



## STANCE COMPLEMENT CLAUSES CONTROLLED BY ADJECTIVES IN ESL AND EFL STUDENTS' ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS

by

Adinda Puspa Nur Faiz\*

Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

[adindapuspanurfaiz@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:adindapuspanurfaiz@mail.ugm.ac.id)

Aris Munandar

Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

[arismunandar@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:arismunandar@mail.ugm.ac.id)

\*corresponding author

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### Abstract:

Stance becomes an important evaluative discourse feature that aids writers in conveying their arguments effectively. Studies have focused on comparing the stance of non-native speakers of English to that of native speakers and have not yet addressed the issue between English learners from different contexts. This study analyzes stance complement clauses controlled by adjectives by Singaporean ESL and Indonesian EFL students. It aims to uncover the frequency and distribution of stances and to explain why Singaporean students' stances differ from those of their Indonesian EFL counterparts. This study used quantitative and qualitative methods. The chi-squared test was carried out to determine whether there was a significant difference. The data were extracted from a sub-written ICNALE corpus, the essays by Singaporean and Indonesian students at the B1 2 level. The chi-squared test indicates there is a significant difference. The results reveal a higher use of stance adjectives among Singaporean ESL students compared to Indonesian EFL students. This study has important implications. Explicit teaching and learning of stance features used adequately in the argument's structure are needed, especially highlighting adjectival repertoire for variety and nuance to the EFL students' stance.

**Keywords:** *Argumentative writing, ESL and EFL, L2 writing, stance, stance adjectives*

### Abstrak:

*Sikap menjadi fitur wacana evaluatif penting yang membantu penulis dalam menyampaikan argumen mereka secara efektif. Studi telah berfokus pada membandingkan sikap penutur bahasa Inggris non-asli dengan penutur asli dan belum membahas masalah antara pelajar bahasa Inggris dari konteks yang berbeda. Studi ini menganalisis klausa pelengkap sikap yang dikendalikan oleh kata sifat oleh siswa ESL Singapura dan EFL Indonesia. Ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap frekuensi dan distribusi sikap dan untuk menjelaskan mengapa sikap mahasiswa Singapura berbeda dari rekan-rekan EFL Indonesia mereka. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Uji chi-kuadrat dilakukan untuk menentukan apakah ada perbedaan yang signifikan. Data tersebut diekstraksi dari korpus ICNALE yang ditulis, esai oleh mahasiswa Singapura dan Indonesia di tingkat B1 2. Uji chi-kuadrat menunjukkan ada perbedaan yang signifikan. Hasilnya mengungkapkan penggunaan kata sifat sikap yang lebih tinggi di antara siswa ESL Singapura dibandingkan dengan siswa EFL Indonesia. Penelitian ini memiliki implikasi penting. Pengajaran dan pembelajaran eksplisit tentang fitur sikap yang digunakan secara memadai dalam struktur argumen diperlukan, terutama menyoroti repertoire kata sifat untuk variasi dan nuansa sikap siswa EFL.*

**Kata kunci:** *penulisan argumentatif, ESL dan EFL, penulisan L2, pendirian, kata sifat pendirian*

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## INTRODUCTION

*Stance*, writers' assessment, or personal attitude of the propositional information (Biber, 2006; Biber et al., 1999), has recently been the topic of many studies. These studies have agreed upon the significance of stance features in conveying arguments effectively and improving writing quality (Lee & Deakin, 2016; Min et al., 2019). Higher education students are unquestionably required to be able to write. Argumentative essays are among the most common academic tasks assigned to undergraduate students (Hyland, 1990; Mei, 2006). Argumentative essays, such as persuasive texts (Hyland, 2019), require writers to argue about something they believe to be truthful (Coirier & Golder, 1993); the writers have to manage persuasiveness and reliability accordingly. Writing academic assignments is already demanding, but for non-native speakers of English (NNS), such argumentative essays, which require complex writing techniques (Meyer, 2005), could be even more daunting (Min et al., 2019).

There are a considerable number of studies on stance features examined in different texts. Most existing studies have primarily focused on the analysis of stance features in academic research writings, such as research articles (Jiang, 2015; Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2022; Loi et al., 2016; Peacock, 2015), theses and dissertations (Akoto & Afful, 2020; Jalali, 2017), critique essays (Al Zumor, 2021), and academic essays (Sabzevar et al., 2020). However, stance features can also be identified in non-discipline-related writings; some scholars have studied stances in letters, complaints, and opinion texts (Pyykönen, 2023) and editorial newspapers (Ahmad et al., 2020). Nonetheless, such discussions in argumentative writing have not yet received adequate attention.

It is reasonable that the above-mentioned studies on stance features focus primarily on academic and discipline-specific writing. That is because stance features have become a crucial discourse strategy for academic authors, who are expected to engage in scholarly discussion within their disciplinary communities. They utilize stance features crucially to express their attitudes and evaluations and anticipate diss/disagreement from peers in the community (Hyland, 2005; Soler, 2002). However, examining stance features in students' argumentative writing is equally relevant and important. Argumentative texts require

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persuasive reasoning, critical thinking, and a strong argument. In composing such texts, writers must not only pay attention to discourse organization (Nirwanto, 2021) and argument structure (Amaliah et al., 2024; Turmudi, 2020), but also consider their attitudes and evaluations, which are equally important (Uccelli et al., 2013). Research suggests that stance features play a significant role in supporting arguments (Aull & Lancaster, 2014) and improving writing quality (Ho & Li, 2018; Min et al., 2019).

Adjectives are among the most overtly evaluative lexical items, such as those used in attributive or predicative syntactic roles, e.g., *Oh, that is nice*, or *We all thought it was an excellent value* (Biber et al., 1999, p. 968). However, such examples do not always overtly mark stance, as their evaluative meanings often depend on contextual cues and the reader's interpretation. Adjectives can often be used for descriptive purposes, which do not explicitly express stance. A study by Zareva (2018) analyzes evaluative adjectives in students' presentations. It reveals that students use adjectives instead for classification (e.g., *initial* stage, *lexical* competence, *implicit* learning, etc.). A study by Wang and Liu (2022) also seems to analyze adjectives in a general context, viewed from students' vocabulary competence. Although adjectives hold significant potential as evaluative devices, their role as stance markers has not been thoroughly explored. Therefore, it is important to observe their use in argumentative writing.

Following Biber et al. (1999) stance is overtly expressed through specific grammatical structures, e.g., adjectives controlling *that*- and *to*-clauses – lexico-grammatical features of stance. The features include modal verbs, stance adverbials, and stance complement clauses controlled by verbs, adjectives, and nouns, (p. 969). Talking about previous studies, the attention is to a specific stance feature, e.g., modal verbs (Ahmad et al., 2020; Moafian et al., 2018), adverbs (Pérez-Paredes & Díez-Bedmar, 2019), complement clauses controlled by verbs (Kozáčiková, 2021) or nouns (Jiang, 2015; Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2022). Nevertheless, these studies have not particularly explored stance complement clauses controlled by adjectives.

Biber and his peers' works on "stance" highly highlight linguistics-based and corpus-based analyses. The analyses have been thoroughly done in various texts and genres in academic research writings (Gray & Biber, 2015), in press, editorials, official documents,

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prose, fiction, spontaneous speeches, and broadcasts (Biber & Finegan, 1988, 1989). The researchers argue that they have provided one solid framework amidst other frameworks of stance. The framework serves grammatical structures with a detailed categorization of forms and meanings. Biber et al. (1999) categorize stance into three semantic categories: epistemic, attitude, and style of speaking. The current study focuses on epistemic and attitudinal stance since the style of speaking is rarely used. Epistemic stance marks how writers are sure about the truth of the information, while attitudinal stance refers to writers' judgment or personal attitudes. The lexico-grammatical constructions and examples are presented in Table 1.

Furthermore, scholars have frequently compared the English of Foreign Language (EFL) learners to that of native English speakers (ENS). They have successfully compared stance features in argumentative writings by Hong Kong students (Barbara et al., 2024), Thai students (Papangkorn & Phoocharoensil, 2021), and Chinese students (Jiang, 2015; Lee & Deakin, 2016), all compared to their English native counterparts. These studies often lead to a general pattern that EFL student writers tend to use fewer stance features than native English writers. For example, Chinese EFL students use fewer stance nouns than their counterparts (Jiang, 2015) and utilize fewer stance adverbs and complement clauses (Lee & Deakin, 2016). This lack of stance use is believed to contribute to argument effectiveness (Jiang, 2015) and possibly to its quality. Similarly, Iranian EFL tended to be less aware of stance-taking, particularly in academic writing, using modal verbs (Moafian et al., 2018). Despite the growing attention paid to EFL writers, there is still a limited understanding of how stance features are used by English learners from ESL and EFL contexts.

The distinction between ESL and EFL is related to Kachru's three concentric circles (1990): Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle. The inner circle refers to English native-speaking countries, such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. The outer circle includes countries such as Singapore, which recognize English as a second language. On the other hand, the expanding circle consists of countries where English is considered a foreign language, like Indonesia (see Bautista & Gonzalez, 2006). Therefore, there is a distinct English language exposure and language input between ESL and EFL learners of English. Studies have revealed the differences between the two groups regarding writing complexity, accuracy, and fluency

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(Barrot & Gabinete, 2021) and lexical-syntactic features and sophistication (Yoo & Kim, 2023; Zhang & Kang, 2022).

Thus, the current study aims to compare Singaporean ESL and Indonesian EFL students, assuming that the distinct use of stance would also possibly exist among the two groups. This study focuses on complement clauses controlled by adjectives. Stance complement clauses are one of the most commonly used stance devices after modal verbs. In contrast, most stance expressions use verbs as the controlling words; it is also common for adjectives (Biber et al., 1999, p. 979). This study is worth conducting since it offers a brand-new discussion of the established discussion and has practical and pedagogical implications. The comparative analysis guides the researchers in describing how the two groups express their stances. This study will be insightful for NNS student writers, as it will familiarize them with adjectival stance markers, which can serve as beneficial linguistic resources to improve their writing.

The following research questions guided this study in describing and explaining the frequency and distribution of the stance in Singaporean ESL and Indonesian EFL students' argumentative essays.

1. What is the frequency and distribution of stance adjectives found in Singaporean ESL and Indonesian EFL students' argumentative essays? Is there any significant difference?
2. Why do the stance adjectives employed by Singaporean ESL differ from those used by Indonesian EFL students in their argumentative essays?

## METHOD

### *Design*

The current study used a quantitative-qualitative approach. It focuses on two variables: stance in Singaporean ESL and Indonesian EFL students' argumentative essays. The data were extracted from the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE) developed by Dr. Shin'ichiro Ishikawa from Kobe University, Japan. The

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researchers used the ICNALE corpus because they believed it was suitable to support the research's objective of conducting a comparative analysis between English learners from different language learning contexts, which could offer implications for language education (Ishikawa, 2013, 2023).

***Participant***

The Written Essays (WE) module consists of collections of argumentative essays written by English learners from 10 Asian countries, both ESL and EFL countries, and English native speakers. The corpus had set the writing task and requested the learners to state their opinions on the topics, i.e., "It is important for college students to have a part-time job" and "Smoking should be completely banned at all restaurants in the country". They have to write a 200 to 300-word essay on each topic in 20-40 minutes without using dictionaries or other sources.

The researchers built specialized corpora: Singaporean ESL and Indonesian EFL. The two groups of students were selected to represent the ESL and EFL contexts, respectively. They are first- and second-year college students majoring in social sciences, the sciences, and technology.

The ICNALE has mapped the students' proficiency levels based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) proficiency bands, i.e., A2, B1\_1, B1\_2, and B2+. However, this study only selected students at the B1\_2 (Threshold Upper) level to avoid the influence of the gap in language proficiency. Furthermore, students at this level are assumed to have a general linguistic ability to precisely define and explain concepts (Council of Europe, 2025). In sum, the Singaporean ESL corpus has 37,450 words (82 students), while the Indonesian EFL corpus has 36,866 words (80 students).

***Instrument***

This study employed lexico-grammatical features developed by Biber et al. (1999). Notably, the table focused on stance adjectives used to control *that*- and *to*-clauses. Table 1 summarizes the framework adapted from Biber's studies (2006; Biber et al., 1999; Gray & Biber, 2015).

Table 1: stance complement clauses controlled by the adjective's framework

<b>1. Stance adjectives + that-complement clauses</b>	
<i>Epistemic: Certainty</i>	<i>e.g., apparent, certain, clear</i>
<i>Epistemic: Likelihood</i>	<i>e.g., doubtful, (un)likely, possible</i>
<i>Emotion/attitude</i>	<i>e.g., afraid, amazed, concerned</i>
<i>Evaluation</i>	<i>e.g., amazing, appropriate, crucial</i>
<b>2. Stance adjectives + to-complement clauses</b>	
<i>Epistemic: Certainty</i>	<i>e.g., certain, sure</i>
<i>Epistemic: Likelihood</i>	<i>e.g., (un)likely, prone</i>
<i>Emotion/attitude</i>	<i>e.g., afraid, ashamed, annoyed, glad</i>
<i>Ability or willingness</i>	<i>e.g., (un)able, keen, ready, welcome</i>
<i>Ease or difficulty</i>	<i>e.g., difficult, easy, hard</i>
<i>Evaluation</i>	<i>e.g., appropriate, bad/worse, good/better/best, important</i>

The categorization of the adjectives needs some careful consideration. As stance markers, epistemic stance adjectives are those that are used to express certainty, doubt, or accuracy of propositional information. In contrast, attitudinal stance adjectives express feelings and evaluations. Categorizing epistemic adjectives is relatively easy, but not with attitudinal stance adjectives. Biber and peers (1999) also said that distinguishing the meanings of attitudes and emotions is challenging (p. 974).

While the framework in Table 1 is fully adapted from Biber's studies, the categorization is also guided by the typology of adjectives by Dixon & Aikhenvald (2004). Semantically, the word class adjective has thirteen semantic types: Dimension, Age, Value, Colour, Physical property, Human propensity, Speed, Difficulty, Similarity, Qualification, Quantification, Position, and Cardinal numbers. Attitudes and emotions reflect the adjectives in the Human propensity type, dealing with how humans behave and feel emotions, e.g., *happy, proud, ashamed, and angry*. On the other hand, evaluation reflects the adjectives in Value and Qualification type related to one's judgment of qualities, e.g., *good, bad, crucial, important, usual, normal, and appropriate*. Furthermore, these meanings can be identified by observing their predicative syntactic role.

Stance constructions studied in the current study have either explicit or implicit attribution. Explicit attribution is explicitly attributed to the writer, commonly using the first person subject (e.g., *I am sure that...*). Implicit attribution is less explicit but refers to the writers' assessment (e.g., *It may be surprising that...*). The other included constructions are

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extra-posed clauses that use the pronoun *it* in the main clause. In brief, the focus of the current study is stance expressions that reflect the personal stance of the writers, so it excludes those attributed to the addressee as second or third person (see Biber, 2006).

***Data collecting and analysis technique***

This study utilized the corpus analysis toolkit AntConc 4.2.2 (Anthony, 2005). The search term feature was used to search specific keywords, focusing on adjectives (in Table 1) that were mainly used to control complement clauses (*that-* and *to-*clause). Then, the researchers verified the constructions by observing them in the Key Word in Context (KWIC) feature. The selected stance constructions were collected and categorized in line with the Biber et al. stance framework (1999).

To answer research question 1 (RQ1), the nominal data on stance frequency were first counted as raw frequency (F) and then normalized to 10,000 words (Normal) to facilitate an accurate comparison between the two corpora, which have different word counts. Next, this study used a chi-squared test. The chi-squared test helped reveal whether the difference in stance adjectives between the two groups was significant. The current study chose the chi-squared test since scholars frequently use it in their corpus-based studies on stance.

After the quantitative analysis, the researchers continued to conduct qualitative analysis. To answer research question 2 (RQ2), the researchers used the quantitative results to describe the results in the two groups. Then, the researchers elaborated on the functional use. In this step, the researchers discussed and interpreted the differences between the two groups using previous related literature. Finally, the implications and conclusions were drawn. The researchers used a Chi-squared test to determine if the result was statistically significant. Qualitatively, the analysis described the distribution and interpreted the functions of stance in the two groups.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

***Result***

The total number of stances in the Singaporean ESL corpus is 130 (35), and 71 (19) in the Indonesian EFL corpus (see Tables 3 and 4). The chi-squared test result in Table 2 shows there is a significant difference.

**Table 2. Chi-squared test result of stance complement clauses controlled by adjectives**

<i>N</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>X<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>p-value</i>
54	1	4.741	0.029

The total number of stance complement clauses controlled by adjectives across the two corpora is 54. After it is equally divided, the expected occurrence of each corpus is 27. The number indicates that the observed occurrences differ significantly from the expected ones, with notably higher values in the Singaporean ESL corpus. The chi-squared test reveals that  $X^2 (1, N = 54) = 4.741, p\text{-value} = 0.029$ , which means  $p < 0.05$ . In other words, there is a significant difference in the occurrence of stance adjectives across the two corpora.

***Distribution of stance complement clauses controlled by adjectives***

Table 3 presents the distribution of stance complement clauses controlled by adjectives in the two corpora.

**Table 3. Distribution of that- and to-clause across the corpora**

<b>Complement Clauses</b>	<b>Singaporean ESL</b>		<b>Indonesian EFL</b>	
	<b>F (Normal)</b>	<b>Proposition</b>	<b>F (Normal)</b>	<b>Proposition</b>
<i>That-clause</i>	19 (5)	14%	12 (3)	16%
<i>To-clause</i>	111 (30)	86%	59 (16)	84%
<b>Total</b>	<b>130 (35)</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>71 (19)</b>	<b>100%</b>

As seen in Table 3, it is clear that both ESL and EFL students frequently employ stance adjectives controlling the *to*-clause, as the propositions are higher than 80% of overall use. ESL students have 111 (30) cases against EFL students, with 59 (16) cases. The results show that the former group employs more stances than the latter group. Meanwhile, for *that*-clause, both groups appear to use it with no significant difference. ESL students have 19 (5) cases in use, while the EFL counterparts have 12 (3), but fewer. However, ESL students take more assertive stances than EFL students.

The complement clauses distribution indicates that stance adjectives used across the two corpora are common in controlling the *to*-clause, significantly outnumbering "*that-clause*" in marking students' assessment and evaluation.

***Distribution of semantic categories of stance adjectives***

Table 4 shows the distribution of semantic categories and meanings of stance adjectives in Singaporean ESL and Indonesian EFL students' essays.

***Table 4. Distribution of the meanings of stance adjectives meanings***

Semantic Category	Meaning expressed	Singaporean ESL		Indonesian EFL	
		F (Normal)	Proposition	F (Normal)	Proposition
Epistemic Stance	Certainty	5 (1.3)	65%	9 (2)	100%
	Likelihood	3 (0.8)	35%	0	0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>8 (2)</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>9 (2)</b>	<b>100%</b>
Attitudinal Stance	Emotion	0	0%	1 (0.3)	4%
	Ability or willingness	5 (1.3)	4%	3 (0.8)	5%
	Ease or difficulty	9 (2.4)	7%	18 (4.8)	28%
	Evaluation	108 (29)	89%	40 (10.8)	63%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>122 (33)</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>62 (17)</b>	<b>100%</b>

The distribution of semantic categories of stance adjectives between the two groups is different. By observing the normalized frequency, the total frequency of attitudinal stance appears more frequently in ESL students' essays, with 122 (33) occurrences, surpassing the EFL counterparts with 62 (17) occurrences. Meanwhile, the total epistemic stance used is similar, with no significant gap. The Singaporean ESL group has 8 (2) cases, while the EFL group has 9 (2) cases. On the other hand, the EFL group likely tends to use a more certain epistemic stance than ESL students.

By observing each stance's meaning, EFL students use epistemic certainty more frequently than their ESL counterparts, with 9 (2) cases against 5 (1.3). ESL students use epistemic likelihood, whereas it is absent in the EFL counterpart group, as evidenced by the results, which show 3 (0.8) cases against zero. Regarding other meanings, ESL students outnumber EFL students in terms of ability, willingness, and evaluation.

The total number of ability or willingness adjectives in the ESL group is 5 (1.3) cases against 3 (0.8) in the EFL group. Notably, the occurrence of evaluation adjectives shows a significant distinction. The latter group has 108 (29) cases, but the former has 40 (10.8). Interestingly, the EFL students are found to use these stance adjectives more than their ESL counterparts; those are emotive with 1 (0.3) cases and ease or difficulty adjectives with 18 (4.8) cases.

***Stance adjectives to convey the writers' certainty***

Context: Example (1) addresses the topic of the importance of part-time jobs for students, whereas (2), (3), and (4) address the issue of banning smoking in restaurants.

- (1) It is **true** that it is important for college students to have a part-time job. (Indonesian EFL/065)
- (2) It is **true** that a restaurant has provided a special room for those who are smoking. (Indonesian EFL/033)
- (3) It is **clear** that smoking should be banned from the public places, especially restaurants. (Indonesian EFL/060)
- (4) Furthermore, it is **evident** that the smoking community in Singapore is of a minority as compared to non-smoking individuals (Singaporean ESL/025)

As shown in (1) and (2), the EFL group frequently uses the epistemic adjective *true* in their essays. This adjective conveys the students' certainty towards the propositional information related to the topics. Another stance adjective, *clear* in (3), is also used to mark their level of confidence and conviction in the claim. Those examples indicate that EFL students prefer to express their assurance related to the topics. On the other hand, ESL students do employ such epistemic certainty adjectives, but fewer. Example (4) demonstrates how ESL students use the epistemic certainty adjective "evident" to express a degree of certainty regarding the propositional content. The adjective *evident* appears to carry a more nuanced meaning compared to *clear*.

Examples (5), (6), and (7) are stance expressions that are explicitly attributed to the writers. In those expressions, epistemic certainty adjectives *certain* and *sure*, and evaluation adjectives *common* are used by EFL students to convey their certainty and evaluation of the given proposition. However, ESL students avoid such explicit attribution while expressing their stance, for instance, in (4) and (8).

Examples (5) and (6) address the topic of the importance of part-time jobs for students.

- (5) **I am certain** that if college students spend their leisure time having a part-time job, they will become successful person. (Indonesian EFL/130)

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- (6) So, it is **common** for **us** that we can have work experience by getting a job, for instance, to become a waiter. (Indonesian EFL/152)

Examples (7) and (8) address the issue of banning smoking in restaurants.

- (7) **I am sure** they do not want to see you suffering or sick because of that thing. (Indonesian EFL/020)
- (8) It is **true** that smoking is detrimental to the health of the smoker and everyone around, but the smoker also argues that it is in his own right and freedom in which he chooses to do what he wants. (Singaporean ESL/041)

***Stance adjectives to convey the writers' doubt***

As shown in Table 4, ESL students use epistemic likelihood adjectives, while their occurrence is absent in the Indonesian EFL corpus. For example, in (9), (10), and (11), the likelihood adjectives *arguable* and *unlikely* are used to mark the writers' uncertainty or doubt towards the proposition.

Context: Examples (9) and (10) address the topic of the importance of part-time jobs for students, while (11) addresses the issue of banning smoking in restaurants.

- (9) Even if they do manage to strike a balance, it is **unlikely** that he would have any time to pursue his own hobbies. (Singaporean ESL/111)
- (10) It is **arguable** that it is important for college students to have a part-time job to inculcate the value of independence. (Singaporean ESL/028)
- (11) Even if the restaurant is located outdoors, it is **arguable** that the smoke may diffuse and affect other diners' appetites. (Singaporean ESL/028)

As seen in examples (9) – (11) above, ESL students prefer not to show their full commitment to the information, but rather to confidently express it. This preference may also indicate that they seem cautious in expressing their opinions.

***Stance adjectives to convey an evaluation***

This study found that evaluative adjectives are the most common stance adjectives used across the two corpora. Particularly, they are ESL students who express their stance using evaluation adjectives significantly higher than their EFL counterparts. The following

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examples present how ESL students employ evaluation adjectives to convey their attitude toward the content of the proposition in their texts.

Context: Examples (12), (13), (14), and (15) address the issue of banning smoking in restaurants.

- (12) Nevertheless, it is still **important** for the public to be educated on the actual effects of smoking as an ultimate goal. (Singaporean ESL/074)
- (13) As such, it is **imperative** that restaurants move towards a complete ban on smoking if we are to move towards a smoke-free environment as a nation. (Singaporean ESL/062)
- (14) In addition, it is **necessary** that smoking be banned in restaurants, especially those that are often patronized by families. (Singaporean ESL/040)
- (15) However, it is **essential** to note that smoking is a habitual activity (Singaporean ESL/022)

The evaluation adjectives, as shown in (12), (13), (14), and (15), respectively, *important*, *imperative*, *necessary*, and *essential*, occur with high frequency in the ESL corpus. Those adjectives are used to express the students' evaluation, mainly about the importance of banning smoking in restaurants. Interestingly, instead of favoring a single adjective, e.g., *important*, the ESL students use various lexical adjectives with comparable meanings yet differing nuances.

***Stance adjectives to convey emotion, ease, or difficulty***

One of the interesting findings of the study is that emotional meaning is only found in the Indonesian EFL corpus. The following examples (16) and (17) offer the typical uses of emotion and ease or difficulty adjectives in the corpus.

Context: Examples (16) and (17) address the topic of the importance of part-time jobs for students.

- (16) I can manage it due to my past experiences which I am **grateful** to have. (Indonesian EFL/037)
- (17) It is pretty **difficult** for me to manage my time. (Indonesian EFL/020)

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As seen from those examples, Indonesian EFL students, again, express their attitude explicitly. In (16), *grateful* is used to express emotion towards the content of information the student shares. Similarly, (17) adjective *difficult* is used to express, in a reflective and personal manner, the student's problem related to the given information.

**Discussion**

The chi-squared test result shows a significant difference in the use of stance complement clauses controlled by adjectives across the two corpora. The total number of stance features is significantly higher in the Singaporean ESL corpus. This finding aligns with the results of previous studies on EFL students' use of stance features. Jiang (2015) found that Chinese EFL students use less nominal stance than their ENS counterparts. Moreover, Barbara et al. (2024) noted that Hong Kong novice students have less frequency of hedges resources, unlike their advanced student counterparts with greater stance resources in their texts. This trend may be influenced by the EFL students' limited awareness of the importance of adjectival stance constructions and insufficient exposure to stance features in argumentative writing.

Regarding the distribution of stance complement clauses, *to*-clauses are more favored in both corpora. This preference may be attributed to the discourse functions of *to*-clauses, as they enable writers to deliver information more directly and concisely. This way may be more effective for the students to express their attitudes. This finding differs from Kozáčiková's (2021) study on stance verbs. She asserts that academic writers tend to express their stance explicitly and precisely, as evidenced by the study's finding that *that*-clauses occur more frequently than *to*-clauses. The study identifies several functions of *that*-clauses, such as reporting, evaluating, or presenting either others' or the author's research findings. Thus, it is reasonable for academic writers to use *that*-clauses for such purposes. Additionally, it is worth noting that a considerable number of adjectives are commonly used to control *to*-clauses (Biber et al., 1999, p. 720).

There is a clear difference in the distribution of functional use of stance. One of the most apparent characteristics of Singaporean ESL corpus is that the ESL students benefited from the evaluation adjectives to express their nuanced and assertive evaluations. As seen in Table 4, Singaporean students have a high frequency of evaluation adjectives. At the same

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time, it is also evident that Indonesian students frequently rely on evaluation adjectives to mark their stance. This trend, observed in both corpora, may be influenced by the writing prompt (Pemberton, 2020), which encourages student writers to evaluate what is important or necessary related to the assigned topic. Notably, the use of evaluation adjectives in the Singaporean corpus correlates with a wider lexical variety, indicating that these writers convey the idea of importance via a range of lexical adjectives, e.g., *important*, *imperative*, *necessary*, *essential*, *crucial*, *vital*, *critical*, and *substantial*.

Conversely, this pattern does not appear in the Indonesian EFL corpus. EFL students tend to use a more limited range of lexical adjectives, primarily *important*, *essential*, and *imperative*. The overall use of stance adjectives also reflects a minimal range of words. This condition suggests that EFL students have insufficient lexical proficiency in writing. Previous studies have addressed such issues, highlighting that second language (L2) writers have a limited lexical range of vocabulary (Jiang, 2015; Man & Chau, 2019; Wang & Liu, 2022). The analysis of the current study reveals that the low frequency and limited variety of lexical adjectives in Indonesian EFL essays result in somewhat general evaluations and a lack of nuance. Therefore, as Wang & Liu (2022) suggest, it is important to provide support for EFL in enriching their vocabulary repertoire. Using a diverse range of adjectives offers a proper writing strategy, as varied stance markers can express distinctions in meaning and make arguments more persuasive and compelling.

Furthermore, this study found that Indonesian EFL students tend to favor expressing their certainty rather than likelihood, such as in examples (1), (2), (3), (5), and (7). However, this finding contrasts with Kitjaroonchai & Duan's (2019) study, which reports that Indonesian EFL student writers mostly use such uncertainty markers. This discrepancy may be attributed to the scope of stance markers analyzed in this study, as it focuses solely on stance complement clauses controlled by adjectives. Therefore, other possible stance markers have not yet been considered. Moreover, the use of certainty adjectives is likely intended to convey the students' viewpoints based on their personal beliefs about accuracy.

In composing argumentative writing, students are not only stating their viewpoints clearly, whether to agree or disagree on the assigned topic, but also how to negotiate possible opposing views from readers. Otherwise, it has become a concern when students fail to

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acknowledge alternative viewpoints, which may weaken an argument's quality (Ho & Li, 2018). The students are also expected to be critically aware of others' views and create an environment that allows for open discussion. Interestingly, Singaporean ESL students benefited from likelihood adjectives to strategically avoid explicitly expressing self-assurance in their arguments, as exemplified in examples (9) – (11).

This study suggests that Indonesian EFL students tend to rely on personal beliefs, which may be a common feature in argumentative writing. However, such a strategy has not yet been effectively used in their arguments. This pattern seems to differ from how skilled and professional academic writers display their viewpoints in their texts (Barbara et al., 2024; Crosthwaite et al., 2017). This difference may be because the texts analyzed in this study are argumentative, not research-based writing; the students perceived the given assignments as more reflective and opinion-based. If that is the case, it would be a concern that must be addressed critically, especially when L2 students are expected to produce more advanced and professionally structured academic writing. Students should work on using lexico-grammar resources correctly and strategically on whether or not to show their presence (Kozáčiková, 2021).

To the best of our knowledge, a limited body of research directly compares stance features between ESL and EFL students. Therefore, it is challenging to compare the current study's findings with the established discussion presented in prior studies. Some studies have discussed and shed some light on language performances between ESL and EFL students, for example, lexical and syntactic features (Zhang & Kang, 2022), writing complexity, accuracy, and fluency (Barrot & Gabinete, 2021), and lexical sophistication (Yoo & Kim, 2023). Drawing on insights from previous studies, the current study's findings suggest that language learning contexts may influence learners' target language performances. The results found that Singaporean ESL students have a wider variety of lexical adjectives than their Indonesian EFL counterparts. This difference may be because the two have different inputs of the target language. Singapore recognizes English as one of the official languages. Additionally, English is chosen as the medium of instruction in universities and all levels of public education (Bolton et al., 2017). Thus, students in such an ESL context have sufficient spoken

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and written input and opportunities to use it naturally (Yoo & Kim, 2023), which differs from Indonesian EFL students.

Although both groups have the same proficiency levels, Indonesian EFL students exhibit limited vocabulary mastery. They tend to rely on low-proficiency lexical adjectives that convey overly general and less assertive meanings. Novice student writers often struggle with vocabulary use, especially when writing in a foreign language. Hartono & Maharani (2020) note that Indonesian EFL students frequently experience writing anxiety caused by insufficient writing practice, grammatical-vocabulary difficulties, and inadequate topic mastery. In contrast, Singaporean ESL students' familiarity with English vocabulary allows for more effective use of lexical adjectives in timed argumentative essays.

It is worth noting that Singaporean ESL students use likelihood adjectives in their arguments, suggesting avoiding an egocentric manner. Rather than relying on self-centered claims, they tend to acknowledge others' perspectives and perceive broader viewpoints. In line with Uccelli et al. (2013), such a cautious attitude is one crucial resource in constructing a stronger argument and enhancing writing quality. This preference may indicate that Singaporean ESL students are more aware of others' voices supported by the multicultural community in the country. However, this speculation is tentative since Singapore and Indonesia have similar multicultural environments, and further studies are needed to verify this finding. Another possibility is, again, a lack of vocabulary mastery. In this scenario, Indonesian EFL students are in an unfortunate position to express their stance in a foreign language while having a limited repertoire of likelihood adjectives.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

### *Conclusion*

This study found a significant difference in the use of stance complement clauses controlled by adjectives in Singaporean ESL and Indonesian EFL students' argumentative essays. While Singaporean ESL students prefer epistemic likelihood, ability or willingness, and evaluation meanings, Indonesian EFL students favor epistemic certainty, emotion, and ease or difficulty meanings. Using nuanced and assertive lexical adjectives enables Singaporean ESL students to construct more appealing arguments, enhancing their attitudes and acknowledging others' viewpoints. It is worth noting that the frequency of stance

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adjectives doubled with the variety of lexical items may add nuanced layers to the arguments, making it persuasive and potentially improving the quality of the argumentative writing.

***Limitation***

This study has limitations. The size of the corpora used is smaller compared to the previous studies. The analysis also focused on stance complement clauses controlled by adjectives. Therefore, the findings have not reached proper representativeness and may result in distinct findings on the use of stance features in the texts. Furthermore, the genre of writing examined in this study is opinion-based, not academic research writing. This condition may explain why the current study's findings differ from previous studies, which primarily focused on research articles. Future researchers are needed to investigate more comprehensively to determine whether stance features affect the content and quality of students' writing.

***Implication***

The present study has pedagogical implications. Teachers generally place greater emphasis on teaching discourse organization than on "*stance features*." However, there is a clear need for explicit EFL teaching and learning strategies that address the lexicogrammatical features of stance. This scenario should be supported by instruction that highlights their importance in argumentative writing. Students should be exposed to stance features, such as observing the features used by advanced writers in academic writings, and encouraged to use them in their own writings. Additionally, students should be provided with a targeted vocabulary exercise to enrich their lexical repertoire, using high-proficiency words to add different nuances to the students' stance. Therefore, they can construct critical and strong arguments and improve their writing quality.

**BIO-PROFILES:**

**Adinda Puspa Nur Faiz** holds her Bachelor of Arts (in English Literature) from Universitas Jenderal Soedirman (Unsoed) Purwokerto. She is pursuing her master's in linguistics at the Linguistics Department, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia. Corresponding email: [adindapuspanurfaiz@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:adindapuspanurfaiz@mail.ugm.ac.id)

**Aris Munandar** is an Associate Professor at the English Department and Intercultural Studies Department, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia. Apart from teaching, he supervises

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undergraduate thesis research in the English Department, master's thesis research in the American Studies and Linguistics Department, and doctoral research in the Humanities Doctoral Program. His research interests are Sociolinguistics and Translation. Corresponding email: [arismunandar@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:arismunandar@mail.ugm.ac.id)

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