CONSTRUCTING SCHOLARLY IDENTITY AND AGENCY THROUGH MODALITY AND LEXICAL CHOICE IN UNDERGRADUATE WRITING

Zia Hisni Mubarak*, Sipri Hanus Tewarat, Afriana
Universitas Putera Batam, Kepulauan Riau,
*) email corresponding author: mubarakzia@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study investigates how undergraduate students construct scholarly identity and express agency in academic writing through the use of modality and lexical choices. Drawing on a discourse analysis framework, the research analyzes a corpus of undergraduate essays from an English language education program, focusing on the strategic deployment of modal verbs, adverbs, evaluative language, and hedging devices. The analysis reveals that students vary in their ability to position themselves authoritatively in the academic discourse community. High-achieving students tend to use modality to balance assertion and caution, displaying nuanced control over epistemic stance and interpersonal engagement. In contrast, lower-achieving students often rely on assertive or vague expressions that limit dialogic interaction with potential readers. Additionally, lexical choices such as abstract nouns, nominalizations, and evaluative adjectives are found to be instrumental in shaping a credible scholarly persona. These findings underscore the importance of explicit instruction in linguistic features that construct academic voice and identity. The study contributes to the growing body of research on student writing by highlighting the role of language in mediating both personal agency and disciplinary alignment in academic discourse.

1. INTRODUCTION

In academic writing, the construction of identity and agency plays a pivotal role in shaping how students engage with knowledge and present themselves as emerging scholars. Student writers are not merely transmitters of information but participants in knowledge-making practices who must position themselves with authority, caution, or alignment within disciplinary discourses. Understanding how students linguistically perform identity and agency can reveal deeper insights into their development as academic writers (Clark & Ivanič, 1997; Hyland, 2002, 2005; Ivanic, 1998).

This study focuses on how modality and lexical choice contribute to the construction of scholarly identity and agency in undergraduate essays. Modality, as defined by Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), refers to expressions of probability, obligation, or possibility—features that allow writers to show stance, certainty, and engagement. Lexical choices, including evaluative adjectives and academic verbs, also contribute to how students align themselves with ideas and academic conventions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

The concept of agency, particularly in van Lier's sociocultural framework, is central to this investigation. Agency refers to a student's capacity to act intentionally and make meaning within discourse. When students strategically choose modal verbs like *might*, *must*, or *should*, or when they use evaluative terms like *significant* or *problematic*, they exercise rhetorical control over their texts and assert a scholarly presence (van Lier, 2008).

In academic settings, writing serves not only as a mode of communication but also as a process through which students develop their scholarly identities and assert their voices within their fields. According to Hyland (2009), the process of writing in academia "is a social activity shaped by the conventions of the academic community," where students must learn to balance institutional expectations with personal expression (p. 47). The construction of scholarly identity is particularly important in higher education, as it equips students with the tools to engage critically and assertively with disciplinary knowledge. However, in the context of Indonesian education, and especially within the dynamic socio-cultural environment of Batam, the challenges to constructing an authoritative academic voice are considerable.

For undergraduate students in Batam, an industrially and educationally growing city in Indonesia, mastering academic writing is a multidimensional challenge. Batam students often come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, where English is frequently a second or even third language. Consequently, these students may struggle with integrating themselves into English-speaking academic discourses, where authority and identity are expressed through complex language choices. As Ivanic (1998) notes, "Academic writing involves more than mere reproduction of knowledge; it requires the writer to present themselves and their perspective in ways that conform to the discourse expectations of the academic community" (p. 211). Many Batam students feel constrained by these expectations, which may conflict with their own linguistic and cultural backgrounds, leading to hesitancy in expressing a clear academic stance.

However, many undergraduate writers struggle to manage these linguistic resources effectively. Prior research has highlighted that students often exhibit either excessive tentativeness or uncritical certainty in their writing, both of which can obscure their academic voice. As a result, there is a pressing need to examine how actual language use in student texts reflects varying levels of identity performance and agency (Hyland, 2004; Tang & John, 1999).

This study investigates a corpus of undergraduate essays written in English to analyze patterns of modality and lexical choice. It seeks to answer the following questions:
1. How do undergraduate students use modality to construct scholarly identity in their writing?
2. What lexical patterns reflect student agency in argumentative essays?

By addressing these questions, this paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how language choices shape the academic identities students project—and to inform pedagogical practices in academic writing instruction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic writing is not merely a technical skill but a social practice where identity and agency are continuously negotiated. As students engage with disciplinary conventions, they make linguistic choices that reflect their positioning as novice or developing scholars. This section reviews the key theoretical frameworks that inform the present study: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the concept of agency in educational discourse, and

the role of modality and lexical choice in constructing academic identity (Lea & Street, 1998; Gee, 1990).

Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics provides a foundational lens for analyzing language as a social semiotic system. Within this framework, language serves three metafunctions—ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Of particular interest here is the interpersonal metafunction, which focuses on how writers express attitudes, judgments, and relationships with readers. Through this lens, modality becomes a crucial resource for negotiating meaning, enabling writers to signal degrees of certainty, obligation, and possibility (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Modality is typically realized through modal verbs (e.g., *might*, *must*, *should*), adverbs (e.g., *perhaps*, *definitely*), and evaluative expressions. These elements allow writers to take a stance toward their propositions—whether tentative, assertive, or deferential. In student writing, such stance-taking serves as a marker of scholarly identity. For example, a phrase like *"This may suggest…"* implies epistemic caution, while *"This proves that…"* asserts a confident stance. The frequency and distribution of such choices can reflect a student's developing academic voice (Hyland, 1998; White, 2003).

The concept of agency, as elaborated by van Lier (2008), complements the SFL perspective. In educational contexts, agency refers to the learner's capacity to act intentionally, make choices, and take control over learning and meaning-making processes. In writing, agency is reflected in how students assert or withhold claims, adopt critical perspectives, and align with or distance themselves from source materials. The linguistic realization of agency is closely tied to modality and lexical choice.

Scholarly identity, therefore, is not a fixed attribute but a discursive construction. It emerges through repeated acts of linguistic decision-making—whether to hedge a claim, adopt a strong evaluative stance, or present oneself as a participant in academic debate. These choices are shaped by students' exposure to academic discourse norms and their awareness of the expectations within particular genres (Ivanič, 1998; Tang & John, 1999).

By combining Halliday's view of modality with van Lier's notion of agency, this study investigates how undergraduate writers construct their scholarly identity through language. The interplay between modality and lexical selection offers a rich site for examining how students engage with knowledge and position themselves within academic discourse communities.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research utilizes a qualitative discourse analysis framework to explore how undergraduate students demonstrate scholarly identity and personal agency through their use of specific vocabulary and modality features in academic writing. By focusing on the actual language choices made by students, the study uncovers how they position themselves within the norms and expectations of academic discourse communities (Bloor & Bloor, 2007; Gee, 2014).

The study is based on a set of five argumentative essays written by students enrolled in an academic writing course at an Indonesian university in Batam city, Riau Island. These essays were intentionally selected to reflect a variety of writing abilities and engagement with academic conventions. The texts, originally submitted as part of course assessments, were anonymized and digitized for analytical purposes. Discourse analysis was conducted in two phases: initially identifying modality indicators using Halliday's model, and then examining vocabulary choices that express evaluation and stance. This approach enabled a close examination of how language constructs meaning, particularly in how students express levels of certainty, obligation, and perspective (Paltridge, 2012).

To ensure the validity of the interpretation, the study employed peer discussions with other discourse analysts and compared patterns across multiple texts to identify consistent linguistic strategies. Analytic decisions and observations were carefully recorded to maintain transparency. Overall, the analysis highlights how students' lexical and modal choices reflect their efforts to build academic credibility and navigate the rhetorical demands of scholarly writing (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings from the analysis of five undergraduate essays, focusing on how students construct scholarly identity and agency through modality and lexical choice. The discussion integrates these findings with the theoretical frameworks of Systemic Functional Linguistics and agency in learner discourse (Fairclough, 1992; Hyland, 2005).

Modality Analysis

Modality refers to how writers express attitudes, degrees of certainty, obligation, or possibility. In the essay, epistemic and deontic modality are both present and function to position the writer's stance, project authority, and construct a scholarly identity (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In the first student's writing, it is evident that the author has a fair understanding of epistemic modality, especially in conveying confidence in their argument. Statements like *"Early marriage is one of the most concerning phenomena in Indonesia"* indicate a high degree of certainty and reflect a firm stance on the issue. However, balance is achieved through the use of modals like *"can cause"*, *"might face"*, and *"may become"*, which show caution in expressing possible consequences of early marriage. This approach reflects an academic voice that is both careful and convincing. On the other hand, the use of deontic modality such as *"should be encouraged"* and *"should only consider marriage…"* suggests that the writer is not merely presenting facts, but also offering normative suggestions based on social ethics. This strengthens the scholarly identity of a concerned and reflective writer.

Meanwhile, the second student demonstrates an ability to combine strong conviction with rhetorical caution through epistemic modality. Expressions such as *"It will definitely affect…"* indicate a high level of confidence in the claim, while phrases like *"There is the possibility of infidelity…"* acknowledge uncertainty. By using forms like *"We should expect individuals to think critically…"*, the writer merges elements of belief with recommendation. Deontic modals like *"need to"* and *"should"* express urgency and moral responsibility, emphasizing that the writer takes an active stance in the social discussion. Even in seemingly descriptive statements such as *"Not everything revolves around sex…"*, evaluative judgment is implied, reflecting moral engagement and a critical perspective on early marriage.

In the third essay, the student appears to be at an early stage of mastering modality in academic contexts. Although there are attempts to adopt an objective tone using *"might"* or *"would"*, there are still overly definite claims without hedging, such as *"This all happens because of early marriage"*, which reflect excessive certainty. This inconsistency indicates that the student is still learning how to balance assertiveness with nuance. Regarding deontic aspects, the use of *"must"* as in *"the couple must commit…"* reveals a strong normative voice, suggesting a desire to guide the reader toward certain social values. Nonetheless, the overall impression of the essay reflects a developing academic voice, with potential to refine arguments by increasing awareness of linguistic subtlety.

The fourth writing shows an overuse of strong epistemic modality without the caution required in academic discourse. Phrases like *"Young marriage is not an obstacle"* or *"It is just the same life before marriage"* convey full certainty without acknowledging the complexity or possible variation in experiences. While *"can"* is used, such as in *"They can relate more to their child"*, it is too general and repetitive, weakening the strength of the argument. There is only one example of hedging that indicates an awareness of uncertainty: *"There might be abuse…"* Furthermore, deontic modality is almost absent. Although the word *"need"* appears a few times, it is more descriptive than normative. The lack of expressions like *"should"* or *"must"* makes the writer's voice sound less authoritative and more like a personal opinion than a well-developed academic analysis.

In contrast, the fifth student demonstrates a mature understanding of modality as a rhetorical strategy. By using modals like *"may"* and cautious phrases such as *"Some find advantages…"* or *"Most people are likely to discover…"*, the writer avoids sweeping generalizations and presents arguments that are reflective and open to multiple perspectives. Lexical choices such as *"adhere to the belief that…"* show epistemic distance — an analytical stance not directly tied to any one viewpoint. In terms of deontic modality, although not dominant, phrases like *"Parents often advocate…"* or *"It's important to emphasize…"* implicitly convey social values without sounding overly forceful. This combination constructs an academic voice that is thoughtful, balanced, and credible, showing a writer who has effectively internalized the norms of scholarly discourse.

Comparative synthesis of Modality use in five student essays

The five student essays display a range of modality usage that reflects varying levels of academic maturity and control over evaluative stance. Epistemic modality, which indicates degrees of certainty or probability (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), was the most prominent and differentiated among the students. Student 1 demonstrates a balanced use of certainty and caution, alternating between assertive claims and hedged possibilities. This reveals a developing academic voice that is both reasoned and reflective. Student 2, on the other hand, frequently uses high-certainty expressions such as *"will definitely"* and *"only logical,"* showing a persuasive and confident tone. While this establishes strong agency, it risks sounding overly assertive and lacking critical distance.

Student 3 exhibits a mixed pattern, sometimes using hedging (*"might," "would"*), but also making categorical claims without sufficient caution. This inconsistency suggests an emerging understanding of epistemic stance, but with limited control (Hyland, 1998; Martin & White, 2005). Student 4 relies heavily on confident, unqualified statements such as *"is very okay"* and *"is not a problem,"* with minimal use of hedging. This creates an overly simplistic tone and weakens the writer's academic credibility. In contrast, Student 5 demonstrates the most nuanced use of epistemic modality, frequently applying cautious modal verbs (*"may," "likely to," "often"*) and vague quantifiers (*"some," "many"*). Their layered use of modality helps construct a careful and reflective scholarly identity.

In terms of deontic modality, which expresses obligation, necessity, or moral stance, Students 1 and 2 stand out for their confident use. Student 1 uses *"should"* to express ethical recommendations, while Student 2 takes a stronger prescriptive tone with phrases like *"need to know"* and *"should behave,"* reflecting an authoritative voice. Student 3 employs *"must"* and *"needed"* in ways that sound somewhat moralistic, which may limit rhetorical effectiveness. Student 4, however, uses deontic modality sparsely and descriptively, suggesting a lack of persuasive control. Student 5 subtly expresses deontic stance through indirect markers like *"it's important to emphasize,"* maintaining a formal tone without sounding forceful or dogmatic.

Dynamic modality—relating to ability or potential—was less central, but still present. Students 2, 3, and 5 integrate it to describe capacity or implied responsibility, often linking it to social or behavioral evaluations. Student 4 uses *"can"* repetitively but without sufficient variation, resulting in a flat tone. Again, Student 5 stands out for using dynamic modality carefully and in context, reinforcing their academic positioning (Hyland, 1998).

In summary, Students 1 and 5 display the most effective use of modality overall, with Student 5 showing the highest degree of academic sophistication through cautious, layered language. Student 2 is persuasive and assertive, though at times too certain. Student 3 is inconsistent in modal control, and Student 4 shows the weakest grasp of modality, relying on overly certain, conversational expressions. These differences in modality use reflect varying degrees of awareness and ability in constructing academic voice, argumentation, and scholarly identity.

Lexical Choices Analysis

Lexical choices reveal how the student constructs scholarly identity through formal vocabulary, evaluative language, and abstraction. This analysis explores how five students construct their academic voice through lexical choices in their essays on early marriage. Each student demonstrates a unique approach to engaging with the topic, blending formal language, evaluative terms, and cultural references to varying degrees. By examining their vocabulary and rhetorical strategies, we can better understand how emerging writers negotiate academic identity, build persuasive arguments, and express critical awareness. The analysis is divided into individual discussions for each student, followed by a concluding reflection.

The first student exhibits a proficient grasp of academic vocabulary, incorporating formal and subject-specific terms that contribute to a scholarly tone. Words such as "psychological impact," "legal age," and "socialization" reflect the student's familiarity with academic and institutional discussions on early marriage. Furthermore, emotive expressions like "alarming" and "provoked strong criticism" emphasize the gravity of the issue and highlight the writer's ethical stance. The repeated use of "early marriage" helps maintain thematic clarity, while connectors such as "first of all" and "in conclusion" organize the argument effectively. The essay also successfully blends abstract ideas with real-life examples, balancing theoretical insight and practical relevance.

The second student adopts a more emotionally expressive and morally charged style, blending academic structure with informal and culturally embedded expressions. Phrases like "fragile mental shaped by early marriage" and "we are not mere animals" indicate strong emotional involvement and ethical positioning. Though the essay uses transitions and references to academic journals for credibility, the inclusion of casual expressions like "Halal sex" and "more mouth to feed" introduces a conversational tone that contrasts with the academic framework. Despite this fluctuation, the writer's voice remains persuasive, marked by confidence and ideological conviction, though it may sometimes compromise objectivity.

The third student's essay demonstrates an emerging academic identity that intertwines critical thinking, moral reflection, and cultural values. Lexical choices such as "immature" and "undesired things" suggest evaluative judgment, while rhetorical questions like "What is the guarantee?" invite reflection and reader interaction. The repetition of certain terms and the use of informal phrasing may slightly weaken the scholarly tone, but they also help reinforce the argument. Notably, references to religious morality—such as the idea of "sinful in Islam"—highlight the student's positioning within

a specific sociocultural and ethical context, giving their perspective additional resonance within the Indonesian setting.

In contrast, the fourth student employs a conversational and anecdotal style, relying on personal references and general statements. Phrases like "My friend's friend" and "What do you think" create a relatable tone but reduce the objectivity typically expected in academic writing. Additionally, vague terms such as "very okay" and "just the same" lack analytical depth. Although the essay attempts to weigh positive and negative aspects of early marriage, the emotional expressions are not supported by sufficient explanation or evidence. This approach weakens the argumentative strength and signals a need for more precision and scholarly distance.

The fifth student presents a well-developed academic style characterized by formal vocabulary and structured reasoning. Terms like "religious convictions" and "motivating factors" suggest a deliberate alignment with academic standards. The use of transitions such as "consequently" and hedging words like "may" and "possible" indicate a balanced and reflective stance. While the essay highlights benefits of early marriage with positive terms like "mutual support" and "emotional well-being," it also acknowledges potential downsides through abstract yet objective language. This nuanced lexical strategy reinforces the student's identity as a thoughtful and credible academic writer.

In summary, the five students display varying levels of proficiency in academic discourse, with each demonstrating distinct strategies in vocabulary use, tone, and rhetorical control. While some rely on emotional appeal and informal phrasing, others emphasize precision, balance, and scholarly distance. These differences reflect the students' ongoing efforts to establish academic credibility and express their stance on early marriage. Overall, the lexical patterns across the essays reveal evolving identities shaped by cultural context, personal engagement, and the demands of academic writing (Thompson & Hunston, 2000).

Comparative Analysis of Lexical Choices and Academic Identity in Student Essays
The five student essays reveal varied levels of proficiency in constructing academic identity through lexical choice and rhetorical style. Students 1 and 5 stand out for their consistent use of formal, technical, and abstract vocabulary. Their essays align closely with academic discourse conventions, employing terms such as "psychological impact," "emotional fortitude," and "mutual confidence" to build credibility and maintain objectivity. Both demonstrate a mature scholarly voice, supported by structured arguments, effective transitions, and the careful use of hedging to acknowledge complexity without overgeneralizing (Ivanič, 1998; Hyland, 2002).

In contrast, Students 2 and 3 adopt more emotionally charged and evaluative language, reflecting strong personal and moral engagement with the topic. Student 2 combines academic phrases like "consequently" with informal and culturally embedded expressions such as "plenty issue in their plate" and "we are not mere animals." This blend creates a passionate yet inconsistent tone. Similarly, Student 3 uses repetition and rhetorical questions to create a dialogic relationship with the reader, but the essay also incorporates religious language like "sinful in Islam," which, while culturally resonant, may limit its neutrality in an academic context.

Student 4's writing is the most informal and conversational. Phrases such as "What do you think..." and "very okay" signal a lack of academic distance, and the frequent use of vague or anecdotal language weakens the essay's analytical strength. Although the writer shows emotional engagement and moral concern, the absence of lexical precision, evidence-based reasoning, and formal tone prevents the construction of a credible

academic persona. Compared to others, this essay reflects an emerging but underdeveloped scholarly voice.

Overall, while all students express a clear interest in the issue of early marriage, only some succeed in translating this engagement into effective academic writing. Students 1 and 5 demonstrate a strong grasp of scholarly language and structure, while Students 2 and 3 show evolving identities marked by emotional and cultural engagement. Student 4, though involved, needs significant improvement in academic formality and lexical control. These comparisons highlight the crucial role of word choice, tone, and rhetorical strategies in shaping a persuasive and credible academic identity (Ivanič, 1998).

Use of Modality in Constructing Scholarly Identity

The analysis revealed that modality plays a central role in how students manage stance and epistemic positioning (Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Hyland, 2004). Across the corpus, modal verbs such as *can*, *should*, *might*, and *must* were commonly used. However, their distribution and rhetorical function varied significantly among the essays. For example, Student A frequently employed *should* and *must* to express obligation and authority:

> *"The government **must** provide more job opportunities."*
> *"People **should** be more aware of the risks."*

These choices reflect a confident stance and a clear authorial presence. According to Halliday (1994), high modality (e.g., *must*) projects assertiveness, marking the writer as a knowledgeable participant in discourse. In this sense, Student A demonstrates a developing scholarly identity, one that engages authoritatively with public and academic issues. In contrast, Student B used lower modality forms such as *might*, *can*, and *possibly*, indicating a more cautious stance:

> *"This **might** cause harm to the environment."*
> *"It **can** be seen as a violation of rights."*

This tentative tone signals epistemic caution, often associated with novice academic writers who are still negotiating their voice. Yet, from a van Lier (2008) perspective, this use still reflects agency—specifically, the agency to withhold **certainty** and engage critically with complex issues. While less assertive, this linguistic strategy suggests the student's awareness of multiple perspectives and the need for qualified claims.

Lexical Choice and the Projection of Agency

Lexical choices also played a significant role in reflecting agency and alignment with academic discourse. Students who consistently used abstract nouns (*freedom*, *justice*, *oppression*) and evaluative adjectives (*effective*, *crucial*, *problematic*) projected greater rhetorical control. For instance, Student C wrote:

> *"This policy is **problematic** because it disregards basic human rights."*

Here, the evaluative term *problematic* not only signals a critical stance but also helps the writer establish an evaluative voice. According to academic discourse norms, such choices contribute to a persuasive and credible scholarly persona (Hyland, 2005).

Student D, however, relied heavily on general or vague expressions (*good*, *bad*, *things*), which limited the argumentative depth and obscured their position. For example:

> *"This is a **bad** thing for the society."*

Such lexical vagueness weakens the projection of agency and reduces the writer's participation in academic dialogue. It may indicate either linguistic limitations or a lack of awareness of academic conventions (Tang & John, 1999).

Discursive Patterns across the Corpus

A cross-case comparison suggests that students with stronger lexical precision and more consistent use of modality tended to produce more rhetorically effective essays. These texts exhibited; a clear thesis and structured arguments, consistent use of evaluative and modal expressions, and balanced stance-taking (assertiveness with qualification). This supports the idea that the construction of scholarly identity is closely tied to language control. As students gain greater familiarity with academic genres, they develop the capacity to strategically position themselves within discourse.

Theoretical Integration: Identity-as-Performance

Drawing on the notion of identity as discursively constructed (Ivanič, 1998), the findings reinforce the idea that identity is performed through repeated linguistic choices. Students are not passively reflecting their thoughts; they are actively constructing their scholarly presence through modality and evaluative vocabulary.

Moreover, from van Lier's sociocultural view, these students exhibit varying levels of agency—not only in their stances but in their rhetorical decision-making. Even cautious or inconsistent use of modality can still reflect intentional positioning within the norms of academic writing.

Strengthened Argument

The findings confirm that modality and lexical choices are not superficial language features but are deeply tied to the development of academic identity and agency. These linguistic resources function as tools for rhetorical positioning, allowing students to align with or resist dominant discourses, assert knowledge, and signal uncertainty.

By linking Halliday's systemic approach with van Lier's notion of agency, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of student writing as a site of identity negotiation. It also highlights the pedagogical value of helping students become more linguistically aware of how their choices shape the way they are perceived as scholars (Hyland, 2005; Lea & Street, 1998).

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored how undergraduate students construct scholarly identity and exercise agency through modality and lexical choices in academic essays. Drawing on Halliday's systemic-functional linguistics and van Lier's concept of learner agency, the analysis demonstrated that students' linguistic decisions reflect not only grammatical patterns but also their evolving position as participants in academic discourse.

The findings revealed that modality—through modal verbs like *must*, *can*, and *might*—was central to how students conveyed certainty, obligation, and tentativeness. These forms indexed different levels of epistemic authority, ranging from assertiveness to cautious engagement. Similarly, lexical choices, particularly in the use of evaluative adjectives and abstract nouns, shaped the rhetorical voice and stance of each writer. Together, these linguistic elements served as tools for performing scholarly identity and signaling one's alignment with academic norms.

From a theoretical perspective, the study affirms that identity is not a fixed attribute, but a performance enacted through discourse (Ivanič, 1998). It also aligns with van Lier's (2008) sociocultural view that agency is manifested through the ability to make purposeful choices—even tentative ones—within institutional contexts like academia. Thus, academic writing becomes both a linguistic practice and a site of identity negotiation.

Pedagogically, the findings underscore the need for writing instruction to go beyond grammar and coherence, placing greater emphasis on the discursive functions of modality and stance. Teaching students to be critically aware of how linguistic choices construct meaning—and shape their perceived academic voice—can foster more confident and agentive writers.

Implications for Future Research

While this study focused on a small corpus of essays, future research could expand the dataset and explore variation across disciplines, proficiency levels, or multilingual contexts. Further inquiry might also integrate interviews or reflective journals to better understand students' intentions and self-perceptions behind their linguistic choices. Such work would enrich our understanding of academic identity as both textual and experiential.

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