

Module 8: Language Resources for Argument Writing

Aims of this module:

- To identify language resources for writing an academic argument
- To demonstrate how evaluative vocabulary, modality, endorsement, attribution, comparison and concession can be effective resources for building an argument in an essay

In English there are many language resources which allow writers and speakers to effectively present an argument.

Evaluative vocabulary

Some descriptive words contain an evaluative meaning (either positive or negative). By consistently choosing negative (or positive) words, the reader can be subtly persuaded to see these things in the same way. For example, words with positive evaluative meaning include: important, significant, necessary, impressive. Words with negative evaluative meaning include: inconclusive, questionable, unimpressive, insignificant and weak.

Expressing Degrees: Modality

Modality is a term we use to describe the words in English which express degrees of certainty, frequency or obligation. Academic writers choose to use modality when they want to present opinions in a respectful way or when they are not 100% certain of the validity of their claims. Below is a list of some common modal verbs and adverbs.

Adverbs

possibly
probably
certainly
usually
always

Verbs

may
could
would
should
must

Attributing claims to outside sources: Attribution

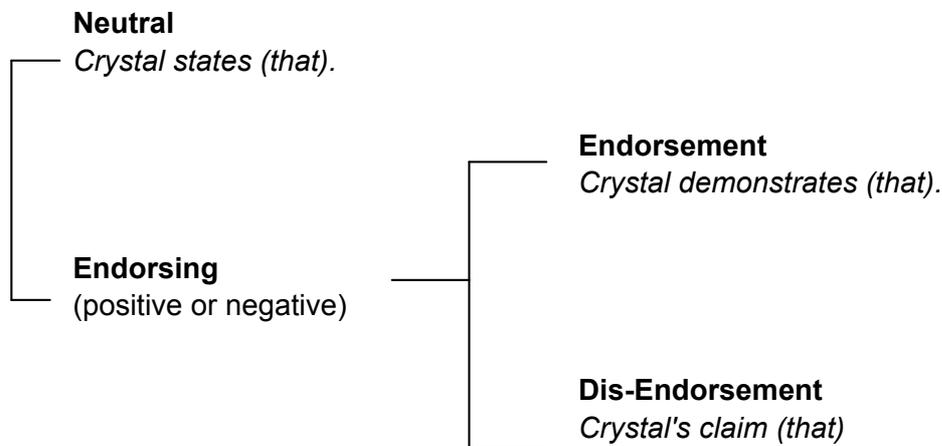
Attribution is a resource that allows us to attribute or project claims to outside authorities in a general or specific way. By doing this we can make our texts appear more or less subjective. For example

	Projecting clause	Claim
More subjective ↕ Less subjective	I think	that a global language is necessary
	There is strong evidence to suggest	

Supporting or not supporting claims of sources: Endorsement

We can also choose to attribute claims with more or less support. This is done by choosing verbs or nouns which are more or less interpretive.

For example:



Making comparisons and contrasts

An important way to evaluate omissions, strengths and weaknesses in arguments or evidence is by creating comparisons and contrasts. There are a number of structures in English you can use to make comparisons and contrasts, depending on your purpose.

Making concessions

Concession is a very powerful resource for acknowledging the views of others without giving those views very much power. Concessions are often expressed in phrases or clauses which begin with words like while, although, despite, even though, in spite of.

One especially effective way of using this resource is to begin with the concession and then express the view you want your reader to take more seriously in the main part of the sentence. For example:

While a global language would make it easier to communicate, many people without the resources to learn that language would be disadvantaged.

Exercise 1

Identify the evaluative language resources used in this text. Highlight or underline evaluative language and work out what resource is used (evaluative vocabulary, modality, endorsement, attribution, comparison or concession).

The main argument used to support the introduction of a global language is that it would facilitate business, trade and academic pursuits. It is argued that without English, for example, people will not be able to benefit from valuable international contacts which have been made possible by the rapid growth in the technology of communication (Crystal, 1997, p.11). However, this argument does not take into account the risk that those who do not have English as a first language could find themselves at a disadvantage compared with their colleagues.

In a recent study of international meetings within the corporate sector, researchers found that those with English as a first language were most likely to participate, especially when meetings involved the use of informal speech (Jones et al, 2001). There is also evidence that scientists who write up their research in languages other than English have their work ignored by the international community (Humphrey 2000).

While Crystal (1997, p.14) argues that real linguistic competence is possible if a language is taught early enough, many countries do not have the financial resources needed for such an education program. If governments are unable to educate all their citizens, only an elite minority would have access to the resources to achieve the level of language competence necessary to participate effectively on an international level. The result would be further disadvantaging of already marginalised groups.

Answers

Exercise 1

Modality

The main argument used to support the introduction of a global language is that it **would** facilitate business, trade and academic pursuits. It is argued that without English, for example, people will not be able to benefit from valuable international contacts which have been made **possible** by the rapid growth in the technology of communication (Crystal, 1997, p.11). However, this argument does not take into account the risk that those who do not have English as a first language **could** find themselves at a disadvantage compared with their colleagues.

Contrast

In a recent study of international meetings within the corporate sector, researchers found that those with English as a first language were most likely to participate, especially when meetings involved the use of informal speech (Jones et al, 2001). There is also evidence that scientists who write up their research in languages other than English have their work ignored by the international community (Humphrey 2000).

Less subjective attribution

Evaluative vocabulary

While Crystal (1997, p.14) argues that real linguistic competence is possible if a language is taught early enough, many countries do not have the financial resources needed for such an education program. If governments are unable to educate all their citizens, only an **elite** minority would have access to the resources to achieve the level of language competence necessary to participate **effectively** on an international level. The result would be further disadvantaging of already **marginalised** groups.

Concession