

Recontextualizing Writing Proficiency: An Investigation of Model Argumentation Texts for IELTS Preparation

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Abstract

In China, memorizing model texts from various sources including textbooks and other reference books is usually considered a legitimate learning practice by both teachers and students, especially when the students are preparing for high-stakes language tests, such as IELTS (International English Language Testing System). However, very little linguistic research has been done on the pedagogical values of these model texts. This study, therefore, aims to address this gap by investigating 15 model essays collected from three commercial exam preparation books for IELTS in mainland China. Drawing on analytical tools based on Systemic Functional Linguistics, a linguistic analysis is conducted to examine the lexicogrammatical resources pertaining to the realization of interpersonal meanings, such as *Engagement* resources in the texts. Results suggest that the *Engagement* resources valued in the model essays reflect the local rhetorical style in constructing an English argumentative text and it is argued that, while the texts may be effective in helping students acquire higher scores on a language test, namely the IELTS writing component, they do not provide enough access to the linguistic resources that are valued beyond the context of language testing.

Keywords: Argumentative writing, Chinese EFL learners, IELTS, appraisal framework, systemic functional linguistics

Introduction

This paper is concerned with the culture of learning in East-Asian countries, such as China, Japan, and Korea. As far as the conception of knowledge is concerned, these East-Asian countries share a similar cultural orientation, the so called “Confucian-Heritage Culture” (Biggs, 1996, p. 46) (CHC). CHC respects the value of knowledge, and anything that can be included in a book is traditionally considered to be true (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2012; You, 2012). This tradition has led to the reverence for written texts by famous scholars, and therefore, students are usually trained to imitate and memorize, instead of challenging, scholarly texts. Even today, memorizing words from teaching materials is considered as a legitimate learning practice for academic subjects in China, even at university level (Hu, 2002; Scollon, 1999). As to the instruction of English writing in China, it is also common for teachers to ask students to memorize paragraphs of texts from either textbooks or other reference books, especially when they are preparing for high-stakes tests, such as CET (College English Testing) and NMET (National Matriculation English Test) (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; You, 2012). Despite their importance in language teaching and learning in China, few academic studies are conducted on the pedagogical values of these teaching materials.

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Against this background, this study aims to investigate the model texts written by Chinese ELT (English Language Teaching) educators for IELTS (International English Language Test System) test preparation. IELTS is an internationally recognised English language test designed for assessing students' linguistic capacity to successfully undertake study at an English-medium university. According to Wray and Pegg (2009), Chinese IELTS candidates tend to prepare for IELTS, especially the writing component, by means of memorizing those sample texts that are considered native-like and legitimate for IELTS. Such practice is understandable, considering Hoey's (2005) lexical priming theory that people usually learn the lexical knowledge of a word such as its collocations, colligations, and semantic associations by being frequently exposed to its usage in speech and writing. In a social context where English is a foreign language, such as China, it is, therefore, argued that language teaching materials, including model essays contained in textbooks and other reference books, play an important role in creating a mini-context of language priming, where the lexicogrammatical knowledge is usually expected to be picked up by students through text memorization and imitation (Ding, 2007; Wray, 2002). While the writers of these model essays usually claim the effectiveness of studying and memorising the model essays in helping Chinese English learners to improve their performance in the writing component of IELTS in a short amount of time (Gu, 2008; Liu, 2011), it is necessary to raise the empirical questions from a linguistic perspective about these sample essays, pertaining to the type of linguistic resources valued in them, and whether these valued linguistic resources provide sufficient preparation for Chinese students' uses of English language in globally-oriented contexts, such as studying at an English-medium university overseas.

In order to address these questions, this study investigates the linguistic features of the model texts in response to IELTS' Writing Task 2, which requires candidates to construct a short argumentative text. Since argumentation texts tend to be of dialogic nature and are often associated with a high level of interaction (Thompson, 2001), this study examines how linguistic resources dealing with dialogic aspects of argumentation are realized in the model texts, drawing on Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Specifically, SFL considers the text as the object of linguistic analysis, since a text is defined as a selection and actualization of the meaning potential of its social context, which is further realized in specific choices of lexicogrammar (Martin & Rose, 2008). In this process, texts also realize the three types of meanings within a particular situation, including ideational, interpersonal and textual (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Ideational meanings construe human experience, including external material world and the internal mental world of human being; interpersonal meanings enact personal and social relationships with people around us; and textual meanings compose ideational and interpersonal meanings into a coherent textual unity. The focus of this study, therefore, is to examine the linguistic resources realizing interpersonal meanings in argumentation texts. Specifically, the study adopts the *Engagement* analysis, based on Appraisal theory developed within the SFL tradition, since it is suggested that the Engagement resources play an instrumental role in creating a high quality argumentation text (Coffin & Hewings, 2004; Thompson, 2001).

Engagement Analysis of Interpersonal Meanings

The Appraisal framework, mainly developed by Martin and White (2005), consists of three sub-systems: *Attitude*, *Graduation*, and *Engagement*. *Attitude* deals with people's feelings towards things or behaviours; *Graduation* refers to the resources for fine-tuning the scale of attitudinal meanings; and *Engagement* refers to the linguistic resources "by which speakers/writers adopt a stance towards the value positions being referenced by the text and with respect to those they address" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 92). It is suggested, that for the argumentation genre, *Engagement* resources are critical in terms of building effective arguments by managing writer-reader interaction (Ho, 2011; Swain, 2007). Since the focus of the study is to investigate the linguistic resources dealing with the dialogic aspects of an argumentative text, the *Engagement* system was chosen as the analytical focus for this investigation.

In the *Engagement* system, a text contains propositions, which are referred to as "something that can be argued, but argued in a particular way" (Eggins, 2005, p. 172). Drawing from Bakhtin's (1981) work on dialogism, Martin and White (2005) classify two types of propositions, namely "*monoglossic*" and "*heteroglossic*" (p. 100). A *monoglossic* utterance is characterised as being factual and objective, which does not acknowledge the

existence of alternative positions or viewpoints, such as in extract (a) below, while a *heteroglossic* utterance invokes or allows for alternatives, indicating the proposition is only one view against many other possible ones, as in extract (b):

- (a) One of the most conspicuous trends in the 21st century is a closer connection between countries, in both economic and cultural aspects. [B3T1]
- (b) It seems that in some countries, the locals have become more accustomed to exotic cultures. [B3T1]

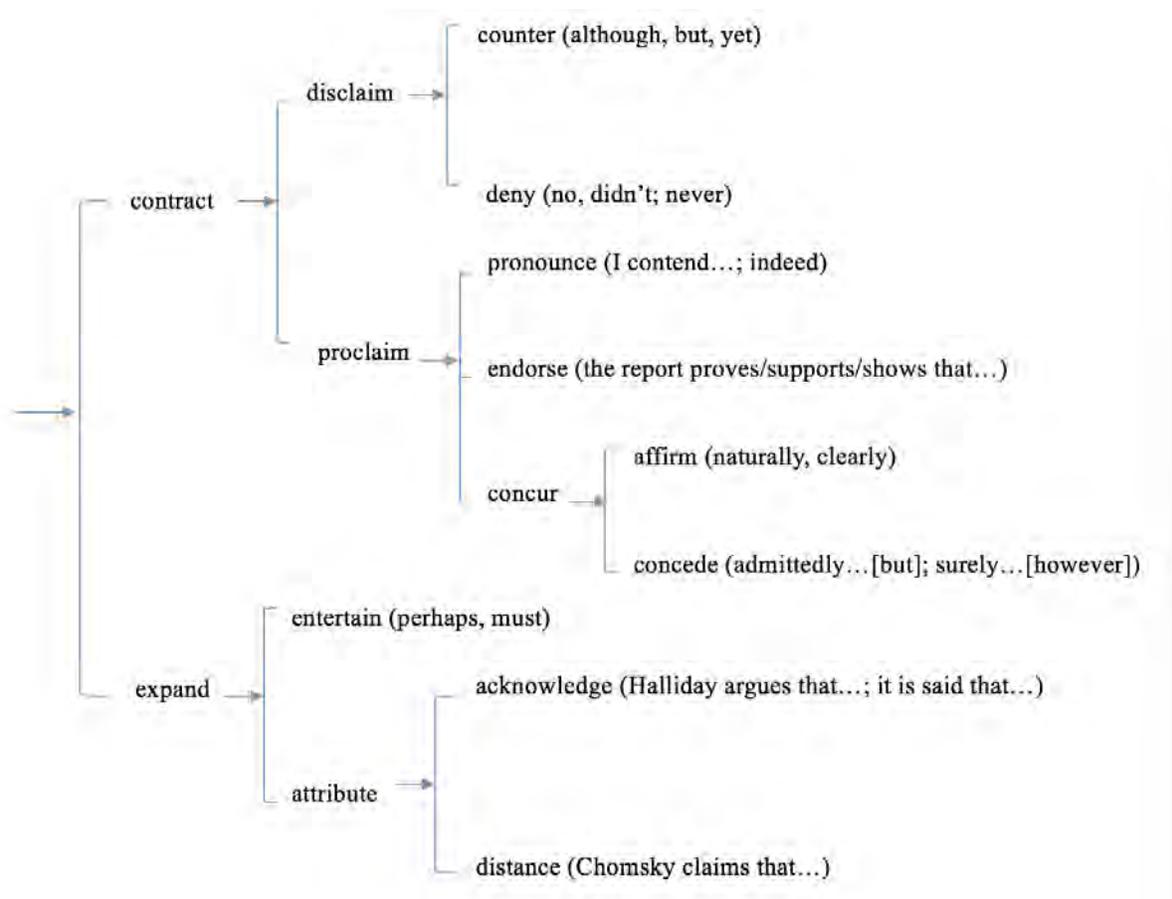


Figure 1. Engagement System (c.f. Martin & White, 2005, p. 134)

The heteroglossic propositions can be further classified into two broad categories, namely, “dialogic expansion” and “dialogic contraction,” depending on whether the propositions actively allow for or fend off the alternative voices (Martin & White, 2005). Both categories contain several options: “Disclaim,” “Proclaim,” “Entertain,” and “Attribute.” “Disclaim” and “Proclaim” construe the meanings which dialogically restrict or even deny the possibilities of alternative views, while “Entertain” and “Attribute” refer to the wordings by which the dialogic space is expanded. In Figure 1, all the semantic choices of Engagement are listed, with some linguistic examples in brackets.

It is noted that many of the Engagement resources, such as “it proves that...”, “however”, “admittedly... [but]” and “it is said that...”, have been investigated in various traditions. In corpus linguistics, for example, they are labelled as the collocational frameworks (Greaves & Martin, 2010), or linking adverbials (Leedham & Cai, 2013). In addition, studies suggest that the uses of such linguistic resources constitute a key area of difference

between EFL users and native users of English language in writing English argumentation texts (Ho, 2011; Lee, 2008; Leedham & Cai, 2013). Leedham and Cai (2013) suggest that the practice of memorizing model examination texts in the final year of secondary schooling in China may lead to Chinese students' misuse, over-use and under-use of linking adverbials, such as “therefore”, “however”, and “besides”, in writing academic essays, when they study in UK universities. As far as IELTS writing is concerned, the impact of memorizing chunks of text can also be identified in their responses to the IELTS writing task (Wray & Pegg, 2009). Against this background, it is necessary to examine what linguistic resources are highlighted in the sample essays collected in test preparation books, especially in terms of the *Engagement* resources that could have potential impacts on students' future language use.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What are the *Engagement* resources employed to enact interpersonal meanings in the IELTS model essays?
2. What linguistic resources pertaining to the realization of *Engagement* resources are most frequently used in the IELTS model essays?

Methodology

Data

Data was compiled from three test preparation books for IELTS, including:

1. Liu's (2011) “A detailed answer for the latest authentic Cambridge IELTS—writing (Academic) (second edition)” [Jianqiao yasi zuixin zhentitiyuan xiangjie—xiezuo (xueshulei) (di er ban)]
2. The New Oriental School's (2006) “IELTS Writing” [Ya Si Xie Zuo Sheng Jing], and
3. Gu's (2008) “Analyzing IELTS writing patterns and collections of writing samples” [Ya Si Xie Zuo Tao Lu Pou Xi Yu Fan Li Da Quan].

Herein these books will be referred to as Book One (B1) Book Two (B2), and Book Three (B3), respectively. According to the prefaces of the books, all three are designed as reference texts for IELTS candidates who need guidance on the writing component of the exam. Book One mainly collects model essays written by Chinese ELT teachers in response to the latest exam questions, while the other two are specifically written for pedagogical purposes, where various exercises are designed to help candidates memorize and imitate certain patterns of language use, such as the “it is + adjective” structure. In addition, it is noted that Book Three stresses the importance of getting rid of Chinese-style English and thus suggests the model essays contained in the book are acceptable to the native users of English language.

All three texts contain a large collection of model essays on topics that frequently appear on an IELTS test, as suggested in the prefaces of each book, many Chinese ELT teachers were involved in writing the model texts for Book One and Book Two, while the texts in Book Three were all written by the author of the book. Each of the books contains model texts for both Task 1 and Task 2 of IELTS writing, whereas this study only used the chapters providing Task 2 model texts.

To create the data set, three sets of essays were collected from the relevant chapters of the three books. In total, 57 texts were collected from book One, 40 from book Two, and 114 from book Three. Then, for each book, the selected texts were numbered and a random number (e.g, between 1 and 57) was generated using the website Random.org, the essay corresponding to that number was selected. Through this process, five essays were chosen from each book. The fifteen texts, accordingly, constitute the data of the study. The texts in each book will be referred to as B1 T1, B2 T2, B3 T4, etc. The topics of the model essays were not controlled, since the topic of an IELTS essay is less relevant to the realization of its interpersonal meanings (Nakamura, 2009). It is also necessary to point out that the purpose of this study was not to judge which text was written better, but to

examine the similarities and differences of the writers' lexicogrammatical choices in relation to the *Engagement* system.

Analytical Procedure

Drawing on the works of Coffin and Hewings (2004), Eggins (2005), Ho (2011), and Lee (2008), additional analysis is conducted, in terms of the *monoglossic* propositions and *Entertain* resources. The analysis of the *monoglossic* propositions adopts Ho's (2011) detailed categorizing scheme of *monoglossic* propositions to examine the specific patterns of the employment of *monoglossic* resources in argumentative texts. According to Ho (2011), *monoglossic* propositions can be divided into the three categories of "*Intra-textual*", "*Inter-textual*", and "*Narrative*". *Inter-textual* propositions refer to the statements which are the "bare assertions" made without any evidence in the text. These statements are made based on the presuppositions shared between the writer and the readers as common knowledge or a belief, which is exemplified in extract (a) below. Meanwhile, *Intra-textual* propositions are assertions based on the supporting evidence available somewhere within the text, such as in extract (b). Lastly, *Narrative* propositions refer to the cases where the writer deploys a narrative style in constructing their argument, which is illustrated in extract (c). The sentences in extract (c) describe a situation in China without explicit argumentation:

- (a) One of the most conspicuous trends in the 21st century is a closer connection between countries, in both economic and cultural aspects. [M: Inter]
- (b) Culture is not a disgrace to but an asset of a country [M: Intra]. An indigenous culture can distinguish one country from others, attracting foreign visitors and yielding high income.
- (c) For example, two decades ago, sex was a taboo subject in China, and most Chinese people felt embarrassed to talk openly about it. Over time the Western culture has permeated into the Chinese lifestyle, and the Chinese people have broken many of their time-honoured traditions. [M: Nar] (All are extracted from B3T1)

In addition, this study also further specifies the analysis of *Entertain* resources, which include evidence-based postulations and modality, drawing on the works of Coffin and Hewings (2004) and Ho (2011). This analysis may shed some light on the rhetorical strategies by which a writer stresses their voice and subjective opinions (Coffin & Hewings, 2004).

As far as the analytical units are concerned, a model essay is firstly divided into units based on the traditional notion of a "sentence," which consists of either one single clause (simplex) or a series of related clauses (clause complexes) (Halliday, 1992). The analysis first identified whether the proposition was *monoglossic* or *heteroglossic*, and then both the *monoglossic* and *heteroglossic* propositions were annotated according to their respective sub-categories. The results in each text were calculated using basic statistical techniques to investigate the frequency of instances and proportion of relevant features in a text. In order to ensure the reliability of the analysis, two coders are included. The first time coding was conducted by the first author of the paper, and the result was checked by another colleague who is familiar with *Engagement* analysis. When an indecisive instance emerges, a third SFL expert (e.g. an associate professor in English department), who is more experienced in *Engagement* analysis, was consulted.

Findings

This section reports the findings pertaining to the patterns of the linguistic realization of *Engagement* resources, including *monoglossic* and *heteroglossic* elements, in the data.

Monoglossic and Heteroglossic Resources

In argumentation texts, *monoglossic* propositions are usually presented as facts, since they only include the writer's voice, making no reference to other positions, while *heteroglossic* propositions are presented in a manner which suggests the existence of other possible views (Martin & White, 2005; Swain, 2007). Our findings suggest that, while all the texts tend to employ a greater number of *heteroglossic* resources than *monoglossic* ones, *monoglossic* proposition is identified as playing an important role in advancing arguments in the texts. This is especially evident in the texts from B1 and B3 (see Table 1). In these texts, the employment of *Intra-textual* and *Inter-textual* propositions indicate that the writers of these texts are more likely to impose their opinions on readers, which is most obvious in the use of *Inter-textual* propositions as factual information to support writers' viewpoints. Therefore, these texts assume a certain degree of "same-mindedness" between writers and readers. Interestingly, although the aim of B3 is to encourage the norms of native English language users in writing argumentative texts, the writers of B3 seem comfortable with constructing arguments by means of monoglossic resources, which are rarely employed in the argumentation written by native English language users (Ho, 2011; Wang, 2008).

Table 1
Overview of Monoglossic and Heteroglossic Resources

Textbook	Monogloss instances	Heterogloss instances	Total Engagement instances
Book One	32 (30%)	75 (70%)	107
Book Two	19 (16%)	103 (84%)	122
Book Three	46 (38%)	76 (63%)	122

Monoglossic Resources

Table 2 presents the distribution of *monoglossic* resources among the three sub-types, including *Inter-textual*, *Intra-textual*, and *Narrative*. While ENL writers tend to incorporate a piece of narrative into an argumentative text to increase its persuasiveness (Ho, 2011), *Narrative* propositions, compared with the other two types of *monoglossic* resources, are rarely used in the texts of the three groups, accounting for only 4.35% in B3, 5% in B2, and 6.2% in B1. In contrast, texts from B1 differ significantly from those of B2 and B3 in the employment of *Intra-textual* and *Inter-textual* propositions. In B1, writers used more *Inter-textual* (59.4%) propositions than *Intra-textual* ones (34.4%). A reverse tendency is seen in the texts of B2 and B3, where more *Intra-textual* propositions (54.35% in B3, 53% in B2) were used than *Inter-textual* ones (41.3% in B3 and 40% in B2).

Table 2
Distribution of Monoglossic Resources

Textbook	Inter-textual	Intra-textual	Narrative	Total Monogloss instances
Book One	19 (59.4%)	11 (34.4%)	2 (6.2%)	32 (100%)
Book Two	8 (42%)	10 (53%)	1 (5%)	19 (100%)
Book Three	19 (41.3%)	25 (54.35%)	2 (4.35)	46 (100%)

A close examination suggests that the *Intra-textual* and *Inter-textual* propositions are employed to fulfil different discursive purposes. The *Intra-textual* proposition, the assertion that is supported by the evidence presented somewhere in the text, tends to be employed in the opening paragraph as the first sentence to introduce the essay topic, or as the last sentence to indicate a writer's opinion on the topic. In many cases, *Intra-textual* propositions are used as the topic sentences of a paragraph, such as in extract (a) below. Sometimes *Intra-textual* propositions are immediately supported by *Inter-textual* ones, such as in extract (b). In these extractions, readers are expected to make implicit connections between the assertion and the supporting evidence provided, and it is assumed by the writer that the supporting evidence can justify the assertion. For example, in extract (b),

the *Inter-textual* proposition is employed as a fact to support the *Intra-textual* proposition that practical courses are needed. In this instance, readers are expected to extract the implicit logical connection between the topic sentence and the evidence provided:

- (a) In the second place, happiness lies in the struggle to be happy. [M:Intra] People sometimes go to extremes and frantically pursue money, power, high social status, etc., which are all symbols of success—but never of happiness. Perhaps if they shifted their life’s goal from ultimate success to unswerving efforts and to a confidence that they will be successful one day they’d be a great deal happier. [B2T4]
- (b) In the first place, emphasis on practical courses is demanded by our ever-developing society. [M:Intra] As society has entered the information age and commercialization is sweeping across the world, computer and business courses are geared to the social demand. [M:Inter] [B2T2]

An *Inter-textual* proposition, on the other hand, refers to the statement that is not supported by the evidence accessible through the text. Such statements are called “bare assertions” (Martin & White 2005, p. 98), which assume that readers will take them for granted since they are obviously true. In many cases, *Inter-textual* propositions are used as the supporting evidence for a writer’s claim. In extract (a) below, an *Inter-textual* proposition (as underlined text) is used to further elaborate the reason why high school graduates may not be as successful as university graduates. The extract, however, closes down the dialogic space for the alternative possibilities that the knowledge acquired in university may not necessarily bring success in people’s lives. To some extent, the writer expects a certain amount of “same-mindedness” between themselves and readers. In other words, the use of *Inter-textual* propositions usually suggests the writer’s assumption that readers share the background knowledge necessary to legitimize the assertions, such as the underlined text in extract (b):

- (a) For example, a high-school level person commonly may not succeed to the extent of a person who has received a university education. This is not only because of the greater breadth of knowledge acquired, but also due to a more critical and focused way of thinking that is imparted and refined during one’s senior education. [B2T1]
- (b) Kids have to spend most of their time in schools, together with many teachers in various disciplines. Their major period at home is their holidays, which is quite negligible compared with their normal school life. [M:Inter] [B1T1]

Heteroglossic Resources

Table 3
Distribution of Heteroglossic Resources

Textbook	Disclaim		Proclaim			Entertain		Attribute	
	Deny	Coun	Con	Pron	End	Pos	Mod	Ack	Dis
Book One	14 (47%)	9 (30%)	2 (7%)	5 (16%)	0 (0%)	11 (24%)	29 (64%)	5 (12%)	0 (0%)
Book Two	9 (26%)	12 (34%)	11 (31%)	3 (9%)	0 (0%)	14 (21%)	42 (62%)	12 (17%)	0 (0%)
Book Three	20 (54%)	12 (32%)	4 (11%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	5 (13%)	30 (77%)	4 (10%)	0 (0%)

Heteroglossic resources are broadly divided into two categories, namely *Expand* and *Contract* resources. *Expand* resources are used to actively allow for dialogically alternative positions, while *Contract* resources are employed to fend off such alternative positions (Martin & White, 2005). The findings suggest all the texts in B1 and B2 use more *Expand* resources, while the texts in B3 employ almost the same number of instances of *Expand* and *Contract* elements (see Table 1). Formulations of *Entertain* are the most valued *heteroglossic* resources in all the texts, which

are usually realized through the subsystems of *Modality*, and *Postulation*. In contrast, fewer instances of *Acknowledge*, and no formulations of *Distance* and *Endorsement* are employed (see Table 3). Such linguistic preference suggests that the texts rely more on personal opinions, instead of external voices to advance their viewpoints. The following qualitative examination focuses on the prominent patterns found in the employment of *heteroglossic* resources.

Contract Resources

Contract resources include two subsystems, *Disclaim* and *Proclaim* elements. Table 4 suggests that the texts in all three books prefer to use *Disclaim* resources much more than *Proclaim* resources, although there are some extreme cases, such as B1T3, where no *Contract* resources are used. This may signal writers' rhetorical preferences to directly exclude or overrule alternative viewpoints, instead of limiting the dialogic space of such alternatives. There are two sub-types of *Disclaim* resources, including *Deny* and *Counter*. *Deny* elements are employed to directly exclude or reject alternative views, such as the extractions in (a) below, whereas *Counter* elements are used to propose opposing evidence to overrule alternative views, which is illustrated in the extraction seen in (b):

- (a) Not [H:Ctr:Dis:Deny] all genius will inevitably be successful, and similarly not [H:Ctr:Dis:Deny] all great men are genius in their childhood. [B2T1]
- (b) As for me [H:Exp:Ent:Pos], however [H:Ctr:Dis:Coun], countries can [H:Exp:Ent:Mod] pursue sustainable advancement while focusing on environmental issues. [B1T4]

Table 4
Distribution of Contract Resources

Textbook	Disclaim			Proclaim	
	Deny	Coun	Con	Pron	End
Book One	14 (47%)	9 (30%)	2 (7%)	5 (16%)	0 (0%)
Book Two	9 (26%)	12 (34%)	11 (31%)	3 (9%)	0 (0%)
Book Three	20 (54%)	12 (32%)	4 (11%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)

In terms of *Proclaim* resources, only *Concur* and *Pronounce* formulations are identified in the data. This pattern suggests that, when contracting the scope of dialogistic alternatives, external sources are rarely used in these texts. In extraction (a) below, for example, the formulation of *Concur*, “we all know,” construes the proposition as common sense knowledge shared between the writer and the readers. In some cases, *Pronounce* resources are employed to indicate authorial emphases or explicit interventions (Martin & White, 2005). Meanwhile, the usage of many *Proclaim* elements in these texts indicates a mixing of informal and formal language features. For example, the uses of “we all know” in extract (a) and “no one can deny” in extract (c) carry the flavor of informal language, while the pronouncement is realized by means of objective or impersonalized formulations in extract (b), where the writer's subjective role in making the argument is obscured:

- (a) We all know [H:Ctr:Proc:Con] people who have a relatively easy and comfortable life, and yet are essentially unhappy. [B2T4]
- (b) There is no denying the fact that [H:Ctr:Proc:Pron] the students better equipped with practical knowledge are more competitive in job hunting, while those majoring in history, geography and the like have few job opportunities. [B2T2]
- (c) Man and woman have the physical and mental difference, which no one can deny [H:Ctr:Proc:Pron]. [B1T5]

Expand Resources

Expand resources fall into two general categories: *Entertain* and *Attribute*. *Entertain* refers to the formulations that are used by the writer to overtly indicate that their viewpoint is simply one of many possibilities, while *Attribute* is concerned with those lexicogrammatical resources that are used by the writer to disassociate themselves from the proposition by attributing it to external sources (Martin & White, 2005). Table 3 indicates that in the analyzed texts, *Entertain* resources tend to be used much more than *Attribute* ones. Such preference suggests that, compared with referring to external materials, the writers of the three books are more likely to construct arguments by means of their own intuitions or subjective views. Specifically, the employment of *Postulation* resources, a subsystem of *Entertain*, suggests writers' different linguistic preferences in the manner of argument support.

Table 5
Realizations of Postulation

Textbook	Subjective opinions	Objective opinions
Book One	8 (73%)	3 (27%)
Book Two	6 (43%)	8 (57%)
Book Three	2 (40%)	3 (60%)

As can be seen from Table 5, *Postulation* resources tend to be used more in the texts of B1 and B2 (11 and 14 instances respectively) than in texts of B3 (only 5 instances). This pattern suggests that the texts in B1 and B2 tend to rely on writers' subjective opinions to advance an argument, such as in extraction (a) below. In contrast, the texts in B3 tend to rhetorically highlight the objective observations as the foundation of *Postulation*, which is demonstrated in extractions (b) and (c):

- (a) My view is that [H:Exp:Ent:Pos], when nations try to develop their economies and become increasingly flourishing in the process, there is still [H:Ctr:Dis:Coun] a lot they can do to create a more livable environment. [B1T4]
- (b) By contrast, it seems that [H:Exp:Ent:Pos] traditional courses are out of date. [B2T2]
- (c) It seems that [H: Exp:Ext:Pos] in some countries, the locals have become more accustomed to exotic cultures. [B3T1]

An interesting observation is that there are fixed wordings frequently employed for realizing the *Engagement* system. This is exemplified by the employment of *Acknowledge* and *Pronounce* resources. For example, in extractions (a) and (b) below, the *Pronounce* formulation, "There is no denying that," is used repeatedly, while the *Acknowledge* formulation, "Some people believe that," can be identified repeatedly in extractions (c) and (d). Such formulaic expressions arguably reflect the local purposes of the texts, which is to be discussed further in the discussion section:

- (a) There is no denying the fact that [H:Ctr:Proc:Pron] the students better equipped with practical knowledge are more competitive in job hunting, while those majoring in history, geography and the like have few job opportunities. [B2T2]
- (b) There is no denying that [H:Ctr:Proc:Pron] some old buildings are of aesthetic, archaeological or architectural values. [B3T3]
- (c) Some opponents of this strategy argue that [H:Exp:Attr:Ack] special students suffer socially, in a misguided belief that students would seldom [H:Ctr:Dis:Deny] talk to each other in an air of professional jealousy. [B3T2]
- (d) Some people are of the opinion that [H:Exp:Attr:Ack] doing job at home is a retrogression, while there are also quite a few people who are strongly opposed to their opinion. [B1T2]

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that there are linguistic preferences pertaining to the employment of *Engagement* resources across the model texts collected in three books. For example, much more *heteroglossic* resources are used than *monoglossic* ones, and the modality resources, such as modal verbs and modal adjuncts, also can be frequently identified in most of the texts. These patterns can be associated with the argumentative functions of these texts. In other words, as is suggested by SFL scholars (Hood, 2010; Martin, 1984; Martin & Rose, 2008), if texts belong to a same genre, these texts are very likely to share a pool of linguistic resources. Therefore, the employment of more heteroglossic resources in the texts can be explained by the characteristic of an argumentative genre which requires the writer to adopt a stance in relation to the issues discussed in a text and other alternative views on these issues (Martin & White, 2005; Thompson, 2001). The uses of modality resources, in addition, may be related to the functions of modality in the argumentation genre, as it usually indicates the arguability of propositions (Eggins, 2005).

However, the analysis suggests that some linguistic choices in the model texts may not be acceptable, especially since many IELTS candidates need to use English for educational purposes at English-medium universities (Wray & Pegg, 2009). This is demonstrated by the preference shown for advancing arguments by means of *Monoglossic* formulations in the different texts of the three books; for example, the employment of *Inter-textual* propositions as supporting evidence for the writers' viewpoints, which suggests that a certain degree of "same-mindedness" is assumed between writers and readers. Such a rhetorical style is also identified by many scholars in various text types, such as the English narratives written by Chinese writers (Lee, 2004), expositions by East-Asian undergraduate students (Lee, 2008), and the English argumentative essays by Chinese students (You, 2012). These studies suggest that the rhetorical style of assuming same-mindedness between readers and writers may be attributed to the involuntary transference of students' mother tongue, such as Chinese language (Lee, 2004). In addition, the employment of opinion-offering resources, especially *Pronouncement* and *Acknowledge*, such as "it is necessary that" and "we all believe that," appears to indicate a certain degree of register confusion (Gilquin & Paquot, 2007), namely, the coexistence of the characteristics of spoken and written language. These rhetorical styles, however, are arguably in stark contrast with the type of academic argumentation required at an English-medium university.

It is, therefore, argued that these model essays legitimize some linguistic patterns, which are recontextualized as the knowledge that could help readers to achieve a satisfactory score in IELTS task-2 writing. For example, the use of formulaic sequences identified in the analysis, such as "in my opinion," "there is no denying that," "it seems that," and "it is +adjective +that/to," constitute a set of fixed templates of expression, or the "lexical bundles" (Biber, Conrad, & Cortes, 2004) pertaining to the genre of argumentation. According to Hyland (2012), lexical bundles provide ready-made language frameworks which facilitate the efficient use of language in a particular genre, without having to generate every word. To some extent, these lexical bundles are formulated as semiotic commodities considering the ways they are presented in these books (Park & Wee, 2012). In other words, since Chinese culture tends to consider anything worthy of inclusion in a book to be true knowledge (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2012; You, 2012), these lexical bundles or text templates are arguably construed as the "knowledge" required for writing the IELTS task-2, which readers, in turn, are expected to pick up by memorizing or imitating the essays. The frequently used wordings, therefore, construe the so called "test strategies or tips," which according to the books will help readers to achieve a good score on the IELTS writing test (Gu, 2008; Liu, 2011; New Oriental School, 2006). On the other hand, such rhetorical beliefs vary between writers, which could partly explain the lexicogrammatical differences of each text within one group.

As suggested by Mahboob (2015), an important purpose underlying English language education in general is to empower students in such ways that they are able to use the language effectively in a wider context so as to make a positive change in their lives. Therefore, it is argued that imitating or even memorizing the model texts identified in this study may actually constrain Chinese EFL learners' access to the globalized ways of using language for knowledge production. To illustrate, the employment of the academic lexical bundles (Hyland, 2008) such as "on the other hand," "it is +adjective +that/to," and "it seems that" signals writers' common

belief that the IELTS task 2 writing is a type of academic writing, while the IELTS task 2 writing actually has more in common with some non-academic genres, such as newspaper editorials (Moore & Morton, 1999). In other words, for Chinese EFL learners the model texts do not provide enough cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), namely the linguistic knowledge and skills which would enable them to have an access to educational resources in the new context, such as studying in an English-medium university overseas.

Conclusion

This paper reports the findings of a linguistic analysis of the model essays written for IELTS test preparation in China. The findings suggest the preferred linguistic resources in realizing interpersonal meanings in the model IELTS essays. By examining the employment of *Engagement* resources in constructing an English argumentative text, the analysis suggests the model essays reflect different rhetorical traditions of constructing argumentation genres. Since language teaching materials, such as test preparation books, constitute an important resource for language priming (Hoey, 2005), by studying with these learning materials, Chinese EFL students are exposed to linguistic resources that might not be helpful in developing their competence for using the English language beyond the context of language testing.

This study, therefore, calls for a large-scale investigation of the English teaching materials used for IELTS test preparation, especially their pedagogical impacts on students, including how the materials are used in language classrooms by students and teachers. In addition, it is necessary to further investigate the impacts of high-stakes English tests, such as IELTS and TOEFL, on the learning and teaching of English in China; it is hypothesized that their impact can be identified not only in the teaching and learning of English language within an institutional context, but also on the Chinese students' language performance in real-life situations.

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