge* and *distance* which are attributed to the alignment and disalignment of authorial voice to the proposition (pp. 112-114).

The dialogically contractive category of *engagement* includes *disclaim* and *proclaim*. *Disclaim*, as one of the sub-categories of *engagement*, restricts or impedes the dialogic space between two sides of communication (Martin & White, 2005; White, 2001b), and *proclaim*, as the second dialogically contractive category of *engagement*, whereby "...dialogic alternatives are confronted, challenged, overwhelmed or otherwise excluded" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 118).

As far as the *appraisal* framework seeks to find answers not only to the attitudinal assessments of speakers/writers but also their interpersonal rhetorical devices as well as *graduation* resources in any specific context; therefore, we might come across studies that might focus on one category of the *appraisal* framework, two, or all the categories of the *appraisal* formwork. In this regard, those studies, which entail *engagement* as one of its area of investigation or merely concentrate on it as the sole category of reference and inquiry in a study, will be laid out.

In one study carried out by Gales (2011), authorial stance was investigated by analyzing an authentic threat text through the analytic systems of the *appraisal*, i.e., *attitude*, *engagement*, and *graduation*. A letter of threatening language, by a terrorist group followed by several bombings in different places in apposition to abortion, was sent to media outlets. The results revealed that threateners capitalized on positive and negative attitudinal assessments for conveying their messages.

In another study done by Liu (2013), the argumentative essays of two Chinese university EFL students were investigated by the complete the *appraisal* framework. Being analyzed in terms of high- and low-rated English essays, similarities and differences were identified. In the case of *engagement*, the low-rated essay exhibited higher use of heteroglossic resources. *Graduation* resources were found much more frequently in the high-rated essay than its counterpart constituting a rhetorical prosody resonance.

In the review of the literature of the appraisal framework, there exist some studies that focused on just one category of the *appraisal* framework. In a study done by Pascual and Unger (2010), two grant proposals in the disciplines of Chemistry and Physics, written by two non-native Argentinean English speakers which obtained funding from international agencies for implementing their projects, were analyzed with reference to the *engagement* system. The result manifested that the reason of their success in obtaining the funds for conducting their research was due to a variety of strategies such as employing rich amount of interpersonal resources in organizing their texts as well as showing preference in engaging other alternative voices rather than challenging their colleagues' views.

Reviewing the related literature on textbooks has shown that despite a large amount of research on the *appraisal* framework (e.g., Liu, 2013), very few studies have investigated the concept of *engagement* as one of the main categories of the *appraisal* framework in terms of cross-cultural considerations. In this regard, the aim of this study is to shed light on the possibly existing similarities and differences of the dialogistic resources among Persian and English writers. More particularly, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Are there any significant differences between Persian and English writers in terms of the application of dialogistic resources in their textbooks?
2. Which subcategories of *engagement* are more frequently used in both these two subjects of study and why?
3. Which subcategories of *engagement* are more frequently applied in terms of cross-cultural aspect and why?

## **2. Methodology**

### ***2.1 Selection of the Study***

In this study testing and teaching textbooks are selected for conducting our research. The selection of applied linguistics, in general, and teaching and testing, in particular, as the fields of enquiry was on the grounds of a number of factors. One important factor is the undeniable effect of teaching and testing not only in the domain of applied linguistics but also in other disciplines. Therefore, gaining mastery over the details of the application of evaluative linguistic resources in the domain of applied linguistics might help researchers in realizing how writers of these two sub-disciplines communicate with their readers in terms of evaluative resources. Another reason for selecting teaching and testing textbooks comes from the fact that these two kinds of textbooks are complementary in the sense that conventionally whatever has been taught was expected to be tested. Accordingly, because of this direct relation, there is a relatively high estimation of correlation between them in terms of the application of evaluative resources in their textuality. Meanwhile, teaching and testing as two major fields of applied linguistics have been frequently investigated under various topics of investigation. So, studying the

employed evaluative resources in the construction of teaching and testing textbooks can give rise to better understanding of these two related fields of knowledge.

## 2.2 Materials

The corpus in this study consists of 2 sub-disciplines of applied linguistics, i.e., teaching and testing. For each sub-discipline, two books were selected randomly among the abundantly available textbooks in these two domains. The reason for the random selection of these four books was to minimize the effect of subjective predilection of researchers which might affect the obtained results. One of the books in each sub-discipline is written by English writer specialized in his/her field of study and another book is written by Persian writer in English language. Therefore, we have four books written by Fenstermacher and Soltis (2004), Popham (2003), Birjandi, Mossallanejad, and Bgheridoust (2005), and Farhady, Jafarpur, and Birjandi (2009). The reason for such a selection was to consider the application of evaluative linguistic resources in terms of cross-cultural intra-disciplinary comparisons. That is, the purpose was to see whether the writers of these two distinct cultures make use of evaluative resources similarly or not. Meanwhile, it was also intended to see whether writers of the identical disciplines have similar point in common or they write differently in terms of the employment of linguistic resources. Therefore, there are four books which were written by Persian and English writers specialized in testing and linguistic.

Ten pages of each book were selected for the study. Meanwhile, the pages for analysis were selected on the basis of systematic sampling. That is every  $n + 10$  ( $n = 10$ ) page is selected for the analysis. This way of selection can increase the probability of the generalizability of the obtained results.

Assuming that the temporal variable might have effects in the textuality of textbooks, in order to make the analysis more valid, only those textbooks which were published since 2000 were selected and included in this study.

## 2.3 Procedure

This study is a qualitative and quantitative enquiry in terms of obtaining the results, analyzing them, and interpreting thereof. That is, in addition to applying the statistical procedures for obtaining the required results as well as comparing and contrasting them in terms of quantifying the frequency of *engagement* linguistic resources, the results were also interpreted in order to realize how textbooks' writers employ these evaluative strategies and which sub-discipline take advantage of them more frequently and to find out what sub-categories of *engagement* system is more frequently utilized.

In this regard, after the selection of the corpus, they were converted into Rich Text format, and then word count was run on them to have a rough estimate of the quantity of the corpus. Then the linguistic resources of the corpus were analyzed and their sub-categories affiliation were specified and determined. The frequency of

each category was identified and was compared and contrasted to the frequencies of its counterparts in other textbooks, and the reasons of the high or low frequency of the sub-categories of engagement system in the four textbooks were discussed. In order to normalize and control the length variation across the possibly unequal size, the number of the *appraisal's* categories of the all blurbs of disciplines was computed per 1000 words.

For higher degree of accuracy, intra-coder and inter-coder procedures were utilized. In this regard, in order to mitigate analytical subjectivity, 20 percent of the corpus was analyzed independently by another expert in the appraisal framework. Then, Kappa coefficient was utilized to check inter-coder reliability. After obtaining the result of Cronbach's alpha (0.920), minor differences were discussed and negotiated, and then an agreement was reached on the method of analysis. Additionally, 20 percent of the corpus was reanalyzed within the interval of at least one month and Cronbach's alpha was 0.890. Finally, the chi-square test was exploited to determine possible cross-cultural and intra-disciplinary variations in terms of the evaluative linguistic resources in their textual formation.

### 3. Results and Discussion

With regard to the kind of the study which was based on a quantitative basis with the purpose of interpreting the findings, the following results were obtained:

| Table 1 <i>Frequency analysis of engagement in Farhady et al. (2009) textbook per 1000 words</i> |           |             |           |                       |
|--|-----------|-------------|-----------|-----------------------|
|  |           |             | Raw<br>no | per<br>1000<br>words) |
| contract   | disclaim  | deny        | 14        | 5.67                  |
|  |           | counter     | 10        | 4.05                  |
|  | proclaim  | concur      | 6         | 2.43                  |
|  |           | pronounce   | 2         | 0.81                  |
|  |           | endorse     | 1         | 0.4                   |
| expand   | entertain |             | 43        | 17.43                 |
|  | attribute | acknowledge | 2         | 0.81                  |
|  |           | distance    | 1         | 0.4                   |
| Total  |           |             | 79        | 32                    |
| <i>Critical value: 3.84</i>  |           |             |           |                       |

Table 2 *Frequency analysis of engagement in Birjandi et al. (2005) textbook per 1000 words*

|          |           |             | Raw<br>no | Frequency.<br>(per 1000<br>words) |
|----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| contract | disclaim  | deny        | 14        | 5.4                               |
|          |           | counter     | 8         | 3.08                              |
|          | proclaim  | concur      | 3         | 1.15                              |
|          |           | pronounce   | 9         | 3.47                              |
|          |           | endorse     | 5         | 1.93                              |
| expand   | entertain |             | 26        | 10.04                             |
|          | attribute | acknowledge | 8         | 3.08                              |
|          |           | distance    | 1         | 0.38                              |
| Total    |           |             | 74        | 28.48                             |

*Critical value: 3.84*

Table 3 *Frequency analysis of engagement in Fentermacher & Soltis (2004) textbook per 1000 words*

|          |           |             | Raw<br>no | Frequency.<br>(per 1000<br>words) |
|----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| contract | disclaim  | deny        | 31        | 6.78                              |
|          |           | counter     | 23        | 5.03                              |
|          | proclaim  | concur      | 1         | 0.21                              |
|          |           | pronounce   | 6         | 1.31                              |
|          |           | endorse     | 1         | 0.21                              |
| expand   | entertain |             | 77        | 16.84                             |
|          | attribute | acknowledge | 9         | 1.96                              |
|          |           | distance    | 2         | 0.43                              |
| Total    |           |             | 149       | 32.58                             |

*Critical value: 3.84*

| Table 4 <i>Frequency analysis of engagement in Popham (2003) textbook per 1000 words</i> |           |             |           |                      |
|--|-----------|-------------|-----------|----------------------|
|  |           |             | Raw<br>no | per<br>1000<br>words |
| contract   | disclaim  | deny        | 25        | 7.90                 |
|  |           | counter     | 26        | 8.22                 |
|  | proclaim  | concur      | 4         | 1.26                 |
|  |           | pronounce   | 13        | 4.11                 |
|  |           | endorse     | 2         | 0.63                 |
| expand   | entertain |             | 67        | 21.19                |
|  | attribute | acknowledge | 1         | 0.31                 |
|  |           | distance    | 1         | 0.31                 |
| Total  |           |             | 139       | 43.97                |
| <i>Critical value: 3.84</i>  |           |             |           |                      |

One of the major aspects of academic writing is its dialogistic backdrop which is reflected and represented via linguistic resources. One of the determining resources in academic writing is *entertain* which according to Martin and White (2005) has been studied under labels as *epistemic modality* (Palmer, 1998) and *evidentiality* (Chafe & Nichols, 1986). Meanwhile, it has been studied by Hyland under the name of Hedges. The results of the above tables show that the total number of *engagement* resources is fairly equal in the writings of English writers. Meanwhile, the results indicate that *entertain* as a subcategory of *engagement* is more frequently used than any other resources in the books of the two Persian writers. *Entertain* is certain types of wordings or locutions which make dialogistic space for alternative positions; that is, it is one of a number of possible positions which has been presented (Martin & White). As far as the subjects of teaching and testing is subject to constantly evolving changes; therefore, the existence of numerous attitudes and ideas on one topic seem natural, and the writer of any book in these two domains are cautious in expressing their ideas over contentious and controversial issues confidently. In other words, by using *entertain* resources the author express a tentative assessment in relation to the informational content; therefore, he/she invites others to read the presented proposition and to accept or reject it freely with no rhetorically wording pressure. That is, when the writer refrain from using *entertain* resource, it indicates that the writer has a deliberate intention in emphasizing the veracity of his viewpoint which is encoded in certain locutions and wordings. This may bring about rhetorical pressures convincing readers to accept



writer's ideas without giving any freedom to them to have alternative position. This way of writing, eventually, might lead to the of lack of interest among readers to proceed with reading.

...methods that they *will* [**engagement: entertain**] find both interesting and challenging... (Birjandi et al., 2005).

...the learner *must* [**engagement: entertain**] take on the role of discourse analyst ... (Birjandi et al., 2005).

...it *should* [**engagement: entertain**] be pointed out that the contrast between subjective and objective tests,... (Farhady et al., 2009).

You *might* [**engagement: entertain**] operationalize this ill-defined skill by asking your students to read series paragraphs...(Popham, 2003).

In relation to the application of *entertain* resources in the writings of Persian writers, it can be realized that although they also apply these rhetorical resources more than any other resources in the textuality of their writings; however, the number of these resources in the books of English writers is twice as many as these rhetorical resources in the books of their counterparts. This shows that the dialogistic backdrop of English books between writers and readers is more salient and stronger than Persian writers. Therefore, the readers of English books and their possibly opposed viewpoints are more welcomed by English writers than Persian ones.

Considering the roles and frequencies of *denial* and *counter* as the subcategories of *disclaim*, it is revealed that they took the second and third positions respectively in both English and Persian academic books. The significant functioning of these two dialogically contractive resources relates to their roles by which writers present contrary positions, and hence support one of those positions indicating their interests and tendencies towards one positioning rather than others. In other words, due to the nature of science which involves taking one side or another, and so accepting or rejecting current issues of arguments, therefore, it seems highly likely that we come across numerous cases of these locutions in the rhetorical formation of academic texts:

Attempts to give priority to meaning in language teaching are *not* [**disclaim: deny**] new if classrooms should focus on real communication... (Birjandi et al., 2005)..

As a matter of fact, it is *not* [**disclaim: deny**] important which item(s) the testee misses (Farhady et al., 2009 ).

*Although* [**disclaim: counter**] many educators embraced his notion of self-actualization, Maslow did *not* develop its implications for education (Fentemacher & Soltis, 2004).

Well, *even though* [**disclaim: counter**] teachers can look at students' overt test scores, they are *still* [**disclaim: counter**] obliged to come up with the interpretation about what those test score means (Popham, 2003).

In relation to the subcategories of *proclaim*, the results show that except for one book written by Persian writer, in the three other books *pronounce* was used to a greater extent than any other subcategories of *proclaim*. The subcategory of *pronounce* involve locutions and wordings which mark the involvement of writer in advancing the value position in the textuality of his/her book. That is, through the application of this dialogically contractive resource, authorial interventions is explicitly represented to assert themselves as closing down the space for possibly other dialogic alternatives. In other words, authorial voice presents itself as the sole voice which has the predominant position in comparison to other existing alternative positionings; therefore, the author enter into to the text explicitly in order to indicate his/her maximal investment and effect in the rhetorical orientation of the text.

*Indeed* [**engagement: pronounce**], the concept of validity almost always finds its way into any conversation ... (Popham, 2003)

*Indeed* [**engagement: pronounce**], one classic reason for not vesting the people with the responsibility to govern is that they will make a mess of it (Fentemacher & Soltis, 2004).

*In fact* [**engagement: pronounce**], classical conditioning can occur even for responses that are not under the control of the subject (Birjandi et al., 2005).

With respect to the low frequencies of *acknowledge* and *distance* as the subcategories of *attribute* in all four books, because attribution consists of formulations and locutions "... which dissociate the proposition from the text's internal authorial voice by attributing it to some external sources (Martin & White, 2005, p. 110); therefore, it can be said that these four books mainly contain authorial arguments and propositions, that is, authorial voice is considered as the source of reference in advancing the dialogistic *engagement* between writers and readers.

In relation to the comparison of the application of *engagement* resources among the four books, the results of Chi-square showed a significant difference in terms of the frequency of one or more subcategories of *engagement* resources in the rhetorical of formation of the books. As it was illustrated before, the major reasons of the significant differences among these four books is attributed to the higher application of *entertain*, *deny*, and somewhat *counter*.

Table 5 Results of Chi-square test

| Engagement resources  | Chi-square value | df |
|-----------------------|------------------|----|
|                       | ig               |    |
| Farhady et al.        | 88.165           | 5  |
|                       | 000              |    |
| Birjandi et al.       | 43.676           | 6  |
|                       | 000              |    |
| Fentermacher & Soltis | 162.302          | 6  |
|                       | 000              |    |
| Popham                | 202.053          | 6  |
|                       | 000              |    |
| Critical value: 3.84  |                  |    |

#### 4. Conclusion

The current study has investigated the application of dialogic resources in the textual formation of English and Persian textbooks of applied discipline, i.e., teaching and testing. In this respect, the *engagement* system proposed by Martin and White (2005) was applied for the analysis.

In respect to the frequency of *entertain* which construes for a text a heteroglossic backdrop of prior utterances and alternative viewpoints as well as allows for dialogistic alternatives, the result shows that this evaluative positioning is favored by both English and Persian applied linguists. The reason of this inclination towards this dialogistic strategy might be due to the fact that these two domains of inquiry (i.e., teaching and testing) inherently entail contentious issues which invoke dialogically alternative positions.

In respect to the subcategories of *engagement*, the result show that in both English and Persian textbooks writers shows a marked difference for coding *engagement* as *entertain* than other subcategories. The reason comes from the fact that by utilizing instances of *entertain* the author indicate its position is but one of possible positions, so makes dialogic space for those possibilities. In other words, this evaluative strategy helps writers to situate their position among the present scientific voices rather than closing down the dialogistic expansion of scientific inquiry. Meanwhile, it was manifested that in both two languages, i.e., English and Persian, dialogistic resources are employed for increasing the significance of readers' presence in the rhetorical formation of the textbooks.

Therefore, the result show that although English writers show more tendency in using *engagement* resources; however, both English and Persian writers favor the application of *entertain* indicating the dialogistic space for other alternative positionings, which might create a sense of understanding at the end of writers/readers discursual negotiations. Moreover, it became evident that both

English and Persian textbooks writers tended to utilize the encoding of *engagement* as *deny* and *counter* indicating the writer's inclination towards a specific thought, insight, and belief. That is, while he is supporting a specific idea or belief, he/she is rejecting other opposed arguments simultaneously.

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