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## Exploring EFL Writers' Authorial Voice in Academic Discussions: A Graduation-Based Appraisal Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

Authorial voice, one of those constructs that shapes how writers establish their stance with scholarly discourse, lies within the centrality of academic writing. While extensively studied in Applied Linguistics, authorial voice has been primarily explored through stance markers, personal pronouns, and engagement strategies, with relatively little attention given to its construction through the Graduation system of the Appraisal framework within Systemic Functional Linguistics. This study, therefore, examines how Vietnamese EFL writers employ Graduation resources to construct their authorial voice in the discussion sections of TESOL theses to bridge the gap. Using the Appraisal framework, a corpus of 15 theses was compiled and analyzed to identify patterns of Graduation use and their impact on voice projection. The findings uncover the predominance of Force-based Graduation, particularly the linguistic resources of Intensification and Quantification, over Focus-based Graduation. This suggests that EFL writers tend to strengthen or weaken meanings rather than redefine categorical boundaries. The study also identifies three levels of authorial voice by Vietnamese EFL writers, namely, explicit, implicit, and unclear, depending on how Graduation resources are employed. While these strategies enhance persuasion, they may also limit critical engagement with existing research. Given the insights, explicit instruction on voice-related linguistic features is necessitated.

**Keywords:** Appraisal Framework; Graduation; EFL Writers; Academic Writing; Voice; TESOL Theses

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# 1. Introduction

Authorial voice has been crucial in academic discourse and central to numerous studies in linguistics. It has also been explored from different perspectives, ranging from stylistics in which the questions about the writer's identity and their relation to the text were solved<sup>[1,2]</sup>, to the evaluation of the interpersonal meaning within the text<sup>[3-5]</sup>. Research has shown that developing voice in academic discourse is challenging because it requires the writer to balance a formal and objective tone with their self-presentation. This is particularly more of a hindrance for second language (L2) writers, who must work through linguistic complexities while maintaining such a delicate balance.

As an extension of the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the Appraisal theory has been developed by Martin and White<sup>[5]</sup> to explore the writer's literacy across types of discourse. It highlighted the impacts of the choice of interpersonal values and to pinpoint evaluative solidarity as a key factor influencing the interpersonal aspects of social context. By looking at the language of evaluation through the lens of three systems of linguistic resources, namely *Attitude*, *Engagement*, and *Graduation*, the Appraisal theory offers a framework to analyze how a speaker/writer interacts with their statements/texts. Notwithstanding an on-going theory, the Appraisal theory has been adopted by an increasing number of researchers investigating a wide range of texts across disciplines, including political speech<sup>[6]</sup>, newspaper articles<sup>[7,8]</sup>. Within academic discourse, the Appraisal framework has proved to be an effective analytical framework for numerous studies to examine how writers construct arguments, align with or distance themselves from other scholars, and establish authority in their writing.

Research into academic discourse tends to explore the evaluative language in several sections of journal articles and theses, for example, the introductions<sup>[9,10]</sup>, the conclusions<sup>[11]</sup>, the review of literature<sup>[12,13]</sup>, and the discussion<sup>[14,15]</sup>. These studies mostly focus on the linguistic resources for the evaluation of *Attitude* and of *Engagement*, leaving the *Graduation* resource open for further research. There is also a paucity of research in academic discourse written by writers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Therefore, this case study is an attempt to

bridge the gap in literature by examining EFL writers' presentation of their authorial voice in unpublished thesis reports via the use of *Graduation* resources. It is guided by the following research questions:

- (a). What are the patterns of Graduation resource EFL writers frequently employ to construct their authorial voice in academic discussion?
- (b). How do these patterns of Graduation resource usage shape their authorial voice?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Authorial Voice in Academic Writing

In scholarly works, writers are apt to express their perspective, style, and even identity through their writing, which is referred to as authorial voice. It is one of the most important attributes in academic writing, contributing to the overall clarity, engagement, and consistency of an academic work while also enabling researchers to underline the value and significance of their contributions to the academic field<sup>[16]</sup>. Although voice has been an interchangeable term for identity in the literature on academic writing, many scholars attempted to distinguish these two concepts<sup>[17-19]</sup>. Notably among many attempts, in a comprehensive review of literature, Mhilli<sup>[20]</sup> has provided critical insights into this distinction. According to Mhilli<sup>[20]</sup>, authorial voice is a reflection of the writer's identity as presented in textual choices, which are derived from a dynamic and evolving repertoire of language features. In contrast, authorial identity covers broader, extra-discoursal attributes such as race, nationality, age, or gender<sup>[21]</sup>, which may not always be evident in the text. Authorial voice, therefore, pertains specifically to those aspects of identity that can be traced within written discourse. These traceable elements include lexical choices, word order, word clusters, syntax, text organization, and many more<sup>[22]</sup>.

On constructing authorial voice, the prominent marker would be first-person pronouns to signal the writer's presence in the text<sup>[23]</sup>, understandably because self-mentioning adds a subjective touch to their arguments<sup>[22]</sup>. The particular prominence is given to the first-person plural pronoun "we", even in single-authored works<sup>[24,25]</sup>. It even prompted scholars to examine the use of inclusive and exclusive "we", which can refer to the writer alone, the

writer and the reader, the writer and colleagues in the same discipline, or humanity as a whole <sup>[26]</sup>. The fine line between inclusivity and exclusivity of “we” has been leveraged to engage readers, attribute perspectives to a community, or emphasize timely matters <sup>[27]</sup>. Such variability within “we” per se, not to mention other myriad linguistic elements, points to the complex relationship between linguistic choices and the construction of authorial voice in academic writing.

Its importance notwithstanding, authorial voice is still subjected to elusiveness and hence a loosely defined construct in writing instruction <sup>[28]</sup>. Its marginalization in instructional contexts, noted by some researchers <sup>[29, 30]</sup>, can be attributed to the perception that authorial voice is complex and challenging to teach. That said, in recent studies, the correlation between writing quality and well-constructed authorial voice was found <sup>[20, 28, 31]</sup>. This follows that a more integrated and focused approach to teaching the concept of authorial voice is needed. On this front, further research on this concept in academic writing, particularly within the EFL writer cohorts, would be of use.

## 2.2. The Graduation System

Developed by Martin and White <sup>[5]</sup>, the Appraisal

framework provides a comprehensive analytical framework to consider how language is used to construct meaning and to position the speaker or writer. The framework comprises three key systems of linguistic resources, each of which serves distinct functions in evaluative meaning-making (as shown in Figure 1). *Attitude* is concerned with the value or assessment that a speaker/writer attaches to their message. *Engagement* is how a speaker/writer self-positions by either acknowledging or rejecting a point of view. *Graduation* is associated with the values a speaker/writer levels up or tones down their message in terms of impacts, or blurs or sharpens the information in terms of preciseness.

*Graduation* is concerned with two dimensions of meaning, namely *Force* and *Focus* (Martin & White <sup>[5]</sup>). These dimensions rest on two aspects, which are intensity/amount and prototypicality respectively. The former pertains to scalar evaluations, including attitudinal judgments or measures of magnitude, strength, extent, and closeness, referred to as Force. The latter, on the other hand, evaluates phenomena based on how closely they align with a core or ideal example within a semantic category, referred to as Focus. This is illustrated in Figure 2.

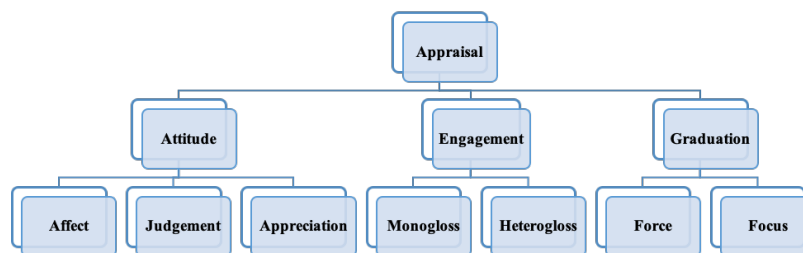


Figure 1. The Appraisal Framework <sup>[5]</sup>.

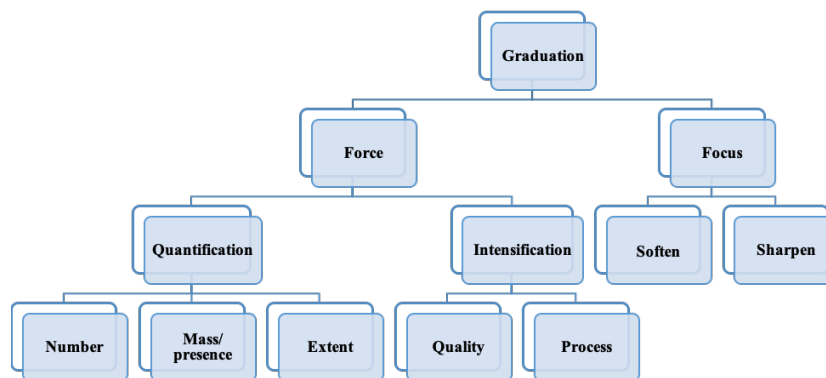


Figure 2. The Graduation System <sup>[5]</sup>.

*Force* involves up-scaling or down-scaling meaning as to amount and intensity. *Amount* applies to entities and measures quantity, presence, or extent in time and space imprecisely (a few drawbacks, many values), known as *Quantification*. *Intensity*, on the other hand, applies to qualities, processes, or verbal modalities, such as likelihood or obligation. This type of scaling, known as *Intensification*, emphasizes the degree of a quality or process (a bit shocked, extremely shocked).

*Focus* applies to categories that are typically non-scalable and defined by strict criteria. It allows such categories to be reinterpreted as part of a continuum, shifting from rigid either-or definitions to degrees of prototypicality. For example, in ‘It is a true masterpiece’, words like true sharpen the category, which in this case is masterpiece, emphasizing prototypical examples. Meanwhile, expressions such as kind of in ‘It is kind of a masterpiece’ soften the category, placing an instance at its margins. These adjustments allow for nuanced interpretations of category membership, which recognize varying degrees of alignment with the category’s core attributes.

The system of *Graduation* within the Appraisal framework is a crucial resource that significantly impacts authorial voice. By experimenting with different levels of Force and Focus, the writer adds nuance to their writing. In particular, by intensifying or weakening the force and focus, the writer can shape their tone (assertive or hesitant), express the levels of certainty and agreement, and signal the confidence in a claim. On this account, applying the lens of *Graduation* can further the understanding of how writers strategically modulate their evaluative language to shape tone, convey certainty, assert confidence, and hence authorial voice in their academic writing.

### 2.3. Related Studies

Much attention has been paid to authorial voice in academic writing largely due to the critical role it plays in reflecting authorial identity and establishing reader-writer interaction. Researchers have looked into this concept from various angles, with three lines of focus on autobiographical accounts of voice and identity construction<sup>[16, 32, 33]</sup>, how participants in the discourse are referenced in texts<sup>[34–36]</sup>, and evaluation markers<sup>[2, 37]</sup>. Myriad voice elements were subject of examination, notably first-person pronouns,

hedges, boosters, directives, questions, connectives<sup>[38–42]</sup>. These textual features are analyzed for their frequencies and patterns to understand how different discourse communities or writer groups employ them to project voice and identity effectively.

Many studies have examined authorial voice construction in journal articles. Zhang and Cheung<sup>[37]</sup>, for example, investigated how researchers within two disciplines use *Attitude* and *Graduation* resources in their articles’ literature reviews to construct authorial voice. As for *Attitude*, the sub-type *Appreciation* resources were preferred over *Affect* and *Judgement* while within *Graduation*, *Force* resources gained dominance over *Focus* resources. Both groups of researchers were found to employ *Graduation* resources to reinforce rhetorical purposes, such as establishing academic territory and occupying a niche. In the same vein, Cheung and Lau<sup>[23]</sup> examined the use of first-person pronouns in journal articles from two disciplines and discovered that these voice elements show varied degrees of authorial voice according to disciplinary conventions. Similarly, Hanks et al.<sup>[36]</sup> examined the types and presentations of citations in the introduction and literature review sections of journal articles across six disciplines. Their research highlighted notable variations in citation practices between disciplines and their contribution to the construction of authorial voice.

In the context of L2 academic writing, research has also enquired into how L2 writers construct their authorial voice. Zhao<sup>[28]</sup> explored the concept of authorial voice strength in L2 argumentative writing by developing and validating an analytic rubric. Through factor analysis of ratings from six raters on 400 TOEFL iBT writing samples and qualitative think-aloud and interview data, she identified three dimensions of authorial voice in written discourse: the presence and clarity of ideas, the manner of presentation, and the interaction between writer and reader. These findings offered a refined understanding of how authorial voice is realized in L2 writing, emphasizing the importance of content clarity and rhetorical strategies in building a strong authorial presence. Building upon this analytic rubric, Zhao<sup>[43]</sup> investigated the relationship between voice salience and essay quality in timed L2 argumentative writing. She assessed 200 TOEFL iBT essays and found that voice was a significant predictor of essay scores, ex-

plaining approximately 25% of the score variance. Among the dimensions of voice, the ideational dimension, related to the clarity and quality of ideas, proved most predictive of essay quality. Her study pointed to the essential role of voice in L2 writing assessments and its potential as a teachable construct in writing pedagogy. Also employing Zhao's rubric<sup>[28]</sup>, the study by Zabihi et al.<sup>[31]</sup> investigated the association between authorial voice strength and writing quality in argumentative tasks by Iranian L2 learners, with the analytic rubric being used to score 129 writing samples. The results proved that voice strength positively correlated with text quality. Multiple regression analysis revealed that dimensions of voice, particularly the "presence" dimension, were predictive of higher writing scores. However, learners struggled with demonstrating a strong voice, indicating the need for instructional support to develop this skill. Zhao and Liu<sup>[16]</sup> conducted a longitudinal case study on two Chinese EFL graduate students to track the development of authorial voice in their master's theses. By analyzing multiple drafts, advisor feedback, and student perceptions, the study revealed that linguistic features of voice remained static, portraying the writers as unconfident. However, content-related features improved over time, reflecting novice researchers' voices. The findings underscored the developmental nature of authorial voice construction and the importance of interactive feedback in the writing process. Baktash et al.<sup>[44]</sup> examined the effectiveness of explicit and implicit instruction in promoting authorial voice expression among Iranian EFL learners. Over eight sessions, participants were divided into control and treatment groups, with the latter receiving instruction on voice elements based on Hyland's interactional framework<sup>[45]</sup>. Results showed significant improvements in the treatment groups, in which explicit instruction proved more effective in enhancing the use of stance markers. This study once again emphasized the role of pedagogical intervention in raising learners' awareness and competence in expressing authorial voice.

Though strides have been made in research on authorial voice in academic writing, certain gaps remain unfulfilled. Notable among these is the insufficient attention given to evaluative linguistic resources, particularly the Graduation system within the Appraisal framework, which can exert considerable influence over the construction of

authorial voice. Equally notable is the relative neglect of L2 writers' theses, especially the discussion sections, which open spaces for the interpretations and the assertion of voice. This study therefore assumes the role of addressing these gaps by examining the deployment of Graduation resources in the discussion sections of EFL theses, thereby offering more insights into an underexplored aspect of academic writing.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

Drawing on the tradition of SFL research employing the Appraisal as an analytical framework, the present study adopts the descriptive qualitative research design assisted with the UAM Corpus tool. An obvious benefit of this design is its efficiency, as it can be completed in a relatively short period. In addition, findings from descriptive qualitative research can contribute to shaping policies or practices and serve as a foundation for further academic investigation<sup>[46]</sup>. The study explores the use of the *Graduation* resource in scholarly discussion presented in the theses in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (hereafter shortened as 'TESOL theses') written by postgraduate students in the Master of Education programs.

### 3.2. Research Context

The present study set the scene for its survey in Vietnam, where the postgraduate programs in TESOL are offered in English and theses written in English are required as part of the requirements for program completion. Students are prepared for the thesis writing in a two-credit compulsory course of "Academic Writing". As TESOL courses might vary among universities, the present study selected TESOL theses written by students from three universities that have similar Academic Writing courses and thesis requirements.

### 3.3. The Corpus

The corpus for this study consists of 15 TESOL theses, which were collected based on convenience sampling. This approach was chosen for its practicality in accessing the materials as the thesis writers were in the researchers'



scholarly network. While data collected based on this approach might not ensure comprehensive representativeness, it fully aligns with the objectives of the present study, which is a case study.

The corpus totals the word count of 32,026 words ( $M = 2,135.07$ ;  $SD = 921.93$ ). These theses were written in 2024 as part of Master of Education in TESOL at three Vietnamese universities. The universities were selected because they have similar Academic Writing courses and thesis requirements. These considerations would ensure firstly the temporal relevance and secondly the consistency in the academic context of EFL writing while also aligning with the present study's objectives. The focus of the present study is on the Discussion sections of these theses, as this is where authors express their interpretations, engage with existing research, and construct their authorial voice.

### 3.4. Procedure

After collecting the theses, the Discussion sections

were extracted and assigned identifiers (D1 to D15) to ensure confidentiality. The texts were analyzed using the UAM Corpus Tool version 6.2j, a tool commonly used in Appraisal framework studies<sup>[14,47,48]</sup>. Utilizing the available coding scheme in this tool, the annotation process is carried out systematically to classify and analyze the Graduation resources, following the Appraisal framework. The interface of the annotation platform is shown in **Figure 3**. To ensure accuracy and reliability, both authors worked as coders, regularly discussing any discrepancies in annotation. Any discrepancies or ambiguities in the classification of *Graduation* resources were discussed in detail during regular meetings. The authors adopted a consensus-based approach, in which disagreements were resolved through discussion and agreement, which ensures consistency in the annotation. This iterative process of collaboration and consensus-building helped to maintain a high level of reliability in the classification of the *Graduation* resources and ensured that the coding scheme was applied consistently across all the texts.

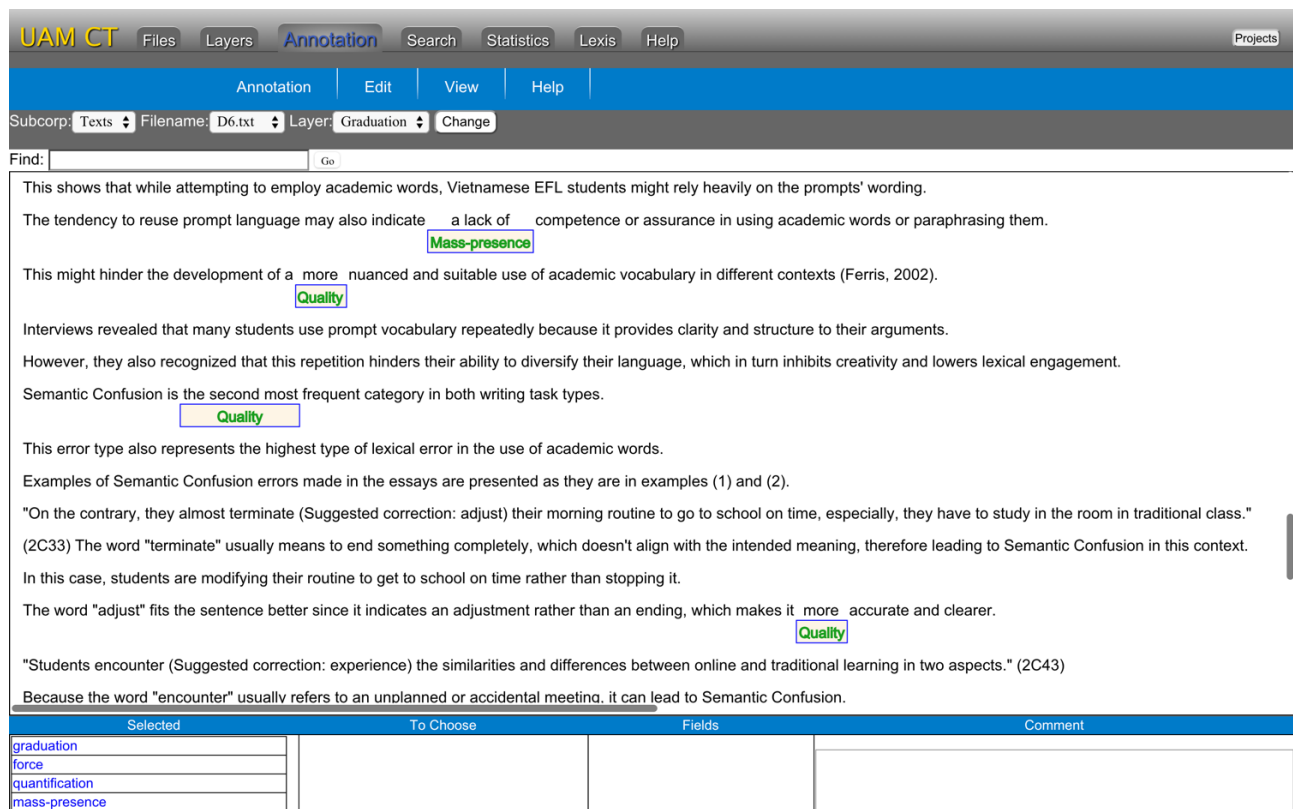


Figure 3. The Interface of UAM Corpus Tool.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Force versus Focus in Authorial Voice Construction

The analysis of the *Graduation* system within the corpus points to the predominance of *Force* (96.7%) over *Focus* (3.3%), as shown in **Table 1**. This suggests that the EFL writers have a greater tendency to modulate intensity and quantity rather than adjust category boundaries in their academic discussions. However, the presence of *Graduation* resources alone does not necessarily equate to the construction of authorial voice. Although some instances reinforce the writer's evaluative stance, others serve purely descriptive functions, which scale meaning without asserting a clear personal position.

**Table 1.** Force versus Focus.

Graduation Type	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Force	231	96.7%
Focus	8	3.3%
Total	239	100%

A closer examination of *Graduation* resources sheds light on three distinct ways in which *Force* and *Focus* contribute to authorial voice: explicit authorial voice, implicit authorial voice, and unclear authorial voice. Explicit authorial voice emerges when the writer clearly signals their stance, using high-intensity modifiers or sharpening distinctions to align themselves with an argument or claim. Implicit authorial voice occurs when the writer moderates their engagement, using *Force* or *Focus* in ways that suggest alignment but do not strongly assert a position. Finally, some uses of *Graduation* function descriptively, ones which structure information without contributing to authorial stance.

Among the instances that project explicit authorial voice, the use of sharpening in *Focus* and highly intensified *Force* plays a crucial role in reinforcing certainty and commitment to a claim. This is evident in cases where the writer employs intensifiers or category-defining expressions to remove ambiguity and strengthen their position.

- (1) It is **indeed** understandable that the students' level influences the teachers' choice of motivational teaching strategies in the current study. (D15)
- (2) This aligns with previous research indicating that

AI tools are **particularly** effective in facilitating vocabulary acquisition and providing instant feedback, which is critical in language learning. (D11)

The use of "indeed" in example (1) functions to eliminate doubt, emphasizing the unquestionable validity of the statement. Similarly, in (2), "particularly effective" amplifies the writer's endorsement of the claim, signaling an active engagement with the scholarly discussion rather than mere reporting. In both cases, the writer does not simply describe a phenomenon but asserts a position, thereby projecting a strong evaluative presence.

More commonly, however, *Force* is used in a way that suggests engagement without fully asserting authorial voice. These cases reflect implicit rather than explicit positioning, where the writer's stance is discernible but not directly stated. In these instances, the degree of intensity or quantity is modulated, but the writer avoids overt commitment to the claim.

- (3) The result reveals that scaffolding strategies are **highly** appreciated by EFL teachers, and used in most of their speaking classes with the aim to support learners with their speaking performance. (D1)
- (4) Engagement with these posts was **relatively** high, which indicates that the members were **quite** successful in attracting participants for their own studies through the group. (D10)
- (5) Moore (1989) noted that learner-learner interaction among members of a class or other group can be an **incredibly** beneficial resource for learning, and in some cases, it was even required because it helped students improve communication skills and can be entertaining and encouraging, particularly for students. (D2)

In example (3), the word "highly" elevates the degree of positive evaluation, but the statement remains detached, presenting the claim as a generalized observation rather than a personally endorsed statement. In (4), "relatively" and "quite" introduce moderation, suggesting a qualified stance rather than a categorical assertion. Similarly, in (5), "incredibly" signals a strong evaluation but remains linked to external sources rather than directly projecting the writer's opinion. This suggests that while EFL writers

in this study do engage with their claims, they often do so cautiously and rely on measured rather than absolute assertions.

There are also instances where *Graduation* resources are used without projecting authorial voice, particularly in descriptive rather than argumentative functions. These cases typically involve quantification-based *Force* or softening in *Focus*, which structure meaning without signaling writer commitment.

(6) The overall perception of AI tools is **largely** positive, with 87.9% of students perceiving AI tools as ranging from “normal” to “very easy” to use, indicating that these tools are **generally** user-friendly. (D11)

(7) Similarly, John & Timperley (2007) assert that praise and rewards are **among the least** effective forms of feedback for learning improvement. (D13)

The words “largely” and “generally” in (6) adjust the degree of evaluation, but the writer’s own stance remains ambiguous, as the statement primarily reports statistical findings rather than engages with them. Likewise, in (7), the softening strategy (e.g., “among the least effective”) attenuates the claim, presenting it as an external assertion rather than a personally held position.

## 4.2. The Breakdown of Force

The distribution of *Force* within the corpus further highlights the dominance of *Intensification* (66.5%) over *Quantification* (30.1%), as shown in **Table 2**. The high occurrence of *Intensification* suggests that these writers are more inclined to amplify evaluations of qualities and processes rather than provide statistical reinforcement for their claims.

**Table 2.** The Breakdown of Force.

Force Type	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Intensification	159	66.5%
Quantification	72	30.1%
Total	231	96.7%

*Intensification* being the most frequently employed resource within *Force* suggests that the writers rely on scalar adjectives and adverbs to reinforce meaning. Depending on their application, *Intensification* may contribute to

authorial voice by signaling engagement with the claim or remain purely descriptive, emphasizing the degree of an attribute without necessarily asserting a position.

(8) This may be **one of the most** impactful ways to progress the learning of each and every student. 81.7% of the participants select some teaching methods that tend to help develop students’ skills which are more likely to be tested on assessment, which helps teachers learn how they can simply and effectively help their students on the road to success through practice in the classroom. (D14)

(9) Vietnamese students exhibit **significantly** higher lexical diversity compared to their Compare/Contrast essays. (D6)

(10) Her **comparatively** higher focus on higher order features was also driven by the adequacy of the students’ proficiency level and the necessity of preparing for their writing tests in which content was weighted higher than other features. (D7)

Example (8) presents a strong instance of *Intensification* where the phrase “one of the most” amplifies the effectiveness of a pedagogical approach. The superlative structure suggests a high degree of confidence, reinforcing explicit authorial stance. Similarly, in (9), “significantly” signals an evaluative perspective, strengthening the claim rather than simply reporting a comparison. However, in (10), “comparatively” introduces a nuanced comparison rather than an absolute assertion, making the claim less categorical. This suggests that while *Intensification* is frequently used, not all instances project a strong authorial voice - some function cautiously, incorporating hedging to temper assertiveness.

In contrast, the role of *Quantification* in constructing authorial voice is more complex: in some cases, it reinforces claims by adding statistical weight, while in others, it merely structures findings without implying personal alignment.

(11) They all share the finding that the scaffolding method has a **considerable** impact on raising students’ speaking abilities. Scaffolding can be employed as a different instructional approach that helps students’ speaking skills. (D1)

(12) According to Singh et al. (2021), the highly contagious coronavirus infection 2019 (COVID-19)



has had a **substantial** impact on many institutions around the world, including higher education, public and private school systems. (D2)

(13) Therefore, in spite of the fact that **a list of** motivational teaching strategies in listening lessons was provided, EFL teachers simply chose ones that were appropriate for their teaching context based on the various reasons presented. (D15)

(14) This study revealed **many** remarkable results which will be presented in this part. (D5)

The adjective “considerable” in (11) suggests a strong evaluative position, reinforcing the importance of the finding rather than merely reporting it. Similarly, “substantial” in (12) enhances the claim by quantifying its magnitude, suggesting engagement rather than neutrality. However, “a list of” and “many” in (13 and (14) serve organizational purposes rather than contributing to authorial stance. These instances construct information rather than indicate alignment, demonstrating that while *Quantification* can enhance evaluative meaning, it is not always a marker of voice.

### 4.3. The Breakdown of Intensification

The further breakdown of *Intensification* into *Quality* and *Process*, as shown in **Table 3**, reveals that the majority of instances (65.3%) are associated with quality, while process-related intensifications are minimal (1.3%). EFL writers in the present study predominantly strengthen the degree of descriptive attributes, such as evaluations of effectiveness, challenges, or significance, rather than directly emphasizing the intensity of actions or processes.

**Table 3.** The Breakdown of Intensification.

Intensification Type	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Quality	156	65.3%
Process	3	1.3%
Total	159	66.5%

Instances of quality-based *Intensification* that signal an explicit evaluative stance can be seen in the following examples:

(15) In general, both teachers made use of both kinds of feedback explicitness since each kind had its own benefits, but there was a **notable** emphasis on direct one. (D7)

(16) In terms of the Vietnamese context, this study

highlights the **heightened** challenges students face due to limited exposure to diverse accents and abstract topics. (D8)

The use of “notable” in (15) enhances the writer’s assertion about the emphasis on direct feedback, reinforcing the significance of this aspect within the study. In the same vein, the word “heightened” in (16) amplifies the challenges faced by students, signaling a rather strong evaluative stance rather than a neutral observation. These intensifications reflect explicit authorial voice, as they amplify the writer’s interpretation of the findings rather than merely reporting information.

On the other hand, some instances of quality-based *Intensification* contribute to implicit rather than explicit authorial presence, where the writer adjusts intensity without fully asserting their stance:

(17) After evaluative feedback, students commonly gave remarks on form in their peers’ writing. In fact, feedback on form was **far more** prevalent than feedback on content. (D9)

(18) However, considering the **relatively** high proportion of indirect form-focused feedback, it is more likely that the students lacked knowledge of effective revision strategies. (D9)

Here, “far more” in (17) strengthens the contrast between feedback on form and content, but the writer does not explicitly state an evaluative position - rather, they frame it as an observed tendency. Likewise, “relatively” in (18) tempers the assertion, signaling uncertainty or caution, which diminishes the forcefulness of the claim. Such instances suggest that while EFL writers make use of *Intensification*, they often hedge their statements to possibly align with academic conventions, potentially to avoid overgeneralization.

In contrast to quality-based *Intensification*, process-based *Intensification* appears infrequently (1.3%) in the corpus, suggesting that these writers are less likely to emphasize the intensity of actions or occurrences. The limited occurrence of this type of *Intensification* may indicate that EFL writers are more inclined toward describing qualities rather than strengthening the portrayal of actions in their writing.

(19) When there is a cooperative and encouraging setting in the classroom, learning is **consider-**

ably improved. (D1)

- (20) They state that students **significantly** improved in their fluency, grammar, lexicon, and pronunciation while using the four scaffoldings. (D1)

In these examples, “considerably” and “significantly” strengthen the depiction of change, highlighting a positive outcome of a pedagogical intervention. While these instances of process-based *Intensification* contribute to evaluative discourse, they do not project a strong personal stance from the writer. Instead, the emphasis remains on reporting observable outcomes, suggesting that EFL writers rely more heavily on modulating descriptive statements rather than making direct claims about processes.

#### 4.4. The Breakdown of Quantification

**Table 4** details the breakdown of *Quantification* within the corpus. The majority of instances pertain to *Mass/Presence* (18.4%), followed by *Number* (10.0%), and finally *Extent* (1.7%). This distribution indicates that while EFL writers do scale meaning in terms of quantity, presence, and extent, their use of these resources remains more constrained than their reliance on *Intensification*.

**Table 4.** The Breakdown of Quantification.

Quantification Type	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Number	24	10.0%
Mass/Presence	44	18.4%
Extent	4	1.7%
Total	72	30.1%

Instances of *Quantification* that contribute to authorial voice are often those that signal a deliberate evaluation of scope, particularly when writers make use of mass/presence and extent to frame the significance of their claims. The use of number-based *Quantification*, on the other hand, appears to be more neutral, often structuring information rather than reflecting a distinct evaluative stance. In the case of number-based *Quantification*, EFL writers tend to enumerate elements within their argument, often presenting findings in terms of frequency rather than engaging in explicit evaluation.

- (21) Opinion essays compared to their Compare/Contrast essays can be due to the frequent exposure to and emphasis on vocabulary development in Opinion essays, which helps students gain confi-

dence and proficiency in employing **a variety of** lexical items. (D6)

- (22) Hence, they were likely unfamiliar with academic writing and made **numerous** vocabulary and grammatical mistakes that needed to be addressed. (D7)

- (23) In several instances, the participants would start their feedback with remarks on **several** positive features in their peers’ work. (D9)

In these examples, the use of “a variety of”, “numerous”, and “several” contributes to clarifying the scale of what is being discussed. However, these instances do not necessarily project a clear authorial stance, as they function primarily as informational tools to quantify findings rather than to position the writer within the academic debate. This suggests that number-based *Quantification* in this corpus serves more of a descriptive function rather than an evaluative one, meaning it plays a limited role in shaping authorial presence.

Conversely, mass/presence-based *Quantification* appears to be more evaluative, as it frequently occurs in statements that gauge the magnitude of an impact or the availability of resources, subtly positioning the writer’s interpretation within the discussion.

- (24) ICT provides learners and educators with **limitless** opportunities to access authentic resources to support their English learning objectives. (D2)

- (25) The teachers state that the students have a positive attitude in learning to write, but **too much** feedback will make students pressured and not effective in their learning outcomes. (D3)

- (26) Opinion essays of EFL Vietnamese students tend to have **greater** lexical richness compared to their Compare/Contrast essays, with higher lexical diversity, slightly higher lexical density, and higher lexical sophistication in terms of mid-frequent vocabulary. (D6)

In (24), “limitless” suggests a strong evaluative stance, implying an unrestricted and highly beneficial potential of ICT resources. This signals authorial engagement, as the phrase intensifies the perceived importance of ICT tools rather than simply describing their presence. Similarly, the phrase “too much” in (25) implies a negative assessment, subtly critiquing an excessive focus on

feedback as counterproductive. This instance, albeit more implicit, reflects authorial voice, as it suggests evaluation rather than neutral description. Finally, “greater” in (26) introduces comparison, positioning the claim within a broader discourse of writing proficiency. This shows that mass/presence-based *Quantification*, in contrast to number-based *Quantification*, is more interpretative, as it involves judgment regarding significance, availability, or sufficiency.

The final category, extent-based *Quantification*, appears the least frequently (1.7%) but contributes meaningfully to evaluative discourse, as it typically amplifies the degree of an effect or influence.

- (27) The scaffolding strategy creates **more** supportive learning environments where students can provide mutual assistance to increase speaking exposure. (D1)
- (28) In the domain of fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, it can be indicated from the results that scaffolding strategies **greatly** contribute to learners’ speaking performance. (D1)
- (29) Educationalists have **long** been interested in the impact of time on classroom learning, according to Anderson (1984). (D2)

In example (27), “more” suggests evaluation, as it implies an increase in effectiveness through scaffolding. Meanwhile, “greatly” in (28) reflects an explicitly strong evaluation, reinforcing the perceived impact of scaffolding strategies on fluency and pronunciation. In (29), however, “long” emphasizes historical relevance, situating the discussion within an established academic tradition. These instances of extent-based *Quantification* reveal a greater inclination toward evaluative positioning, indicating that when EFL writers do employ this resource, they often do so with the intent of reinforcing the importance or significance of a claim.

#### 4.5. The Breakdown of Focus

**Table 5** delineates the sub-categories of *Focus*. Within this category, *Sharpen* (2.1%) is slightly more prevalent than *Soften* (1.3%). Despite its limited use, *Focus* remains significant in understanding how EFL writers frame certainty, typicality, and marginality within their arguments.

**Table 5.** The Breakdown of Focus.

Focus Type	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Soften	3	1.3%
Sharpen	5	2.1%
Total	8	3.3%

A closer look at *Soften* within *Focus* suggests that when EFL writers do employ this resource, they tend to mitigate certainty and reduce categorical strength, allowing for greater flexibility in their claims. This often reflects a cautious approach to academic positioning, as writers avoid absolute classifications and instead present arguments in a qualified or hedged manner.

- (30) Similarly, John and Timperley (2007) assert that praise and rewards are **among the least** effective forms of feedback for learning improvement. (D13)
- (31) Among a number of reasons collected from the interview section, teachers considered that they chose motivational teaching strategies to use in listening lessons could be due **partly** effective strategies perceived by teachers and students. (D15)

In these examples, *Soften* weakens categorical distinctions by moving a concept away from a core prototype. In (30), “among the least effective” suggests a degree of effectiveness, rather than an outright rejection of praise and rewards. In example (31), the use of “partly effective” signals an uncertainty or partial endorsement, which allows for interpretative openness. These instances indicate that when EFL writers engage with *Soften*, it is primarily to avoid rigid classifications, which may reflect a hesitancy to commit fully to evaluative claims.

By contrast, *Sharpen* functions to intensify category alignment, reinforcing the prototypical nature of a concept and removing ambiguity. Although used slightly more frequently than *Soften*, the presence of *Sharpen* remains relatively minimal within the corpus, suggesting that while some writers assert strong categorical distinctions, most remain reluctant to make definitive claims.

- (32) This appears to be **particularly true** for difficult conceptual learning. (D2)
- (33) This may be attributed to the fact that they are **typical** activities for intercultural approaches in non-formal and informal settings, not in a for-

mal educational context. (D4)

- (34) The capacity to self-regulate is **undoubtedly** beneficial to a student in peer feedback activities as they can independently solve problems and subsequently enhance the quality of their writing. (D9)

In these examples, *Sharpen* reinforces categorical certainty, indicating a higher degree of commitment to a claim. The word “particularly” in (32) emphasizes the definitive validity of the statement, leaving little room for counterarguments. Similarly, the use of “typical” in (33) marks the activities as standard or expected within a given context, strengthening the writer’s assertion. In (34), “undoubtedly” removes uncertainty, positioning self-regulation as an unquestionably valuable skill. These instances suggest that while *Sharpen* enables a more assertive stance, its relatively low occurrence reflects a broader tendency among EFL writers to avoid definitive classifications.

## 4. Discussion

The findings of this study uncover the tendency of *Graduation* usage among the EFL writers. To address the first research question, which asks about the patterns of *Graduation* resources used by EFL writers to construct their authorial voice, the analysis revealed a clear predominance of force-based resources. The writers predominantly employ force-based *Graduation*, particularly *Intensification*, in constructing meaning within their academic discussions, whereas focus-based *Graduation* is used much less frequently. Such a pattern echoes with Zhang and Cheung<sup>[37]</sup>, who observed a similar preference in academic discourse, where writers emphasized strengthening or weakening meanings through *Quantification* and *Intensification* rather than through sharpening or softening categorical distinctions. *Graduation* resources help modulate meaning; however, not all instances explicitly project authorial voice.

Regarding the second research question, which inquires how these patterns shape the authorial voice, the results suggest that the predominant use of *Intensification* contributes to an explicit authorial voice in some cases, while in others, it results in implicit or unclear voice. Therefore, the EFL writers’ use of *Graduation* resources

in academic discussion can be categorized into three levels of authorial voice: explicit, implicit, and unclear. Explicit authorial voice emerges when intensifiers or sharpening devices reinforce a strong writerly stance. In contrast, implicit authorial voice occurs when *Graduation* resources signal engagement but do not overtly assert the writer’s position. Lastly, some instances of *Graduation* do not contribute to authorial voice but instead function descriptively, where scaling meaning serves informational purposes rather than reflecting the writer’s stance. This reinforces the argument that voice in writing is a multi-dimensional construct influenced by both linguistic choices and reader interpretation<sup>[2, 49]</sup>.

By favoring force-based *Graduation*, EFL writers tend to reinforce the strength of their claims rather than redefine conceptual boundaries through *Focus*. The frequent use of quality-based *Intensification* and mass-based *Quantification* over precise numerical expressions suggests an attempt to assert significance without necessarily providing empirical specificity. This reliance on amplification rather than nuanced rhetorical distinctions reflects a strategy aimed at enhancing persuasion while maintaining academic credibility. While this approach allows writers to project an evaluative and engaged stance, it may also lead to a more descriptive than critically engaged voice, limiting deeper interaction with existing research.

These findings hold significant pedagogical implications for academic writing instruction, particularly for L2 writers. The predominance of force-based *Graduation* suggests that EFL writers have a fundamental awareness of how to modulate meaning in academic discourse. However, their frequent reliance on implicit authorial voice and moderated *Intensification* indicates a need for explicit instruction in voice projection to strengthen their evaluative stance. Research has demonstrated that targeted pedagogical interventions can improve L2 writers’ ability to use stance markers effectively<sup>[50]</sup>. To support this, Zhang and Liu<sup>[16]</sup> advocate for more explicit instruction on voice-related linguistic features, emphasizing the importance of helping students develop a clearer awareness of how their linguistic choices shape authorial identity. Similarly, Bakhtash et al.<sup>[44]</sup> found that both explicit and implicit instruction on stance markers improved writing performance, enabling learners to more effectively convey their presence,



evaluation, and engagement with their topics. Practical classroom activities can further support this development, such as analyzing sample texts to explore how linguistic choices influence reader perception of writer voice, conducting textual analyses of expert writing in students' disciplines, and engaging in guided revision exercises to refine voice projection.

(a). What are the patterns of Graduation resource EFL writers frequently employ to construct their authorial voice in academic discussion?

(b). How do these patterns of Graduation resource usage shape their authorial voice?

## 5. Conclusions

This study shows that EFL writers predominantly rely on force-based *Graduation*, particularly *Intensification* and *Quantification*, rather than focus-based *Graduation*, to construct their authorial voice in academic discussion. This preference suggests a tendency to emphasize argument strength through amplification rather than redefining categorical distinctions. Additionally, the findings indicate that authorial voice can be categorized into explicit, implicit, and unclear levels, depending on how *Graduation* resources are employed. While this approach enhances persuasiveness and academic credibility, greater awareness of how *Graduation* interacts with authorial stance could further support EFL writers in refining their voice. These insights highlight the necessity of explicit instruction on *Graduation* use to help writers develop a more confident and nuanced academic voice. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on authorial voice in EFL academic writing by providing insights into how *Graduation* resources shape meaning within scholarly discussions. Further research may explore how explicit instruction in *Graduation* resources could enhance L2 writers' ability to construct a confident and well-positioned authorial voice.

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Conceptualization, L.-H.V.; methodology, L.-H.V. and L.V.L.; data collection, L.-H.V.; data analysis, L.-H.V. and L.V.L.; original draft preparation, L.-H.V.; review and editing, L.-H.V. and L.V.L.; visualization, L.-H.V. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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