

Stance Nouns in Argumentative Essays by L2 Malaysian Undergraduates

Hui Lin Teh ^a
hlteh@sunway.edu.my
Sunway University, Malaysia

Geok Imm Lee ^b
gilee@upm.edu.my
Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

Vahid Nimehchisalem
v.nimehchisalem@vizja.pl
University of Economics and Human Sciences, Poland
&
Taylor's University, Malaysia

Ain Nadzimah Abdullah
ainnadzimah.abdullah@taylors.edu.my
Taylor's University, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Stance nouns are an important feature of academic writing since they indicate to the readers how writer's stance and the arguments are to be interpreted. However, there is a lack of studies in investigating how the L2 undergraduate students use stance nouns in L2 argumentative writing. With the aim to gain more insights into patterns of use of stance nouns in L2 academic writing, this study employed summative content analysis to analyse the patterns of stance nouns in 100 argumentative essays by the L2 first-year undergraduate students in a private university in Malaysia. Based on the classification of stance nouns model by Jiang and Hyland (2015), the frequencies of the three types of stance nouns (*entity*, *attribute* and *relation*) were identified to determine the patterns of use of the stance nouns. The findings show that L2 students used more *manner* nouns and *status* nouns (*attribute* type), and *event* nouns (*entity* type) that reflected more epistemic evaluations and evidence-based reasonings in their stance. The classification of stance nouns indicates how writers use them to express stance and influence how readers interpret the arguments presented. In conclusion, different variants of stance nouns can help writers to strengthen their arguments in argumentative writing. This may inform the development in corpus-based teaching materials as the findings on patterns of use of stance nouns can be used as examples in the teaching and learning of argumentative writing.

Keywords: Academic writing; Argumentative essay; L2 writing; Stance; Stance noun

^a Main author

^b Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

Mastering academic language features is essential for academic success as many university's academic assignments require students to express their stance and build arguments to support their stance (Hyland, 2018; Maamujav et al. 2021). In fact, past studies highlight that the students need to adhere to rhetorical structures and use academic language features such as hedges, stance adverbs and stance nouns that adhere to established writing conventions within the academic community (Barbara et al., 2024; Wu & Paltridge, 2021). To complete the academic assignments particularly argumentative essays, the students need to take a clear stance on a topic and convince the reader of its merit (Ramage et al., 2012; Toulmin, 2003) by utilising academic language structures and vocabulary of academic writing (Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Yasuda, 2023).

In terms of the use of stance nouns in writing, stance nouns were used to guide and convince readers of the writer's viewpoint (Işık-Taş, 2018; Jiang, 2015; Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Lee et al., 2021). These stance nouns are crucial for communicating the writer's position and building strong arguments. Biber et al. (1999) state that epistemic nouns are used to express a stance in the proposition that encapsulates important ideas and knowledge. The writer often includes a "stance noun" as the head noun followed by the grammatical structures which function primarily to express the writer's position (Işık-Taş, 2018; Jiang & Hyland, 2015). Similar to Schmid's (2000) notion of "shell nouns", stance nouns together with the grammatical structures, can function to encapsulate complex ideas. They can condense information and connect sections of text, making writing more concise. In academic writing, using such nouns helps writers avoid wordiness and project objectivity. Vande Kopple (1994) contends that typical academic texts consist of a higher proportion of nouns that characterizes the density of content in writing. In argumentative writing, Jeong (2022) also found that the frequency of nouns used was higher than other word classes such as verbs, adjectives or prepositions in her study on the use of language features to predict the quality of L2 academic writing.

However, some scholars highlight the issues L2 students face in academic writing such as lack of grammatical and vocabulary competency, and inadequacies in academic conventions (Parnabas et al., 2022; Tung et al., 2024). Some students may not have the necessary repertoire of grammatical and vocabulary competency for academic writing or not taught previously (Chikara et al., 2023), so they may not be able to use these stance nouns and grammatical structures effectively as expression of stance. These issues can be detrimental to the construction and development of stance, especially in L2 academic writing. There are also limited studies that investigate how stance nouns can be used with grammatical structures in L2 academic writing (Chikara et al. 2023; Hirvela, 2017). Additionally, there is a lack of studies that investigate the patterns of use of stance nouns to convey the writer's stance, especially in L2 academic writing in Malaysia (Azmar & Razali, 2024). Thus, this study aims to analyse the use of stance nouns as stance expression in the argumentative essays by L2 Malaysian undergraduates. A critical review of empirical studies on the analysis of the use of stance nouns in academic writing is provided to illustrate the growing importance of stance nouns for academic writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the analysis of stance nouns in L1 academic writing, Biber et al. (1999) found that epistemic nouns were usually used with two complement clauses: *that*-clauses and *infinitive-to* clauses in four academic primary university registers in L1 context (transcribed conversations, fiction, news and academic prose). Biber (2006) further investigated the expression of stance used by university students in the US in two registers which were academic or instruction (classroom teaching and textbooks), and student management (class management talk and written course management language). The analysis focused on modal verbs (and semi-modals), stance adverbs, and stance complement clauses. He found that nouns used with *that*-complement clauses were mainly used in the academic register such as classroom teaching and textbooks. Although their findings are valuable, they did not analyse argumentative essay which is one of the most commonly assessed writing task at higher education (Coffin et al. 2012; Yasuda, 2023).

In the studies of stance nouns in L2 argumentative essay, Işık-Taş (2018) investigated how 300 L2 IELTS test takers with predominant first languages in Arabic, Chinese and Urdu, used stance nouns with seven different grammatical structures in the writing component. Overall, the results revealed that the students frequently used attribute nouns, then followed by entity nouns and relation nouns. The results also indicated that the more proficient students have more varieties in terms of the types of stance nouns. This suggests that students with better writing skill used a wider range of stance nouns to avoid repetition. The use of cognition nouns also significantly differentiated the more proficient students from the others which means these students were able to provide a critical evaluation of ideas in their writing. In contrast, Jiang (2015) compared how different types of noun complement structures like *that* clauses were used with stance nouns to build arguments in argumentative essays written by L1 American university students and L2 Chinese L2 undergraduates majoring in English. He found that combining various stance nouns with these structures helped writers strengthen their arguments. Yet, L2 students generally used these structures less frequently compared to L1 students. This might be due to a lack of awareness of these structures or conventions in academic writing (Hyland & Milton, 1997). While Jiang's study (2015) is valuable, it only analysed how stance nouns were used with noun complement structures.

There are also studies that analyse the use of stance nouns with deictic expressions such as *this/these* in L2 argumentative essay. Lee et al. (2021) examined '(un)attended *this/these*' in 174 source-based ESL undergraduates' argumentative essay to understand how ESL writers' choices and usage were related to the levels of writing. The Chinese L2 undergraduate students were enrolled in a US-based writing course. The findings illustrate that '*attended this/these*' refers to the use of demonstrative determiner *this/these* with the shell nouns. They found the high-rated writers preferred *attribute* nouns as well as *event* nouns under the *entity* category, similar to Işık-Taş (2018). Nonetheless, their study only focused on how stance nouns were used with deictic expressions as expressions of stance. In addition, Jin (2019) studied how L2 writers in an US university used demonstratives *this* and *these* in their writing with nouns which were categorised according to concrete, abstract and shell nouns. She found that students used *this/these* followed by shell nouns that referred back to broader ideas mentioned earlier in the text, similar to extended antecedents or references that provided more clarity in the writing (Gray & Cortes, 2011). This suggests that the students can use such noun expressions to connect ideas within their writing (textual cohesion) and express their own positions (stance). However, Jin's study focused on how *this/these* was used at the beginning of sentences. Some writers may position *this*-N structure at

the end or in the middle of the sentence, depending on the function of the clauses or the phrases that they use to construct the sentence. Hence, it would be worthwhile to analyse the variations of *this*-N structure with stance nouns in argumentative writing.

In studies of use of stance nouns in other types of writing such as published research articles, Jiang and Hyland (2015) argue that the noun complement construction can be employed to express stance by selecting an appropriate head noun that can accurately characterise the proposition in the complement clause. They studied how the noun complement structures were used with stance nouns in 160 research articles across eight different fields. Their findings show that the academic writers frequently used *status* nouns to comment on the certainty and necessity of entities, and *cognition* nouns to describe the beliefs or mental reasoning. Kirmizi and Kirmizi (2022) also investigated how stance nouns within *that*-clause constructions were used by 160 Turkish writers (L2) and 160 English writers (L1) in research articles, across various social science and natural sciences disciplines. Their analysis, following Jiang and Hyland's classification model of stance nouns (2015), showed that both L1 and L2 writers relied heavily on nouns expressing certainty (*status* nouns) and belief (*cognition* nouns) to convey their stance. This suggests that both groups depend on interpretive comments to establish their stance. However, both studies were limited to *that*-clauses and did not include other grammatical features that might influence stance expression in academic writing.

To summarise, stance noun and its accompanying grammatical structure offers a range of stance choices that enables writers to construct a clear stance and persuasive argument (Işık-Taş, 2018; Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Lee et al., 2021). Although the reviewed studies concur that stance nouns are pertinent to stance construction, L2 students still struggle to use them to express stance. The lack of studies of stance nouns as stance expressions in L2 academic writing in Malaysia necessitates the need for a study on the use of stance nouns in the argumentative essays by L2 Malaysian undergraduates.

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study aimed to examine the patterns and functions of stance nouns in the argumentative essays written by L2 Malaysian undergraduates. Summative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was used to analyse the patterns of the stance nouns found in the argumentative essays written by the L2 Malaysian undergraduates. In this study, two analytical frameworks were employed for the coding of the stance nouns and grammatical structures found in the argumentative essays. They are Grammatical Pattern of Stance Noun Uses framework by Işık-Taş (2018) and Function-based classification of stance nouns in the Noun Complement construction by Jiang and Hyland (2015).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Many studies on academic language features in argumentative writing have been researched using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework which considers how language, social context, and meaning are connected (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). SFL helps the writers to understand how language choices shape the meaning and persuasiveness of these essays. For instance, the writers express stance using stance nouns and the grammatical structures which contribute to building arguments and conveying the writer's stance. Overall, SFL framework emphasises that

writing involves strategically selecting words and grammatical structures to achieve specific goals in academic contexts (Hyland, 2007; Barbara et al. 2024). Thus, SFL framework acts as a guide that informs the data analysis.

For the purpose of this study, the head nouns within the stance noun expressions are referred to as "stance nouns" because they function to convey the writer's stance in the proposition introduced by the grammatical structures (Jiang & Hyland, 2015). A writer chooses a particular stance noun and uses appropriate grammatical structures to express his or her stance and provides an evaluation of the particular situation or information mentioned in the proposition (Jiang, 2015). This is in line with the 'Systemic Functional Linguistics' framework of language use in a specific academic context as proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004).

Based on Jiang and Hyland (2015), the stance nouns were identified to investigate how these stance nouns operate with the grammatical structures to express stance in the argumentative essay. The stance nouns were manually identified after the identification of grammatical structures based on Işık-Taş's (2018) framework. Referring to the example below, the stance noun 'assumption' is the head noun that expresses a clear stance towards the content specified in the following *that*-complement clause (Jiang & Hyland, 2015).

"The first study targeted several brand communities under the **assumption that participants in these communities are highly involved consumers and likely to have relatively close ties to brands.** [Marketing]" (p.531).

The identification of the frequency and types of the stance nouns provide insights into patterns of expression of stance used by L2 writers in the argumentative essay. The stance nouns and the accompanying grammatical structures form the stance expressions which are used to express the writer's stance and construct the arguments.

SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

This study was based on 100 argumentative essays written by the L2 Malaysian undergraduate students for a final examination that was conducted for a compulsory English academic course at a private university in Malaysia. Ethical approval was obtained from the private university where the essays were collected (Ref No.: SUREC 2019/047). These essays were selected from six tutorial groups with approximately between 18 and 25 students in each group. The groups were selected based on the criteria that the students represented the larger population of the L2 students who were required to pass the compulsory English academic course for the Business programmes at the university. The students were in their first year aged between 19 and 21 years old and enrolled in a Finance and Accounting degree program. The language requirement for enrolment is at least 6.0 band in IELTS which is referred to as a 'competent' user who can use reasonably complex language, particularly in familiar situations (IELTS, 2024).

To complete the argumentative essay task of 650 words, the students were required to state their thesis statement and support their stance with logical reasoning and relevant examples. The essay prompt required students to argue whether digital marketing would be the future of marketing trends. They were also required to write five or six paragraphs in the essay which include introduction, body paragraphs (including refutation paragraph), and conclusion. The total word count was 66496 with an average of 665 words per essay. The handwritten argumentative essays were digitalised and numbered to ensure anonymity of the writers.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, the stance nouns in the argumentative essays were identified using the Antconc concordance software, version 3.5.9 (Anthony, 2020) based on two analytical frameworks. First, the grammatical structures that encapsulated the propositions were identified, following the Grammatical Pattern of Stance Noun Uses framework developed by Işık-Taş (2018) which were divided into three categories: the noun complement structures, deictic expressions and other structures (refer to Appendix). Işık-Taş's (2018) framework facilitated the initial coding for the identification of the grammatical structures that follow the stance nouns.

Following the identification of grammatical structures using Antconc earlier, the stance nouns were then identified and categorised according to the Functional Classification of Stance Noun framework by Jiang and Hyland (2015). The framework, which comprised of three main types of stance nouns namely *entity*, *attribute* and *relation* nouns, was used to determine the types and functions of the stance nouns in expressing stance (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Function-based classification of stance nouns in the Noun Complement construction (Jiang & Hyland, 2015)

Entity	Description	Examples of stance nouns
Object	Concretisable meta-text	Report, paper, extract
Event	Events, processes, states of affairs	Change, process, evidence
Discourse	Verbal propositions and speech acts	Argument, claim, conclusion
Cognition	Cognitive beliefs and attitudes	Decision, idea, belief, doubt
Attribute	Description	Examples
Quality	Traits that are admired or criticized, valued or depreciated	Advantage, difficulty, value
Manner	Circumstances of actions and state of affairs	Time, method, way, extent
Status	Epistemic, deontic and dynamic modality	Possibility, trend, choice, ability
Relation	Description	Examples
Cause-effect, difference etc	Cause-effect, differences, relevance	Reason, result, difference

For *entity* nouns, they are divided into four subtypes: *object*, *event*, *discourse* and *cognition* nouns (Jiang & Hyland, 2015). The *object* nouns refer to metatexts or concretisable texts such as 'report' or 'paper'. *Event* nouns refer to actions, processes or states of affairs which have a spatiotemporal location such as 'change' and 'process'. *Discourse* nouns take a stance towards verbal propositions and speech acts such as 'argument' and 'claim'. Lastly, *cognition* nouns concern beliefs, attitudes and elements of mental reasoning such as 'idea' and 'doubt'.

Next, the *attribute* nouns refer to nouns that "concern judgments and evaluations of the quality, status and formation of entities" (Jiang & Hyland, 2015, p.536) which are divided into three subtypes: *quality*, *manner* and *status* nouns. First, *quality* nouns assess whether something is admired or criticized, valued or depreciated, where assessments fall on a scale of plus or minus (for example, good-bad and important-unimportant), for example, nouns like 'advantage' and 'difficulty'. Second, nouns relating to *manner* describe the circumstances and formation of actions and states of affairs which depict either their dimensions in the way in which they are carried out or the frequency with which they occur, for example, 'time' and 'way'. Finally, *status* nouns concern evaluations in terms of epistemic, deontic and dynamic modality.

Lastly, the *relation* nouns are "used to express a stance by elaborating how a writer understands the connection or relationship to information in a proposition, conveying relations such as reason, result and difference" (Jiang & Hyland, 2015, p.536). These nouns function to

show the readers that the writers understand the relations between the head noun and the proposition in the noun complement structures which further establishes the credibility of the writer and the saliency of the argument (Jiang & Hyland, 2015).

A manual reading of the concordance lines was done to ensure accurate identification of the stance nouns and the functions. Each type of stance nouns was tabulated which indicated the frequency or the rate of occurrences in the argumentative essays. In many studies of linguistic analysis on stance nouns, the ‘normed’ rates of occurrence are computed per 10,000 words (Işık-Taş, 2018; Jiang, 2015; Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2022) in which a noun occurs in a fixed amount of a text, based on the formula provided below (Biber & Conrad, 2009, p.62). These normalised rates were calculated this way to ensure accuracy in data analysis since the frequency counts were from essays of different lengths.

Normed rate = (raw count / total word count) X the fixed amount of text

For interrater reliability, two raters independently classified stance nouns using Jiang and Hyland's (2015) framework. With 15 years of experience in teaching and research in academic writing, they resolved any rating differences through consensus. Cohen's Kappa analysis showed good agreement ($\kappa=0.759$), establishing the reliability of the results (Lee et al., 2021).

FINDINGS

The findings show that there was a raw frequency of 400 with 60.2 occurrences per 10,000 words (Table 2). Generally, the results of the study showed the highest frequency of stance nouns was attribute nouns (68.4%) and followed by *entity* nouns (28.3%). However, the frequency of *relation* nouns was only 3.3% which was very scarce.

Table 2 shows how the stance nouns are distributed according to different subtypes based on raw frequency, frequency per 10,000 words and the percentage. Under the *entity* category, the *event* nouns had the highest frequency in the essays with 9.2 occurrences (15.3%) while the *object* nouns had the lowest frequency with 0.9 (1.5%). Under the *attribute* category, the *manner* nouns had the highest frequency with 23.9 (39.7%) followed by *status* nouns with 12.9 frequency (21.4%). The *quality* nouns had moderately low frequency with 4.4 (7.3%). *Relation* nouns were the least used among the three types with frequency of two (3.3%). The following parts will explain the patterns of use of *entity* nouns, *attributes* nouns, and lastly, the *relation* nouns.

TABLE 2. Frequency of stance nouns

Types	Raw	Frequency per 10,000 words	Percentage per 10,000 words
Entity nouns:	113	17	28.3
event	61	9.2	15.3
cognition	30	4.5	7.5
discourse	16	2.4	4
object	6	0.9	1.5
Attribute nouns:	274	41.2	68.4
manner	159	23.9	39.7
status	86	12.9	21.4
quality	29	4.4	7.3
Relation nouns	13	2	3.3
Grand total:	400	60.2	100

PATTERNS OF ENTITY NOUNS

EVENT NOUNS

Event nouns refer to actions, processes or states of affairs which have a spatiotemporal location (Jiang & Hyland, 2015). The *event* nouns occurred 9.2 occurrences per 10,000 words (15.3%) The *event* noun ‘marketing’ was the most frequently used with 26 occurrences, which was one third of the total raw frequency of *event* nouns. It was also the key topic for the essay. In example (1), the *event* noun ‘marketing’ was used with infinitive-to clause to support the writer’s view in the essay. The proposition in the *infinitive-to* clause provided elaboration based on student’s knowledge of the subject to foreground the event noun ‘marketing’. The selected stance noun and the grammatical structure formed the expression used to construct the stance in the essay which expressed one of the benefits of digital marketing.

- (1) “Online business owner can use digital **marketing** to promote their company products with the use of social media in anytime of the day or night as they favour.” [E25]

COGNITION NOUNS

Cognition nouns concern beliefs, attitudes and elements of mental reasoning such as ‘idea’ (Jiang & Hyland, 2015). In this study, there were 30 occurrences which was ranked the second highest after the *event* nouns, under the *entity* category. In example (2), the *cognition* noun ‘rights’, reflects the student’s viewpoint towards data privacy. The student deliberately chose to use the noun ‘rights’ instead of ‘opportunity’ or ‘privilege’ to describe the following action in the *infinitive-to* clause and thus guides the readers to interpret ‘to request deleting their information at any time’ as a right, that is the legal claim by the customers.

- (2) The business entities that owns customers data are not allowed to simply disclosed it to third party and customers have the **rights** to request deleting their information at any time. [E6]

DISCOURSE NOUNS

The *discourse* noun takes a stance towards verbal propositions and speech acts (Jiang & Hyland, 2015). There were 16 occurrences found in this study. In example (3), the noun ‘issue’ reflects the student’s stance towards an opposing view ‘However, it is argued that digital marketing involves gathering of personal information of an individual which is seen as an intrusion of personal privacy’. The use of the noun ‘issue’ and deictic word *this*, fully encapsulates how the student perceived the opposing view where digital marketing may lead to violation of privacy rights. The stance expression ‘this issue’ can also be used to introduce the refutation or a solution (‘strict government regulations have been established’) to the issue mentioned earlier.

- (3) “However, it is argued that digital marketing involves gathering of personal information of an individual which is seen as an intrusion of personal privacy. Digital marketing commonly requires an individual to give up some information about themselves so that marketers could analyse the data given and make personalised advertisements that would appeal to the individual. This is to arouse the interest of the

individual in their business. Individuals are insecure about this and are afraid their information would be misused. This provides an issue for business using digital marketing. In response to this issue, strict government regulations have been established.” (E42)

OBJECT NOUNS

Object nouns are used to represent concretized texts such as ‘reports’. They were the least used stance nouns with only a raw frequency of six *object* nouns that consisted of three head nouns (‘website’, ‘essay’ and ‘study’), similar to findings in Jiang’s (2015) analysis on L2 argumentative essays. In example (4), the *object* noun ‘essay’ was specifically used with the deictic *this* to refer to the writing task, which was the argumentative essay. It was stated in the beginning of the thesis statement that expressed the writer’s stance on the topic of the essay, whether digital marketing is the future of marketing trends.

- (4) “Thus, this essay will elaborate on why digital marketing is the future of marketing trends, resulting in the concentration of specific demographics, the enhancement of brand image through social media, and the minimization of risk of exploitation of personal data.” [E2]

Since the argumentative essay was written in a timed exam setting, the students were not required to cite previous studies or articles to support their argument. This could explain the low frequency of object nouns in this study. The students were not required to refer to any journal articles or other sources.

PATTERNS OF ATTRIBUTE NOUNS

MANNER NOUNS

Under *attribute* nouns, *manner* nouns occurred 159 times in the essays with a total of 29 head nouns. For *manner* nouns, the head noun ‘way’ has the highest frequency (n=30). Previous studies on stance nouns revealed that ‘way’ is one of the most frequently nouns used in the research articles (Jiang & Hyland, 2015) and the argumentative essays (Işık-Taş, 2018). In example (5), ‘way’ was used to express one of the benefits of digital marketing, and the content in the preposition-of clause elaborated the actions performed by the entity (digital marketing). The whole expression was mentioned in the topic sentence in one of the body paragraphs as one of the key ideas to support the writer’s stance on how digital marketing would be the future trend in businesses (thesis statement).

- (5) “Furthermore, digital marketing also provides a new way of attracting new customers and enhancing the business-to-customer relationship.” [E33]

STATUS NOUNS

The raw total frequency of *status* nouns was 86 occurrences with 16 head nouns. The *status* noun ‘ability’ in example (6) expresses the function of dynamic modality that describes ability, opportunity and tendency. It reinforces the important role of digital marketing for the businesses

that support the writer's stance. The students argue that digital marketing has the capacity to improve the way businesses are done.

- (6) “Secondly, digital marketing allows for the **ability to personalise advertisements to each individual customer to cater to their needs through internet platforms such as Facebook and YouTube.**” [E65]

QUALITY NOUNS

The *quality* noun assesses whether the entity is admired or criticised, valued or depreciated. The assessment falls on a scale of extreme ends such as ‘good-bad’ (Jiang & Hyland, 2015). Its frequency was ranked last (7.3% per 10,000 words) under *attribute* nouns. There were 29 times of occurrences (4.4 frequency per 10,000 words) with 15 head nouns. The distributional pattern is similar to previous studies where the *quality* nouns were used in lesser frequency compared to manner and status nouns (Işık-Taş, 2018; Jiang, 2015; Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2022).

The *quality* noun ‘problem’ (n=7) was the most frequently used by the L2 undergraduate students in the argumentative essay. The analysis revealed that all instances occur in *this*-N structure as exemplified in example (7). The student was providing a counterargument and the refutation to prove his or her stance is more valid. The noun ‘problem’ refers to something that is difficult to deal with which carries a negative connotation. Thus, the *quality* noun ‘problem’ expresses the student’s stance that privacy concern is a negative issue that should be resolved. The deictic word *this* helps to guide the readers to interpret the privacy concern mentioned earlier as a negative issue. Hence, the student can use the expression ‘this problem’ to connect and introduce the refutation (the solution to the privacy concern).

- (7) “It is believed by many that digital marketing involves the privacy concern. Many people are afraid of the possibility of data breach by hackers and the inappropriate use of data information by the companies. However, this problem can be solved by using gated offer. Gated offer is used to target the members of a specific group based on life stage, occupation and the others.” [E33]

PATTERNS OF RELATION NOUNS

In this study, there were only two head nouns for *relation* nouns, ‘reason’ with a total of 11 occurrences and ‘outcome’ with one occurrence. *Relation* nouns were scarcely used in this study which is similar to previous studies on the use of the stance nouns and nominal construction by either the L2 students or the advanced writers like the academicians (Işık-Taş, 2018; Jiang, 2015; Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2022). Generally, the L2 students in this study did not make use of the *relation* nouns to establish the connection between the entities and the attributes of entities, as well as to expand the discussion.

From the findings, the *relation* noun ‘reason’ has been used with multiple form of grammatical structures such as N-that complement clause, *this*-N, N-*wh* and N-*be-that*. Predominantly, it has been used with *that*-clauses (n=5) in the stance expressions that described the causal relationship between the ideas in the essay as illustrated in the example (8). The proposition in *that*-complement clause that followed the stance noun ‘reason’, expressed the

writer's stance. The whole expression was then connected to more elaboration that can expand the argument in the paragraph.

- (8) *that*-clause: "First and foremost, the reason that digital marketing can be the future of marketing trends is because it can spread the information and details on digital channels such as Internet, social media and search engine." [E28]

In example (9), the *relation* noun 'reasons' perform the anaphoric reference function (Diessel, 1999; Halliday & Hasan, 1976) in which the stance expression 'These reasons' refers to ideas mentioned in preceding sentences which are then connected to the writer's claim ('enable digital marketing to become more and more attractive for firms').

- (9) *this*- N: "According to a recent study, it has been found that in the coming years, at least 84.5% of all advertisements will be programmatic. This is largely due to the lower costs that digital marketing incurs in comparison to traditional marketing. Businesses are also able to reach out to a larger audience through the use of social media and email. These reasons enable digital marketing to become more and more attractive for firms. Thus, this essay will elaborate on why digital marketing is the future of marketing trends, resulting in the concentration of specific demographics, the enhancement of brand image through social media, and the minimization of risk of exploitation of personal data." [E2]

On the other hand, the *relation* noun 'reason' in example (10) functions as a cataphoric reference (Diessel, 1999) which refers to the elaboration provided in the subsequent *that*-complement clause using the *N-be-that* structure. Again, it seems that this structure with the *relation* noun 'reason' allows the writer to provide more room for discussion and elaboration (Jiang, 2015; Jiang & Hyland, 2015).

- (10) *N-be-that*: "Nowadays, everybody is tech-savvy as most use technology for their daily jobs or entertainment. Hence, many are using the Internet which creates the marketing need to target the majority of users. That is why digital marketing is more convenient as one of main reasons is that it is cheaper than traditional marketing which means the company is investing less money than usual, and the marketing is focused on the target group only." [E99]

DISCUSSION

USE OF STANCE NOUNS AS EXPRESSION OF STANCE AND STANCE SUPPORT

In this study, the overall findings suggest that the students tend to use *attribute* nouns particularly *manner* and *status* nouns in expression of stance and construction of arguments. This is in line with findings reported in some studies that found that *manner* noun is one of the most frequently used type of stance nouns in academic prose (Işık-Taş, 2018; Jiang, 2015; Jiang & Hyland; Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2022; Lee et al., 2021). This may be due to the function of the *manner* nouns that are typically used to describe the circumstances and the formation of actions by the entities which can explain and support the arguments.

In addition, *status* nouns also frequently occurred in the argumentative essays written by L2 students in Jiang's study (2015) as well as in Işık-Taş's study (2018). The L2 students who majored in English programme in Jiang's (2015) study tended to use *status* nouns (31.7%) to convey their feelings and attitude towards the entity's features. Furthermore, the frequent use of *status* nouns indicates that the L2 students in this study tend to make interpretive comments in the process of establishing their stance (Schmid, 2000). A noteworthy finding is that all the 14 instances of *status* noun 'ability' were used with *infinitive-to* clause in the argumentative essays. The proposition in the *infinitive-to* complement clause denotes the epistemic status of the proposition as well as the writer's assessment of the proposition. This is in line with findings in previous studies where nouns indicating epistemic value of the knowledge are crucial in expression of stance and construction of sound argument (Biber et al., 1999; Jiang & Hyland, 2015).

The high frequency of *manner* and *status* nouns supports the contention that these types of nouns are used for objectivity and impersonal evaluations in writing (Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2022). In particular, Chafe and Nichols (1986) indicated that the use of *status* and *event* nouns can provide arguments based on empirical discussion and critical interpretation of evidence. The reason why the L2 students mostly used *manner* and *status* nouns is likely due to the fact that they were required to read many academic texts regarding the Business subjects that included texts about digital marketing (the essay topic). Thus, they were exposed to specific words and rhetorical structures which were found in the written texts for the Business discipline. These words typically denote actual circumstances, state of affairs and epistemic knowledge in the business context. Consequently, the attribute nouns were mainly utilised to express their stance and provide supporting evidence to illustrate the importance of digital marketing in response to the essay topic, whether digital marketing would be the future trend.

In terms of *entity* nouns, the L2 students in this study often used *event* nouns to form empirical argument with evidential support from the factual events and observations (Hyland, 2004; Jiang & Hyland, 2015). The *event* nouns function to assert and support writer's stance through factual evidence and real-world events to convince the readers since the topic was business-related. This pattern is similar to the pattern found in Jiang's (2015) L2 argumentative essays which suggests that the L2 undergraduate students in this study relied on the *event* nouns, to elaborate with a realistic evidence based on the real-world context (Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Qin & Karabacak, 2010).

It was also observed that most *discourse* nouns follow the structure *this*-N which was not reported in previous studies (Işık-Taş, 2018; Lee et al., 2021). It can be deduced that *discourse* nouns tend to follow *this*-N structure as they are mainly used to take a stance towards the writer's propositions. With deictic words such as *this*, *these* or *those*, the stance expressions can be used effectively to refer to the argument presented earlier in the prose and to further emphasise the writer's stance. The use of *discourse* nouns like 'issue' conveys illocutionary force that enables construction and extension of arguments (Jiang, 2015).

However, the lower frequency of *cognition* nouns is similar to patterns reported in previous studies (Işık-Taş, 2018; Jiang, 2015; Kirmizi and Kirmizi, 2022) which indicates that generally, the L2 writers used fewer *cognition* nouns compared to the L1 writers. Schmid (2000) says that *cognition* nouns such as 'idea' can be associated with more interpretative comments in constructing arguments. The fact that *cognition* nouns have lower frequency in this study suggests that the L2 students generally made less interpretative comments to evade personal evaluations in their attempt to sound more objective in their argumentation. Findings also reveal that many *cognition* nouns were followed by *that*-clause that functions as a noun complement clause. The

proposition in *that*-complement structure validated the writer's stance. This is in line with Biber (2006) who found that the proposition in *that*-complement clause usually follows the cognition nouns or nouns that hold personal evaluation towards the proposition.

The findings also reveal that students frequently combined *N-to* and *this-N* grammatical structures with *manner* nouns and *status* nouns from the *attribute* type which are nouns relating to attributes concerning judgements of formation of entities and, evaluations of epistemic, deontic, and dynamic modality of the entities (Jiang & Hyland, 2015). These expressions formed the majority of the stance expressions found in the 100 argumentative essays. These expressions highlighted the prominence pattern in expressing stance by the L2 students in this study which focused more on the evaluative statements supported with evidence-based reasoning. The use of stance nouns and grammatical structures, particularly complex structures like the noun complement clauses, can convey the writer's stance and present the reasonings and evidence in an objective and sophisticated manner as well as demonstrate the writer's credibility and knowledge in the field of study.

In contrast, the least occurrence of relation nouns may be attributed to higher cognitive demands of expressing causal relationships. The L2 students may struggle to use the relation nouns to construct arguments and extend it further (Jiang, 2015). In sum, the stance noun expressions should be considered as an important component of language features in academic writing (Işık-Taş, 2018; Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Lee et al., 2021), particularly for argumentative writing. An understanding of these stance expressions and their functions in constructing stance and arguments are pertinent to the teaching and learning in academic writing (Flowerdew, 2003). Concrete examples of the stance expressions, particularly for developing relations in arguments, can be provided to help students develop a wider repertoire of stance expressions.

STANCE NOUNS AS ANAPHORIC AND CATAPHORIC REFERENCES IN CONSTRUCTION OF ARGUMENT

Stance nouns also can function as an anaphoric or cataphoric reference in expression of stance to construct argument in argumentative essays. The findings show that stance nouns can perform the anaphoric and cataphoric reference function (Diessel, 1999; Halliday & Hasan, 1976). The stance noun expression serves as a specific referential function to mark epistemic stance and also create space for discursive discussion (Gray & Cortes, 2011; Jiang & Hyland, 2015) by connecting key arguments with supporting details. The findings clearly support the view that arguments are interpretive and personal which need to be carefully constructed to provide clear causes and explanations. Additionally, the stance nouns can be used alongside other stance features such as hedges or attitude markers to strengthen the argument and create explicit connection between the ideas (Hyland, 2005).

In the examples explained earlier, stance nouns act as a linking device between the elaborated information and the current proposition in order to assert the writer's stance. This illustrates the relationship between the stance and the supporting evidence in the writing and allows the writers to bridge the gap in the reasoning to convince the readers of the saliency of the claim or stance (Qin & Karabacak, 2010; Toulmin, 2003). This pattern is reflective of the interpretive nature of arguments in social sciences which requires careful construction and provision of clear causes and explanations (Jiang & Hyland, 2015). In summary, the findings have illustrated how the stance nouns can be used to make the stance and arguments persuasive through building connection or relationships to information in a proposition to create a discursive space and extend the argument in the writing.

CONCLUSION

The results on the patterns of use and functions of the stance nouns indicate that L2 students in this study used more *manner* nouns and *status* nouns (*attribute* type) as well as *event* nouns (*entity* type) that reflected more epistemic evaluations and evidence-based reasonings in their argumentative essays. The most frequently used stance noun under *entity* type was *event* nouns followed by *cognition* nouns. *Discourse* nouns and *object* nouns were very scarce. Next, the most commonly used nouns for the *attribute* type were the *manner* nouns followed by *status* nouns and lastly, *quality* nouns. *Relation* nouns were scarce.

The study leads to a better understanding of how the L2 undergraduate students apply these stance expressions in argumentative writing, which addresses the research gaps such as limited studies on Malaysian learners in specific genre of argumentative essay. The findings reveal that diverse combination of stance nouns and grammatical structures can help writers to strengthen their arguments (Jiang, 2015). The L2 students in this study evaluated the attributes of entities to express stance and increase persuasiveness of their argument. Since different variants in expressing stance are used in academic writing in L2 context (Yasuda, 2023), the L2 students should learn the forms and functions of these linguistic expressions in academic writing, to gather in-depth and comprehensive understanding of how a particular stance noun and grammatical feature helps to strengthen the writer's stance and support the argument in the writing, especially in L2 writing (Biber et al. 2020; Jiang, 2015).

With these insights, the materials for the teaching of L2 academic writing can be modified to meet the language needs of the L2 writers in different contexts. Knowledge about the most frequently used to the least frequently used grammatical structure and types of stance nouns in the argumentative essay found in this study can inform the choices made by the writers in expressing their stance and developing their arguments. It could also reveal varied form of combinations of grammatical structures and stance noun that could contribute to the quality of essay. The writing instructors can integrate these examples in the course materials for students to practice writing using multiple grammatical structures with stance nouns as well as other prevalent stance features to achieve the communicative goal of the argumentative writing (Azar et al., 2022), that is to highlight their stance and support the arguments. To conclude, the analysis of the stance nouns can indicate prominent patterns of stance expression in argumentative writing and contribute to the growing research on stance and uses of stance expression in L2 argumentative writing.

The study has two limitations. First, this study focused on the undergraduate writers in business discipline only. It is possible that a study on undergraduate writers in other disciplines may yield different results for the use of stance nouns and further contribute to the knowledge of application of the stance nouns in different disciplines. Second, the genre under investigation in this study was limited to argumentative essay only. Other types of writing genres in academic writing such as dissertations and conceptual papers were not investigated. Therefore, the analysis of stance nouns was limited to argumentative essay only. More research is needed to explore how the stance nouns are used in other academic writing contexts.

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APPENDIX

GRAMMATICAL PATTERN OF STANCE NOUN USES FRAMEWORK (IŞIK-TAŞ, 2018)

<u>(1) Noun complement structures</u>	
(1.1) stance noun + that clause (N-that)	I am of the opinion <u>that</u> people in a group should work together to achieve a common goal.
(1.2) stance noun + to- infinitive clause (N-to)	Firstly, people in the group must try their best to achieve the success <u>to</u> be the best worker.
(1.3) stance noun + of prepositional clause (N-of prep)	People in Western countries enjoy this opportunity <u>of eating</u> new foods and at the same time learning something about relevant country.
(1.4) stance noun þ preposition + wh-clause (N prep-wh)	As for an organisation, they should do their best to produce an ideal atmosphere <u>in which</u> people have the freedom and rights to shown themselves.
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<u>(2) Deictic expressions</u>	
(2.1) this/that/these/those/another/same/such + stance noun (this-N)	I will show some reasons why I agree with <u>this</u> view .
(2.2) this/that/these/those/another/same/such + be + stance noun (this-be-N)	<u>This is</u> a very simple talk about the culture and behaviour.
<hr/>	
<u>(3) Other structures</u>	
(3.1) stance noun + wh- clause (N-wh)	This leads to a competition <u>where</u> the people will always look forward for the change in job for the better money. (No use of stance nouns in this pattern was identified in the corpus; the example was obtained from the results of current study.)
(3.2) stance noun + be + wh-clause (N-be-wh)	Digital marketing <u>is where</u> the businesses advertise their products online to attract more potential customers.
(3.3) stance noun + be + to +infinitive-clause (N-be-to)	My approach <u>is to</u> grab the lonely planet guide and read up on Wikipedia about local history and traditions.
(3.4) stance noun + be + that (N-be-that)	Another strong argument <u>is that</u> all-day TV programming has allowed people to keep in touch with what is happening around them, not only locally, but globally as well, with news, both local and international, being delivered as events unfold.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Hui Lin Teh is a lecturer at the English for Specific Academic Purposes Unit, Centre for English Language Studies, Sunway University. Her research areas include academic writing, English for Specific Purposes and EAP teaching and learning.

Geok Imm Lee is a senior lecturer at the Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia. Her research interests are in the areas of academic writing, English for Specific Purposes and English at the workplace.

Nimehchisalem Vahid holds a PhD in TESL and is professor at University of Economics and Human Sciences in Warsaw, adjunct at Taylor's University, Malaysia, and founding editor of the International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies, Australia. His areas of teaching and research interest are language assessment and ELT materials.

Abdullah Ain Nadzimah conducts research in the area of sociolinguistics with an emphasis on language planning and policy. She has been in the field for more than 30 years. She is currently at School of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences & Leisure Management, Taylor University.