English Education Journal

The Realization of Tenor in the Students' Argumentative Essays

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Article Info	Abstract
	Writing an argumentative text requires knowledge to encode the meaning, such as the interpersonal meaning. The interpersonal meaning relates to how the writer realizes tenor in the text. The tenor encodes participants involved in the text, how the relationship between them, and what kind of attitude discovered in the text. Those meanings are covered in the three aspects of tenor: personalization, standing, and stance. This study analyzed the argumentative essays written by the English Education students of Palangkaraya University. It employed a qualitative research approach, and the research objects were argumentative essays. The results revealed that most of the students tended to be objective in conveying their argument. They tried not to involve themselves in taking a position in their essays. Unfortunately, they did not try to increase their authority by supporting their opinion with the sources. It was caused by the limitation of time and the prohibition of using handphones during writing. Even so, they shared their experiences to strengthen their argument. Besides, the students conveyed the attitude openly, even though some students wanted to be neutral. It can be implied that it is essential for the students to be more careful in selecting and applying particular language features of tenor in English writing.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is considered a difficult skill in learning English. It is a productive skill that needs the students' knowledge about linguistic competence, such as understanding parts of speech, active and passive form, and conditional sentences (Prastyo, 2014). It is problematic because the writer should have the ability to process the idea to construct something meaningful in the text (Ariyanti, 2016).

Systemic functional linguistics is a theory of language that significantly impacts language teaching and learning, especially to overcome complexities in writing. It considers language as a social semiotic system (Halliday, 1985 in Liu, 2013). There are many existing applications because of this theory's presence; one of them is in education. There is much evidence that these theories help students learn the language regarding the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) theories' impact on language education. Schleppegrell (2013) found that SFL metalanguage helps students consider the linguistic choices they have in working with text, support reading skill and writing related to particular disciplines, enables to participate in content area learning as they could develop language proficiency. With its focus on language, it has been investigated that SFL explicitly provides ways for students to improve and develop the study of writing (Miller, Mitchell, & Pessoa, 2016).

Moreover, this study aims to find how the English Education students encode tenor in their argumentative essay. Eggins (2004) defines tenor as the role relation of power and solidarity. Mechura (2005) proposes that tenor is a component of interpersonal meaning that constructs relationships in a discourse. Tenor also refers to participants' role interaction, the social relation, permanent and temporary, between the particular discourse participants (Halliday, 2004). The tenor itself consists of three aspects, which are personalization, standing, and stance. Personalization is about how attention is drawn to the writer or the reader and the use of the appropriate technique to deliberate im-personalization (Mechura, 2005). Mechura (2005) also defines standing about how much of a claim the author lays to expertise and authority. Meanwhile, the stance concerns the writer-oriented features. It refers to how the writers annotate their text to comment on the possible accuracy or credibility of a claim and the attitude they want to convey in the text (Hyland, 2002).

Some related studies have been conducted previously. Research of tenor in student textbooks indicates that the power is equal and unequal. It uses frequent and low contact, high and low affective involvement, uses positive clauses more than negative ones. The statement speech act is also dominant, which shows that the text is mostly in the form of declarative mood (Bharati &Achsan, 2017; Rukmini et al., 2018; Khalim & Warsono, 2017). In written discourse composed by the students at the university level, the studies of tenor and interpersonal meaning show that there is still a problem about objectivity, frequent use of mood to declare information, accomplishing negotiation by writers' employment of evaluative language at the micro-level of a sentence (Rahayu, 2014; Widhiyanto, 2017). They analyzed using some linguistics experts' theories, such as Halliday (2004) and Martin and White (2005). In the spoken discourse, especially

in the students' interaction, the analysis of tenor shows that the most dominant mood used by the students in their interpersonal meaning negotiation is the declarative mood and imperative mood. Students can determine their behavior, feelings, ideas, and values toward things and people's viewpoints by using words. Moreover, learning activities give students a more imperative mood than the others (Yuliati, 2016; Fitriati et al., 2019; Sutopo et al., 2019).

Other studies have also been conducted to investigate tenor, especially in one aspect of tenor itself, such as personalization. The studies about exploring personalization in the discourse have been undertaken by Khamesian (2015), Prasithrathsint (2014), Davies (2012), Fuza (2017), Fitzmaurice and O'Farrel (2018), Shannon (2011), Maroko (2013), Bailey (2011), Liu (2013), and McKinley (2015). Some studies revealed that academic writing is often characterized by the high frequency of nominalization (Khamesian, 2015), personalization. Besides, nominalization creates detachment and objectivity for academic writing (Prasithrathsint, 2014). Another study found that essays as 'I' forced comparisons between the personal and impersonal, which in turn have caused me to reflect more deeply on dynamic, individual, and subjective analyses of personal experiences (Davies, 2012). Therefore, through pronouns, the writer may interpolate themselves directly into the text as the utterance's explicitly responsible source (Liu, 2013). Personalization enables the writers to deal with the objectivity and subjectivity of writing to characterize the areas. It can also approach them according to aspects such as the organization of texts and linguistic choices and differentiate them according to characteristics such as theme choice, variation in the number of authors, use of verbal and non-verbal language, and so forth (Fuza, 2017). Besides, the personalization also determines the writer's identity. Identity construction theory and critical argument theory are all crucial to gaining an understanding of the process of students learning academic EFL (McKinley, 2015). In addition, the objectivity of the text can be achieved by impersonalization through passive voice. Some studies on passive voice have been conducted. The third person and the passive voice are used to convey ideas and arguments. However, the first person can be used effectively, especially in introductions and conclusions (Fitzmaurice & O'Farrel, 2018). In academic and scholarly writing, there are legitimate reasons for authors to use the passive voice. Authors may wish to emphasize objectivity in their works. They may wish to focus on the study, process, instrument, or project under discussion rather than on the researcher or other individuals performing the work. They may also need to use the passive voice to eliminate anthropomorphism (Shannon, 2011). Many studies have examined the use of passive voice. It was found that humanities dissertations preferred personal pronouns and the third person while science dissertations mainly chose the 'faceless' agentless passive voice (Maroko, 2013). Although academic English tends to use the passive more than standard English, it should not be over-used (Bailey, 2011).

The previous studies commonly investigated tenor are mainly written discourse, tenor in spoken discourse, and tenor realized in textbooks. This study filled the gap about the realization of tenor in academic essays, especially argumentative essays written by the

students at a university level. The purpose of this research is to examine the students' argumentative essays to reveal how they realize tenor in their texts. By knowing how they write the essays and their mistakes, this research can identify how to write good argumentative essays. This research is essential because it discovers how the academic writers should write a good quality academic writing by applying an appropriate way of using language features such as tenor of interpersonal meaning. It can benefit English learning development, especially in writing, to increase English learners' writing an excellent academic essay quality.

METHODS

This present study adopted a qualitative approach. The researcher collected the written data in argumentative texts and analyzed them according to the tenor's aspects. The interview with the students was also conducted to support the data from the written text. This study focused on analyzing the argumentative essays written by university students to encode the text's tenor.

The subjects of the study were the English Education students at Palangkaraya University. Meanwhile, the object of this study was the argumentative essays written by the students.

In collecting data, the researcher collected 12 argumentative essays. The data were then analyzed using the three aspects of tenor: personalization, standing, and stance. Some markers were used to encode those three aspects of tenor in the text. Personal pronouns and directives were used to encode personalization. Meanwhile, mood, modulation, and reference were the markers to reveal the standing of the

text. To encode stance, some features used were attitude and modality. The interview questions were delivered to 12 students to find the reasons and meaning they wanted to convey in their argumentative essays. The questions were based on the three aspects of tenor: personalization, standing, and stance. The results of the interview were useful to strengthen the results from the argumentative essays' analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Writer and Reader Projection in the Students' Argumentative Essays

The personalization analysis conducted on the twelve essays had found some results. In terms of the writers' position, the students projected or positioned themselves in their essays as the people who experienced listening comprehension in the language laboratory. Although they projected themselves as experienced writers, they did not tend to present themselves in the essays. It could be seen from the infrequent use of the personal pronoun *"I."* They did not want to contribute and give themselves toward the issue conveyed in their argumentative essays.

Moreover, the frequent use of the personal pronoun "they" was the reason that the students referred to other students, which were them, who experienced in learning listening. Besides, they also did not tend to build high familiarity and solidarity. It could be seen from the infrequent use of the personal pronoun *"we"* in the essays.

In terms of the typical readers in their argumentative essays, the students considered the readers as college students, especially those at the undergraduate level. The use of the

personal pronoun *"you"* was the indicator of this finding, although the occurrence of this personal pronoun was not too significant. This finding was also supported by the result of the interview with the twelve students. Most of them considered that their essays' readers were university-level students.

Bailey (2006) stated that academic writing tends to be impersonal and objective, but it was not achieved by the twelve writers of the argumentative essays. It was caused by the infrequent use of the personal pronoun *"it"* and the occasional nominalization. Moreover, students involved too many personal pronouns in referring to the individual agent, such as the teacher (lecturer) and students. There were few abstract nouns or the nominalization used by the students. One of the attempts to create objectivity is using nominalization (Mechura, 2005). Therefore, the students were considered subjective in writing their argumentative essays.

Although the students did not achieve objectivity, they were quite convenient in writing the essays by not providing too much directive meaning. They still wanted to persuade the readers, but they tried not to give instruction or wanted the readers to see something in the way determined by the writers. It could be seen from the infrequent use of the imperative sentence, modal obligation, and necessity in the personalization analysis.

Authority and Expertise in Students Argumentative Essays

Concerning standing analysis, the students' argumentative text analysis revealed some findings. The analysis results showed that the students did not present their authority because of modulation's lower occurrence,

especially the objective modulation and providing references in their essays. In persuading the readers toward the issue conveyed in the essays, the students relied on subjective implicit modulation. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) stated that the modulation contains the speech function to command or offer. For command, modulation is one of the obligations, which may be either subjective or objective. The result of the students' essays analysis showed that there were frequent uses of subjective modulation. It indicated that the students tended to be subjective in conveying their command to persuade the readers or make the readers see something in a particular way determined by the writers.

Another finding also showed the students used declarative mood in writing their argumentative essays. It indicated that the students tended to state their arguments by using statement sentences. They did not tend to persuade the readers by asking questions or giving instructions by using imperative sentences. The result of the interview also supported this finding. Most of the students shared their experiences in their essays, which meant that the students mostly used declarative sentences.

Moreover, the readers could see the writer's expertise from the use of references in the essays. The standing analysis result, which conveyed the writers' expertise, showed that most of the students did not provide good references. The only authorities they used were only from their experience listening comprehension, inside or outside the language laboratory. The infrequent use of sources, such as related studies and statements from the

expert, indicated that they did not adequately write their essays.

Argument Construction in the Students' Argumentative Essays

The stance analysis result showed that the students were quite open in expressing their attitude in the essays. It can be seen from the frequent use of the asserted attitude. It might be caused by the use of the students' own experiences in listening comprehension. They tended to believe that they told the truth in the essays. Therefore, they expressed their attitude openly. They did not try to be neutral in constructing an argument by using a trigger attitude. It could be seen from the stance analysis. It showed the occurrence of using a trigger attitude was lower than using an assert attitude. It also indicated that the students tended to take a side in conveying the issue. The results of the interview supported this finding. Nine students tried to criticize or give praise toward the issue in the essays. In other words, students tended to take a side in responding to the issue and conveying their arguments to the readers of their essays.

Besides, the result of modality analysis showed that there were frequent uses of deontic modality. It indicated that the students were open to being negotiated by the readers or were not even uncertain about presenting their argument. Moreover, the frequent use of deontic modality was on using a modal verb to convey the meaning of permission. Whereas Biber (1999, p. 486) stated that the modal verb to express permission is commonly used in spoken interaction rather than academic writing. In the previous paragraph about the realization of stance through attitude, the students were considered confident that they told the truth through the frequent use of assertive attitude. After conducting the modality analysis, the students tended to be uncertain in presenting their arguments. Whereas, Biber (1999) in Mechura (2005, p. 7-9) stated that effective ways to construct an argument, balance claim, and be objective in writing argumentative essays are using a more trigger attitude and using more epistemic modality rather than deontic modality. In other words, what the students wanted was not suitable for the essays they created. They tried to influence and persuade the readers, but they did not apply an appropriate technique to achieve that goal. The interview results also supported this finding. It could be seen that ten students wanted to influence and persuade the readers to follow and believe what they said in the argumentative essays. However, they lacked appropriate stance techniques in their texts.

The Benefits of Tenor Consideration to Help the Students in Writing Argumentative Essays. In writing an academic text, especially an argumentative essay, the writer is attempted to be objective in stating their argument (Bailey, 2006, p. 105), projecting and positioning themselves. The readers in an academic way (Ivanic, 1994), decreasing the use of directive meaning to construct appropriate audience relationship (Hyland, 2002b), using right command strategy (Iedema, 2004, in Lee, 2010, p.61), providing the accurate data and references from good sources (Bailey, 2006), and expressing a personal feeling, attitude, value judgment, or assessment in an effective way (Biber, 1999). From those theories, there are some benefits from the tenor consideration to help students write an argumentative text. Increasing students' awareness to use personal

pronouns in writing the essay is one of the benefits. The students should use a less personal pronoun and more in using nominalization and the pronoun "it" to achieve the essay's objectivity. Besides, it can help the students be critical in influencing and persuading the readers by using appropriate directive and command strategies. The students need to manipulate the tenor in their essays. Therefore, they are not allowed to be more 'bossy' in stating their argument.

Moreover, tenor consideration can give the students the lessons as the academic people they need to complete their argumentative essay by providing the evidence, such as a related study or the experts' statement, to strengthen their argument. Besides, it can also improve students' awareness of their attitude, judgment, and assessment of the issue they convey in their argumentative essays. The students should modify their attitude expressed in the text to be neutral in positioning themselves. Besides that, the tenor consideration can increase students' critical thinking to consider the modal verb they use to persuade the readers about the argument and improve the writer's commitment to state the opinion. To achieve this goal, the students should use more epistemic modality rather than deontic modality.

CONCLUSIONS

Through personalization analysis, the students projected themselves as the people who experienced the listening comprehension. It can be seen from the frequent use of the personal pronoun *"they,"* which was projected as the college students. However, the students did not tend to contribute themselves to the argumentative essays. Moreover, they considered their essays' readers like the students at the university level.

In the standing analysis, the students realized their authority by providing the lower occurrence of using modulation, mostly objective modulation. It indicated that they still did not tend to present their authority and expertise. They also showed it by stating their own experiences in learning listening by using declarative mood. Besides, the students were still lack of providing their expertise in writing their argumentative essays. The infrequent use of references from reputable sources is the reason for that result.

From the analysis of stance, the way students constructed their argument was revealed. The students built their argument by taking a side toward (mostly) the listening comprehension in the language laboratory. They did not tend to be neutral in responding to the issue in their argumentative essays. Moreover, how the students influenced the readers was considered as their attempts to construct the argument. However, when the students wanted to persuade the readers, they still lacked the appropriate technique in presenting their stance using modality. As the indicator of writers' confidence, the infrequent use of epistemic modality becomes the reason for this finding.

From those explanations, there are some benefits for the students to consider appropriate tenor in writing the academic text, especially argumentative writing. The benefits are increasing students' awareness in using the personal pronoun, helping students be critical in influencing and persuading the readers by using appropriate directive and command strategy, and giving the students lessons to complete their

argumentative essay by providing the evidence from the references. Other benefits are improving students' awareness in expressing their attitude, judgment, and assessment toward the issue they convey in the text and increasing students' critical thinking in considering the modal verb they used to persuade the readers.

In terms of contribution for English language learners, this study relates to the interpersonal meaning in written language, especially in academic text, about how the writer constructs the relationship with the readers. English language learners need to pay attention to the interpersonal meaning, especially tenor. That term can reveal the meaning of interaction between the writer and the reader in the text. Thus, the English language learners need to be careful in applying particular language features to realize the appropriate tenor.

Besides, for English lecturers, the realization of tenor contributes to helping English lecturers understand the students' participant relationship in their essays. The lecturers can increase the students' ability to consider appropriate tenor by teaching them about Systemic Functional Linguistics and its language features, especially those used in the argumentative essays. Therefore, the lecturers should write argumentative text by considering the tenor in the text.

Furthermore, this study concerns how the undergraduate students realize the tenor in argumentative essays, in which there is still an inappropriate way to recognize the tenor. Other researchers might conduct further research on the students after explaining the tenor in the text. Hopefully, it can increase the students understanding of the realization of tenor in academic writing, especially in argumentative text. Moreover, the study of tenor realization can be conducted to the different genres of academic writing. Therefore, the research can investigate how the writers realize tenor among various genres of academic writing.

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