A corpus-based study of stance expression in EFL students' article review writing

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Abstract

Academic writing is a skill that needs to be mastered by students in the English Department. One of the ways to practice academic writing is through a critical review, in which students are assigned to write a review of a scientific journal article. In doing so, students can express their thoughts using stance expressions in their reviews. This research investigates the students' critical review writing by employing a corpus-based approach to analyze the frequency and distribution of stance expressions used by the students. AntConc software was used for quantitative analysis especially frequency and N-Gram, while TagAnt was used to identify words with their grammatical categories. The results were interpreted qualitatively by examining the context of the words through the concordance lines. The corpus was compiled from the results of article review assignment written by students participating in the Applied Linguistics class, consisting of 27,662 words in total. The result reveals that attitude markers are the stance markers commonly used by the students in the texts (44.7%), followed by hedges (37.2%), self-mentions (11.7), and boosters (6.4%). This finding suggests that the students frequently involved their feelings by expressing personal affective of stance. It also demonstrates the students' engagement with the texts they reviewed and their attempt to think critically instead of only retelling facts, despite the possibility of subjectivity. This research concludes that writing reviews can help students to think critically and express academic evaluation and argumentation in English.

Abstrak

Analisis berbasis korpus terhadap ekspresi pendirian pada tulisan tinjauan artikel mahasiswa jurusan bahasa Inggris

Penulisan akademik merupakan keterampilan yang perlu dikuasai mahasiswa jurusan Bahasa Inggris. Salah satu cara melatih penulisan akademik adalah melalui tinjauan kritis, dengan menugasi mahasiswa untuk menulis tinjauan terhadap artikel jurnal ilmiah. Penelitian ini menyelidiki tulisan tinjauan kritis mahasiswa dengan menggunakan pendekatan berbasis korpus. Peranti lunak AntConc digunakan untuk analisis kuantitatif khsuusnya frekuensi dan N-Gram, sedangkan TagAnt digunakan untuk mengidentifikasi kategori gramatikal kata-kata. Hasilnya ditafsirkan secara kualitatif dengan melihat konteks kata melalui baris konkordansi. Korpus penelitian disusun dari hasil penugasan menulis tinjauan mahasiswa yang mengikuti kelas Applied Linguistics, yang terdiri atas 27.662 kata. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa penanda sikap banyak digunakan dalam teks (44,7%), diikuti peranti pemagaran (37,2%), penyebutan diri (11,7%), dan peranti penguat (6,4%). Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa banyak melibatkan perasaannya dengan menunjukkan afektif personal dari pendirian. Penelitian ini juga menunjukkan keterlibatan mahasiswa dalam teks yang mereka tinjau dan usaha mereka untuk berpikir secara kritis, tidak hanya sekadar menceritakan kembali fakta, meskipun terdapat kemungkinan subjektivitas. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa menulis tinjauan dapat membantu mahasiswa untuk berpikir secara kritis dan mengekspresikan evaluasi dan argumentasi akademik dalam bahasa Inggris.

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1   Introduction

As one of the skills to be mastered in learning English as a foreign language (EFL), writing plays an important role, especially for university students. The ability to write in English can demonstrate a student's mastery of the language because writing involves the application of various knowledge and skills, such as vocabulary, grammar, and critical thinking. In a university context, particularly the English Department, the students are required to be able to speak and write in English, not only in casual situations but also in formal and academic ones. In a casual setting, EFL students are expected to have the ability to communicate effectively. This means that students should know how to express themselves clearly and understand their interlocutors in everyday conversations. In an academic setting, they should be able to engage with academic texts and develop critical thinking to analyze information and give reasoning and arguments. In addition, students' choice of words is an important aspect of second language writing that indicates their improvement as writers (Wing Yee Siu et al., 2024). On the other hand, the level of technicality and abstraction that are related to the representation of academic understanding can often be challenging for those who have not been proficient in this register (Hood, 2010).

One of the ways to develop students' skills to write academic texts is through critical writing. In doing so, students can practice this skill by reviewing a journal article. A critical review refers to a detailed evaluation of a text or other works, such as a journal article. Instead of only summarizing the content of the article, a critical review involves analyzing and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the ideas, content, and approach of the article. A critical review is written to give the readers a reasoned judgment about the value of the article and its contribution to the field of research. In universities, students are often assigned to write a critical review to prepare them to write a thesis. In this way, the lecturer can see how the students apply the technical aspects of academic writing including grammatical rules, vocabulary choices, cohesion, and coherence. Besides, the lecturer can also get insights into how the students express their evaluation, view, and stances towards certain subject matters and their critical thinking, especially in English.

Studies on evaluation in academic settings have been conducted primarily within the appraisal framework. These studies focus on how students use the appraisal subsystem of attitude in different text types written by students, including argumentative essays (Refnaldi, 2018; Liu, 2013), critical review (Cahyono, 2021), and course review (Setyaningsih & Larassati, 2019). In these studies, the appraisal framework by Martin & White (2005) was applied. In contrast to those studies that emphasis on students' evaluation, Cahyono & Setyaningsih (2019) applied the appraisal system by Hood (2010) to investigate the attitude of the lecturer in appraising his students' tasks. While the above-mentioned analyses were conducted on written text, the appraisal framework was also used by Sujatna & Kuswoyo (2023) to analyze students' attitudes toward spoken text, namely, oral presentation. Bastola & Hu (2021) also examined the attitude in master's thesis supervisory feedback in the form of written comments and oral feedback. Besides appraisal, analysis of evaluation has been done in terms of stance marking, for example, in classroom interaction between the teacher and students (Abrar, 2020). The findings suggest that students dominantly used an epistemic stance. Al-Zubeiry and Assaggaf (2023) analyzed stance marking in interaction across disciplines in research articles written by non-native speakers of English. They found that articles in the science discipline have a higher frequency of lack of stance markers than those in the humanities due to the distinctive persuasive characteristics of each discipline.

Other researchers have also investigated the evaluation of research articles by using a corpus-based approach that incorporates not only qualitative but also quantitative methods. They examined the evaluation, especially stance marking and hedges in academic writing. Kafes (2018) analyzed the authorial stance in research articles, especially on how academic writers of non-native and native

English speakers expressed their stance in the research article. Al Fajri and Oktavianti (2024) compared the use of stance markers in applied linguistics research articles between English L1 and L2 writers and found that L2 English writers used more boosters and attitude markers, while L1 English writers employed more hedges and self-mentions. Thuy (2018) examined cultural differences in the use of hedges in the results and discussion sections of research articles written by Vietnamese and native English-speaking authors and found that hedge frequency was lower in articles by Vietnamese researchers. Alghazo et al. (2021) focused on grammatical devices used by academic writers of English to express stance in research article abstracts in the areas of applied linguistics and literature, and found that abstracts in both areas were similar in terms of the use of the stance complement clauses. These previous studies have examined evaluative meanings in academic contexts using appraisal theory and stance frameworks, and have focused on students' argumentative essays, course reviews, oral presentations, or stance in published research articles. Based on the aforementioned studies, it can be inferred that Indonesian EFL students' stance in critical review writing is under-researched. In other words, these previous studies have not yet investigated how Indonesian EFL students employ stance expression in academic writing, particularly critical review that requires evaluative judgment combining summary, critique, and recommendation. As stance expressions are essential in review writing, examining how students express stance helps reveal whether they understand the purpose of the text. Stance also reveals students' critical thinking; therefore, it can help teachers assess students' language proficiency and critical thinking skills.

The use of lexical items that are related to evaluation and stance is an important aspect in critical review writing. Stance refers to the writer's feeling, attitude, perspective, or position as enacted in discourse. Stance involves the writer's expression of personal attitudes and assessments of the status of knowledge in a text (Biber, 2006; Hyland, 2012). Furthermore, stance expressions can convey various types of personal feelings and valuations, including the writers' attitudes about certain information, their certainty about its truth, the way they obtained access to the information, and the perspective they are taking (Biber, 2006). Stance emerges in the writer's choice of one linguistic form over another (Strauss & Feiz, 2014). Thus, stance taking is not merely the expression of the writer's attitude or feelings towards a certain matter. Instead, it also involves the writer's activity of taking up a position in an interaction (Abrar, 2020). This means that stance deals with how writers express their personal attitudes and how they position themselves in relation to their audience and the information they present. It is conveyed through linguistic choices that shape the writers' role in the discourse.

Stance marking can be expressed overtly or less overtly (Biber, 2006). Stance expressions can convey various types of personal feelings and evaluations, and they can be expressed overtly through grammatical devices such as adverbials (e.g. *Obviously, your parents don't care what you do.*) and complement clauses (*I really doubt [that the check is there.]*), value-laden lexical choices such as hate and love, and paralinguistic devices like tone and pitch. Furthermore, in English, many common words are evaluative and used for the lexical expression of stance. These include (1) predicative adjective such as *good, lovely, nice,* and *right* commonly found in conversation (as in *That was nice.*) and *difficult, important, likely, necessary, possible, true* in academic texts (as in *The abnormality may be very minor or it may be virtually important.*); (2) verbs which express emotion or attitude such as *like, love, need, want* in conversation (as in *I love the color of the rice.*); and (3) attributive adjectives including *appropriate, good/best, important, practical, useful* in academic texts (as in *To produce the best results the plant should be supplied with water that contains no contamination.*) (Biber et al., 1999).

In a similar vein, Hyland (2005) argues that stance has three main components, namely evidentiality, affect, and presence. Evidentiality refers to the commitment of propositions a writer presents and their influence to the readers. Affect deals with the attitudes, including emotions, perspectives, and beliefs. Presence relates to the writer's projection into the text. Furthermore, Hyland

(2005) asserts that in academic writing, stance markers are also expressed in the form of the following categories. First, attitude markers, which convey surprise, agreement, importance, frustration, and so on, rather than commitment, such as *interesting, surprising,* and *excellent*. Attitude is mostly indicated by attitude verbs (*agree, prefer*), sentence adverbs (*unfortunately, hopefully*), and adjectives (*appropriate, logical, remarkable*). The second category, boosters, is used to express certainty, such as *always, definitely*, and *as we all know*. Other examples of boosters include *clearly, obviously, and demonstrate*. The third category, hedges, indicates the writer's degree of confidence, like *perhaps, it is likely*, and *might*. Hedges also allow information to be conveyed as an opinion instead of a fact. The fourth category belongs to self-mentions, which are indicated by the use of first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives such as *I, we*, or *the researcher*, to present propositional, affective and interpersonal information (Hyland, 2012).

In relation to how EFL students express their stance in academic writing, this research aims to investigate how Indonesian EFL students construct academic valuation and argumentation in written reviews. Analyzing stance in undergraduate students' writing is also crucial, since their academic writing indicates that they are still learning how to use the linguistic markers (Barbara et al., 2024). Therefore, this research will explore the use of stance markers in the critical review writing of EFL students in a private university in Semarang, Indonesia. This research is expected to fill the gap by mapping how stance expressions are distributed and by providing a corpus-based analysis of stance expression specifically in Indonesian EFL students' article reviews. This corpus-based research utilizes a corpus tool to analyze a corpus compiled from the students' writing by identifying the frequent lexical items related to evaluation and exploring how the students use the lexical expressions of personal stance. By integrating quantitative corpus techniques with qualitative interpretation, this research is expected to not only broaden the scope of stance research in EFL contexts but also offer pedagogically useful insights for teaching academic review writing at the undergraduate level.

2 Methods

This research adopted quantitative and qualitative methods. According to Biber et al. (1998) corpus-based research actually relies on quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative method involves using frequency information about occurrences of linguistic features found in the data, while the qualitative method is related to the interpretation of the data. The data of this research were taken from critical review assignments written by English Department students of Universitas Dian Nuswantoro, Indonesia. These students enrolled in the Applied Linguistics course, which was held in the fifth semester in 2023 and 2024.

This research employed a small corpus compiled from the students' assignments. A small specialized corpus is a corpus that contains a specific topic or is compiled for a specific research purpose (Koester, 2010), in this case, to investigate particular lexical items in EFL students' critical review writing. Small corpora means ones in the 20,000-200,000 word range (Aston, 1997). Learner corpus analysis often uses small, genre-specific datasets because it aims for contextual and functional depth rather than volume. Furthermore, specialized corpora are small but homogeneous, thus it allowed the researchers to examine linguistic features such as stance markers without any potential noise caused by cross-genre variation. These essays consist of 27,662 words in total, taken from 26 essays written by students participating in the classes. The assignments were already in the form of digital files (MS Word and PDF formats). Following Danis (2019), no corrections on the grammar in the students' writing were made, but the spelling errors that might influence the identification by the corpus software were corrected. These texts were then compiled into a plain-text corpus using Notepad, and then the results were generated by using AntConc software. AntConc is a corpus analysis tool that offers features including concordancer, word and keyword frequency generators, and tools for cluster and word distribution analysis (Anthony, 2004). Moreover, to facilitate the

researchers in identifying the grammatical categories of the lexical items, such as verbs, adjectives, etc., the TagAnt (Anthony, 2024) tool was also utilized. The tagged version of the data was used to identify the lexical items that express stance markers, while the untagged version was used to comprehend the context of the stance markers through concordance/KWIC (key words in context) tools. The analysis of this research focused on the lexical items that express evaluation and the stance markers, including modal verbs, attitude markers, hedging expressions, and self-mentions. The interpretation on frequency and concordance lines was done to explore how the students express their evaluation and personal stance in their writing.

3   Results

This research analyzed the stance markers used in Indonesian university students' critical review writing. After the data were analyzed, the findings in the form of occurrences and examples of each stance marker are tabulated and presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Stance Markers Used in the Students' Writing

No	Stance Markers	Freq.	%	Examples
1	Hedges:	447	37.2	
	Modal aux.	355	29.5	can, would, could, should, will, may, might, must, had to
	Epistemic Adj. and Adv.	55	4.6	perhaps, seemingly, apparently, relatively, almost, entirely, quite, somewhat, sometimes, often, mostly, predominantly, fairly
	Epistemic lexical verbs	38	3.2	seem, appear, think, doubt, indicate
2	Boosters	77	6.4	really, always, definitely, surely, of course, in fact, definitely, clearly, significantly, certainly, completely, very, indeed
3	Attitude markers	539	44.7	interesting, excellent, important, mind-blowing, good, detailed, clear, well-structured, valuable, significant, specific, strong, subtle, easy, new, comprehensive, relevant, useful, thorough, difficult, insightful, complex, balanced; like, need, disagree, prefer, regret; unfortunately
4	Self-mentions	141	11.7	I, my, me, we, us, our, the writer, the reviewer
	Total	**1205**	**100**	

Table 1 demonstrates that a total of 1205 occurrences of the stance markers were identified in the students' article reviews. The result reveals that four types of stance markers were found, with attitude markers dominating the findings, followed by hedges, self-mentions, and boosters. This result indicates that the students mostly conveyed their emotions or affective attitude rather than commitment. Students also show their attitude towards the article both positively and negatively, mostly by using adjectives. On the other hand, the low use of boosters in the students' critical reviews may imply that the students are less assertive in their writing. Further discussion is presented in the following sections with examples provided for each category.

4   Discussion

4.1   Hedges

Hedges have the second-highest occurrence in this research. The use of hedges indicates that the students moderate their claims so as to be more cautious and avoid sounding too certain when presenting their claims. Using hedges is also likely to decrease responsibility for the truth or claims written in the review. It can be seen that the dominant use of modal auxiliary verbs shows that they

are likely to tone down their statements and avoid overgeneralization. In academic writing, this reflects that it is important to think carefully and maintain caution, particularly in article review writing, where arguments should be explained clearly and backed by supporting evidence.

The first category of hedges found in the students' article review is modal auxiliaries. These are the dominant types of hedges used by the students in this research (355 occurrences). This high proportion of modal auxiliaries in the findings suggests that the students viewed the ideas written in the journal articles as possibilities rather than certainties. Table 2 shows the occurrences of the modal auxiliaries.

Table 2: Modal Auxiliaries Used by the Students

No	Modal Aux.	Freq.
1	can	128
2	would	67
3	could	64
4	should	26
5	will	26
6	may	20
7	might	15
8	must	7
9	had to	2
	Total	**355**

The students used different stance markers of the modal auxiliary for different reasons. The use of *can* and *could* implies that the students express a general possibility or capability. This suggests that the students generalize or propose possible interpretations, rather than making claims. The examples of *can* and *could* found in the reviews are provided below:

(1) The research demonstrates how linguistics *can be a powerful tool* to break down hidden messages through the text.
(2) The tables and statistical data presented in this study were so compact, in my opinion, and confused me that I had to read it over and over again so that *I could understand the contents* of the table and the statistics.

In examples (1) and (2), the students used the modal auxiliary *can* and *could* in active and passive voice, respectively. Here, *can* expresses ability, especially regarding the approach of the research. However, the word *can*, in its negative form, was also used to show the student's incapability of making sure about the content of the article, as seen in example (3).

(3) Although this journal was indeed needed to read, there are perspectives from me as a reviewer that I can not be sure if their paper also contains some biases.

The use of *would* and *could* also imply assumed or conditional reasoning, which indicates that the students grew their ability to engage critically and offer alternative possibility or claims regarding the texts they reviewed. While a modal auxiliary will express possibility, it also shows future orientation.

(4) This *would have helped* readers understand not only how news framing occurs but also why certain judgment strategies are used in certain political contexts.
(5) I wish that the authors *could have given* more attention to appraisal and attitude analysis.
(6) In fact, if more examples are given, *readers will find it easier to understand* the patterns being discussed.

Other modal auxiliaries the students used to show possibility are *may* and *might*. The students could get the readers to be involved in their writing by connecting with them in the texts. The examples can be seen in (7) and (8). In these examples, the students gave possibilities of what the readers would have reacted if the authors had written their research clearly.

(7) As a result, readers *may be confused* about what the author meant when he used these words.
(8) If it is written in that format, it *might be more organized,* and readers will be more comfortable reading it.

The use of *should* indicates that the students give a recommendation or a normative judgment. This means that they tried to make an evaluation and showed their critical thinking about what should be done by the authors to address the limitations.

(9) To improve the paper, *the authors should consider refining* the language and structure by proofreading and revising for clarity.

In contrast, the students did not use many of *must* and *had to* in their writing. This suggests that the students rarely make forceful claims or inferences regarding the articles. These modal auxiliaries were used by the students to show the readers that the articles are worth reading, as can be seen in example (10). On the other hand, the word *had to* was used to show the students' difficulties in understanding the article, as provided in (11).

(10) You *must read* this article because the article is very helpful to many people.
(11) The tables and statistical data presented in this study were so compact, in my opinion, and confused me that I *had to read it over and over again* so that I could understand the contents of the table and the statistics.

In terms of epistemic adverbs and adjectives, the students used these stance markers to express their degree of confidence, to soften their evaluation and claims, and to invite the readers' interpretation. It can be assumed that the students developed an awareness that the readers may have different interpretations of their point of view. Meanwhile, the epistemic lexical verbs were employed by the students to construct their arguments instead of only stating facts. The distribution of these stance markers is provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Epistemic Adverbs & Adjectives and Lexical Verbs in the Students' Reviews

No	Epistemic Adv. & Adj.	Freq.	Epistemic Lexical Verbs	Freq.
1	often	19	think	17
2	quite	13	appear	8
3	mostly	5	indicate	6
4	at least	3	seem	5
5	seemingly	2	doubt	1
6	relatively	2	suppose	1
7	sometimes	2		
8	fairly	2		
9	perhaps	1		
10	apparently	1		
11	almost	1		
12	entirely	1		
13	somewhat	1		
14	predominantly	1		
15	evident	2		
	Total	**55**		**38**

It can be seen from Table 3 that the students employed epistemic adverbs and adjectives and lexical verbs. In addition, the epistemic adjective occurred only twice in the word *evident*. Examples of how the students applied these types of stance markers are given in (12 and (13).

(12) Despite these limitations, I *think* the article offers important insights into how newspapers shape public opinion through their use of language.

(13) Then, although this is a language journal, the authors *seem* to invite readers who do not have an educational background in the language section to also read and follow the focus or material of the discussion in this article.

In examples (12) and (13), the students used the epistemic lexical verbs *think* and *seem,* respectively. These words indicate the students' personal judgment, but they still imply that other opinions or points of view were possible. These words also enable the students to present their understandings of the limitation posed by the journal article, as in (12), and the author's way of engaging the readers of the journal article, as in (13). At the same time, the students also acknowledged their uncertainty and subjectivity towards those articles. These words are commonly used, particularly when the students are still learning how to incorporate a personal stance into academic writing that requires objectivity. Moreover, the students also made their statements indefinite by utilizing frequency adverbs such as *often* and *sometimes,* as can be seen in examples (14) and (15). These words are employed to show that the students avoid giving strong claims by not mentioning the frequency of the authors' use of linguistic terms in (14) precisely, and how often the authors combined the intensity and clarity of definition in their article as quoted in example (15).

(14) The sentence structure is long, full of theories, and *often* uses linguistic terms that are only understood by people who are already familiar with this field.

(15) This combination of intensity and clarity of definition creates a balance between analytical depth and readability, even if it *sometimes* feels too dense for casual readers.

In example (16), the student used the epistemic adjective *evident* in their review. Here, the student expressed that s/he was certain about her/his claim as it was supported by the evident shown in a particular table provided by the authors.
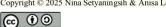
(16) As shown in Table III provided by the researchers, *it is evident there* that the technique categorization is written using the Indonesian Language.

The use of different categories of hedges in the article reviews demonstrates that the students seem to build their skills in presenting their arguments. It also implies that they did not just report or retell the information they read in the journal articles. Instead, they tried to shape their argument by evaluating evidence and facts from the texts.

4.2 Boosters

Boosters allow the writers to show their certainty and to emphasize information. However, this category of stance markers was less employed by the students in their article reviews. The limited use of boosters implies that the students might be reluctant to display their strong certainty or were not confident enough to present their claims. They might also want to sound more neutral when presenting their evaluation. The stance markers expressing boosters in the students' article reviews are summarized in Table 4.

It can be seen from Table 4 that the students mostly use *very* to intensify their arguments. This stance marker occurred mostly with adjectives expressing attitude as a modifier, as shown in examples (17) and (18). In addition, the word *very* is also common and familiar to EFL students, so it was frequently used by the students.

(17) Overall, this article is a *very* rich piece of theory and data on appraisal analysis in news.

(18) As I have said before, this article is *very* interesting to read and provides a lot of new insights.

Other markers of boosters found in the data include *in fact* and *indeed*. These are also used to confirm or strengthen the arguments that were already made by the students. Furthermore, by using these boosters, the students might want to sound more authoritative since they could add a more persuasive tone to their evaluations.

(19) *In fact*, if more examples are given, readers will find it easier to understand the patterns being discussed.

Table 4: Boosters Used in the Students' Reviews

No.	Boosters	Freq.
1	very	43
2	clearly	8
3	really	6
4	always	5
5	significantly	4
6	certainly	4
7	definitely	2
8	surely	1
9	of course	1
10	in fact	1
11	completely	1
12	indeed	1
	Total	**77**

Although this journal was *indeed* needed to read, there are perspectives from me as a reviewer that I can not be sure if their paper also contains some biases.

4.3 Attitude Markers

Attitude markers are the most prominently employed stance markers in the students' writing, with 539 occurrences. The types of attitude markers found in their critical reviews include adjectives such as important, significant, interesting, well-organized; verbs such as like, need, disagree, prefer; and adverbs like *unfortunately*. They also gave not only positive but also negative attitudes towards the articles they reviewed, as can be seen from the words like *disagree, unpleasant, confusing,* and *inconsistent*. Table 4 presents the occurrence of the ten highest attitude markers identified in the students' article reviews.

Table 5: Attitude Markers in the Students' Review

No	Attitude Markers	Freq.
1	detailed	36
2	like	36
3	well-pp	34
4	clear	28
5	valuable	27
6	important	25
7	significant	23
8	specific	23
9	strong	21
10	good	19

*(only 10 highest frequency is displayed to avoid an extended table presentation)

Examples of how the students express their attitude towards the journal articles can be seen in the sentences below. The students gave positive evaluations to the journal articles, especially in terms of the depth of the analysis and the way the authors presented their arguments.

(20) This study provides *an extensive and detailed analysis* of the translation procedures.
(21) Moreover, I *like* the writing style by Nazara et al., because this study is *very detailed* in terms of describing the research process, which can be seen from the third chapter or method.

Besides positive evaluations, the students also pointed out the articles' limitations in their reviews, as can be seen in examples (23) and (24), and their disagreement and preference concerning the way the authors presented their data and analysis, as shown in examples (25) and (26).

(22) The symbols make the writing seem *messy and unpleasant* to read.
(23) *Unfortunately*, it has limitations or lacks, especially concerning audience reception analysis and the consideration of multimodal discourse.
(24) […] because I *disagree* if the author just takes the data source from theconversation.com.
(25) I would much *prefer* if the author could explain more in depth each translation technique used with specificity of the text being analyzed.

The frequent application of the attitude markers reveals that the students mostly evaluate the journal articles by expressing their feelings, personal valuations, or affective stances. This result also suggests that the students engaged with the material and they attempted to give a critical evaluation rather than just a description of facts. It can be inferred that the students not only summarized the texts, but they also gave reactions toward the article and the authors. However, this dominant frequency may indicate that personal emotions are significantly involved, which may signal subjectivity.

4.4 Self-mentions

Self-mentions were also found in the students' critical reviews in the form of first-person pronouns, singular and plural, possessive adjectives, and implicit expressions of *the writer* and *the reviewer*. Using self-mentions is also considered important in academic writing since it can show the writer's own views and arguments. It also shows the writer's role in the text. The result of self-mentions of employment in the students' critical reviews is provided in Table 6.

Table 6: Self-Mentions in the Students' Reviews

No	Self-mentions	Freq.
1	I	74
2	us	14
3	my	13
4	we	13
5	me	10
6	the writer	10
7	our	4
8	the reviewer	3
	Total	**141**

Based on Table 6, it is evident that the pronoun *I* is mostly preferred by the students. Since a critical review also contains subjective interpretations, it is common to find authors uses first person pronoun in their writing. On the other hand, the use of the pronoun *we* indicates that the students wanted to include the readers in the discussion and to take a similar position with them and to sound more collaborative rather than confrontational. It can be seen in examples (27) and (28).

(26) *I* think that the authors were too hurried and there are some sections that *I* think need to be discussed more extensively.

(27) By utilizing Appraisal Analysis, *we* can understand how opinions and attitudes are embedded in news texts, influencing how political figures and their action are viewed by the public.

When referring to themselves as *the writer* or *the reviewer*, the students seemed to distance themselves in order to present a neutral view. The use of these self-mention expressions also established their roles as the person who did the writing and reviewing, and at the same time, maintained objectivity.

(28) With this, *the writer* would like to review the whole article, starting from the title to the conclusion.

(29) Moreover, *the reviewer* or readers can not assure that there is bias in Asad's paper.

This research sought to investigate the stance markers in academic writing by taking a small corpus of students' critical reviews of two published journal articles. Based on the quantitative analysis, this research found that the students employed Hyland's four categories of stance expression, namely hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions. Meanwhile, the qualitative interpretation indicated that the students used different stance expressions for various reasons. This research found that the highest frequency of stance markers is the attitude markers. It can be implied that the students frequently expressed their personal evaluation as an engagement with the materials in the journal articles. This supports the finding of Al Fajri and Oktavianti (2024), as Indonesian writers also employed a higher frequency of attitude markers and that these markers were applied to express affective attitudes.

The second-highest frequency of stance markers is hedges. Hedges may indicate that the students were likely to be more careful in presenting their claims by softening their statements and avoiding too much generalization. The most commonly used type of hedges is modal auxiliaries to express possibilities, capabilities, and give recommendations. This finding is consistent with the research done by Kafes (2018), whose findings reveal that modal verbs were used to show important points, express possibilities, make suggestions, and state limitations. However, in contrast with the findings of Thuy (2018), in which the necessity of the issue or the actions was emphasized through the significant use of *should* by Vietnamese writers, this research found that the writers focused on possibilities and capabilities, as shown by the modal verb *can* that has higher frequency compared to other modal verbs.

In terms of self-mentions, there is a moderate use of this category, which suggests that the students considered using self-mentions to take ownership of their views in their writing. The students used more first-person pronouns than phrases like *the writer* to refer to themselves. While the findings of Al Fajri and Oktavianti (2024) also show that the use of self-mention is not as high, there is a difference in terms of how the first-person pronoun was used. This previous research found that the pronoun *we* was mostly used to explain research methodology and findings and to present arguments, whereas in the current research, the pronoun *I* was used to express the writers' personal views. The least frequent stance marker used by the students is boosters. The result is also in line with Al-Zubeiry & Assaggaf (2023), who found that non-native English speakers are less likely to use boosters in humanities articles since humanities researchers are concerned with views and opinions rather than facts.

Overall, the article review written by the students reflects that they are developing their English mastery. By writing a critical review, the students could learn how to give judgment, express their evaluation, and give recommendations, which are important aspects of critical review writing. The use of stance markers in the students' critical review writing also shows that they have acknowledged the style of academic writing. These findings have several pedagogical implications. The students'

use of stance markers suggests that they are starting to adopt academic writing conventions. However, targeted instruction is still needed to improve their knowledge and skills in using stance markers in a review writing. This can be implemented in the teaching and learning process in the academic writing class. Teachers can also use students' stance expressions to improve their writing, such as tone and authorial identity or position, to support more confident and intentional stance-taking in academic writing.

5   Conclusion

This research investigated how Indonesian EFL students express academic valuation and argumentation through their journal article reviews. The analysis was focused on the stance expressions used by these students. Using quantitative analysis through a small corpus compiled from the students' writing, this research looked at the frequency of occurrence of the stance markers. In terms of qualitative analysis, this research employed concordance lines to examine the usage of the stance markers in context. Based on the analysis, the researchers found that the students utilized the four categories of Hyland's stance expressions in their journal article reviews, based on the order of highest to lowest frequency, namely attitude markers, hedges, self-mentions, and boosters. Attitude markers were dominant since the students mostly involved their feelings, as can be seen from their expression of personal affective stance. Attitude markers also demonstrate the students' engagement with the journal articles. It can be concluded that the students did not just report facts or materials, but they also involved their critical thinking and evaluation when reviewing the articles. In other words, article reviews can help students to think critically and write an academic evaluation and argumentation in English. However, some limitations still need to be addressed. The present study did not specifically analyze how the Indonesian cultural background might influence the use of stance expressions, so future studies may consider this in the analysis. Moreover, the present study only used a small sample; therefore, it may not depict a generalization of the academic writing skills of Indonesian EFL students. Future studies could include a larger sample comprising students from different universities. Furthermore, future studies could also make a comparison with native English speaker students or other non-native English speaker students from different cultural backgrounds to look at how they express their stance in writing a review or other text types.

Disclosure Statement

The authors claim there is no conflict of interest.

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GENERAL COMMENTS