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Contact Details:

Dr. Caroline Coffin
Centre for Language and Communications
Faculty of Education and Language Studies
The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA

Telephone:
Work: 01908 858 495
Home: 0207 272 4374

Fax: 01908 654 111
Email: C.Coffin@open.ac.uk

Caroline Coffin is a senior lecturer at the Centre for Language and Communications at the Open University, UK where she is currently chairing a new Open University course, *Exploring English Grammar*. Her most recent publications are *Analysing English in a Global Context* (co-edited with A.Burns) and *Teaching Academic Writing* (co-authored with Open University colleagues).

Title: Arguing about how the world is or how the world should be: the role of argument in IELTS Tests
(final draft)

Caroline Coffin
The Open University, UK.

Abstract

Non native speakers of English wishing to study at tertiary level in English speaking countries are increasingly required to prove their English language competence by taking an internationally recognised test such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing Systems (IELTS). This article reports on the analysis of a corpus of scripts written in response to a section of the IELTS test requiring students to write a short argument essay. The analysis focuses on the range of argument structures deployed by students, aiming to establish the extent to which particular strategies are associated with the band score awarded for the task. The article also considers possible effects of the design of the test on student responses.

KEYWORDS: argument genres; discourse analysis; English for Academic Purposes; English language tests; Functional Linguistics.

1. Introduction

Tertiary education is currently experiencing considerable change. Two influencing factors, and ones that have implications for English language teaching, are the globalisation of tertiary provision and new electronic forms of course delivery. These factors have contributed to the expansion of the numbers of non native speaker students entering English medium university study offered by English speaking countries – either following traditional face to face programs or, increasingly, programs that are delivered at a distance (Coffin et. al 2003: 3-5).

In order to assess students' capacity to successfully undertake English medium study, many tertiary institutions now make a specified grade on an English language test an entry condition for non-native speaker applicants. Two of the most widely used and internationally recognised tests are the International English Language Testing Systems (IELTS) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Candidates' success in either of these tests is deemed to predict their competence in managing the English language demands of academic study.

In this paper, my aim is to offer further understanding of the linguistic demands of the IELTS test, specifically the section that assesses students' ability to construct a short argument essay. Drawing on the analytical tools of systemic functional linguistics

(SFL) (e.g. Halliday 1985/94; Martin 1992; Christie and Martin 1997), I examine a range of argument structures that candidates typically draw on, considering their relationship with both test scores and test prompts. First, however, I present an overview of the growing body of research into argumentation with one of the aims being to show how the analytical tools used in the study presented here have been informed by recent theorising and empirical investigation. I also highlight key findings relating to the assessment of argument essays produced within English Language tests.

2. Argumentation: an overview of the research literature

Within the multidisciplinary field of Argumentation Studies various aspects of argumentation, including argument structures and schemes, have been the object of investigation (see, for example, van Eemeren et al. 1996; van Eemeren 2001). The field approaches argumentation from a number of disciplinary perspectives including those of philosophy, rhetorical studies, linguistics and education. In general, argumentation is defined in terms of purpose, rather than according to the rules of formal logic; "Argumentation is aimed at increasing (or decreasing) the acceptability of a controversial standpoint for the listener or reader" (van Eemeren et al. 1996: 340).

Investigations to date have included types of evidence in relation to argumentative strength (Hoeken and Hustinx, 2002), the role of audience (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Maneli, 1993), the evaluation of argument (both in terms of informal logic and in relation to contextual factors (Goddu, 2002, Voss and Dyke, 2002)) and argumentative persuasiveness and force (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986).

Of particular relevance to the study presented here is the development of frameworks for analysing the structure of argumentative texts. Theorists such as Leff (2002), for example, have proposed that patterns of opposition and resolution (e.g. *thesis, antithesis, synthesis*) are a useful means of capturing the global shape and structure of argument texts. In educational contexts, seminal work by the philosopher Toulmin (1958) has led to the development of frameworks which account for the various phases or elements marking the progress of an argument, for example, *claim, sub-claim, data (*or *grounds/evidence)* and *warrant.*

The results of a number of studies suggest that such frameworks are useful for both analysing and teaching argument (Fulkerson 1996; Mitchell and Andrews, 2000; Osborne, 2001; Riddle, 1997). Within the context of English language education, Connor (1991) and Connor and Mbaye (2002) have demonstrated the practical usefulness of using Toulmin's model of argument structure to assess the effectiveness of written argumentation. More specifically, Crammond (1998) has shown how Toulmin based frameworks can be adapted for the purposes of measuring the density or depth of argumentation occurring in persuasive texts. Of significance for the study presented here is Crammond's proposal that, in order to account for structural variation, a model of argumentation needs to acknowledge the role of oppositional elements (such as rebuttals and alternative solutions/positions).

Within the field of systemic functional linguistics, there has also been interest in developing descriptions of written argumentation (Coffin, 2000; Martin, 1989;

Thompson, 2001). Following this tradition, linguistic analysis has been used to show how argument structures vary according to the overall purpose of the writer. One fundamental distinction is whether a writer aims to analyse and argue about *how the world is* or - with a view to provoking some form of action on the part of the reader - argue about *how the world should be*. Such a distinction is sometimes characterised within the field of rhetorical studies as the difference between persuasion and argumentation. That is, whereas argumentation can be defined as a process of establishing a position which is then defended through the use of evidence, negotiation, logic etc, persuasion can be seen as a process of persuading the reader (either a specific reader or the world generally) to adopt the writer's position and (frequently) carry out an action. In sum, argument can be viewed as an attempt to make a point of view convincing and credible through a process of reasoning whilst persuasion can be understood as "that kind of discourse which is primarily focused on the reader and attempts to elicit from him [sic] a specific action or emotion or conviction" (Kinneavy 1971: 211).

Within SFL, the terms *analytical* and *hortatory* are used to distinguish these fundamental differences in argumentative purpose and strategy. Thus Martin (1989: 17) uses the term analytical for texts which present a well formulated claim or thesis, in which it is argued for example, **that** *logging is an environmental problem*. In these texts the focus is primarily on the credibility of the thesis and the relationship between writer and reader can be characterised as interpersonally distant. The term *hortatory*, on the other hand, is used for texts which aim to persuade the reader **to do** what the thesis recommends, for example, to participate in social action that will ensure the banning of logging. In these texts, the relationship between writer and reader is more interpersonally 'charged'.

It is proposed that the differences in analytical and hortatory forms of argumentation have linguistic consequences for how writers structure (i.e. begin, develop and conclude) their argument texts. Likewise it is proposed that the difference between a one sided and a two (or more) sided argument has consequences for how writers organise their argument texts. Whereas in a one sided argument (referred to as an *exposition genre* in SFL) a writer presents one side of an issue, in a two sided argument (referred to as *discussion genre* in SFL) a writer evaluates two or more opposing positions in order to make a judgement as to which is more viable. In other words, a distinction is made between texts which appear to weigh up evidence in a rational balanced way before passing a judgement and those which make no attempt to balance arguments for and against an issue, no matter how controversial the proposition (see Berril 1992; Crosswhite 1996 for a rhetorical perspective on this). A summary of these four types of arguing genres is presented in Figure 1.

	one sided argument	two sided argument
'persuading that'	analytical exposition genre	analytical discussion genre
'persuading to'	hortatory exposition genre	hortatory discussion genre

Figure 1 A classification of key arguing genres

The classification of argument texts according to their purpose and argumentative strategies has proved relevant not only to the description of academic essays but also to media and political argumentation (Iedema et al, 1995; Martin 1989). However, it is in relation to the teaching of writing that their use has been primarily investigated. (e.g. Coffin 1996, 2000; Humphrey 1996; Martin 1989, 2000; Rothery, 1994). In section 3.2, the classification system for argument structure will be further elaborated in terms of the textual and linguistic realization of the phases or elements that comprise each type.

Another area of research literature relevant to the study presented here is that which focuses on the argumentative essay produced as part of English language tests. Research shows that such tests do not necessarily take account of students' control of the overall shape and style of argument, focusing instead on syntactic features. In other words, language proficiency may be assessed in such a way that linguistic features related to argument structure and persuasiveness are overlooked. Research into EFL essays written for the Test of Written English (TWE), for example, reveals that, as long as candidates' essays are reasonably coherent and use correct grammar, students' scores are not affected by the way they address the task (Hamp-Lyons 1991a).

Other studies, however, show that some tests of academic writing do focus on the rhetorical and communicative dimensions of an argument essay. Hamp Lyons's (1991b) investigation into the ELTS test (a forerunner to the IELTS test) revealed that assessment criteria included rhetorical purpose in addition to syntactic features with raters tending 'to look at content as a rhetorical shaping of ideas, with the emphasis heavily on the rhetorical shaping' (1991b:142).

Such studies raise the issue of the extent to which students' control of rhetorical structures (such as an argument structure) can be linked to their assessment scores, particularly given the variability in scoring procedures and criteria, rater training and experience (for a review of these and other factors see Cummings, 1998; Kroll, 1998; Weigle, 2002: 58 – 76). The research literature which focuses on the assessment of writing more broadly (i.e. beyond that of English language teaching contexts) also recognises the difficulty of disentangling the variables that have an effect on assessment scores. To date, findings in this field have proved inconclusive as to the relationship between discourse mode (e.g. argumentation) and test score (see Huot 1990 for a general review of the research).

In summary, research to date shows that:

1. There have been a number of argument frameworks developed within educational contexts. Research investigating their application supports the notion that argumentation can be usefully defined in terms of rhetorical purpose and that for teaching and assessment purposes, it is helpful to break down argumentative essays into elements or phases e.g. *thesis, claim, data* etc.

2. Frameworks which have evolved in functional linguistics draw together and systematise distinctions which have emerged in the literature, namely the

difference between analytical and hortatory exposition and discussion (see Figure 1).

3. Investigations into the relationship between test scores and control of linguistic features related to argument structure and persuasiveness are largely inconclusive.

Section 3.2 will provide further detail on the theoretical and linguistic underpinning of the SFL argument framework. Section 3.3 will then show how the framework was used to distinguish the different types of argument produced by IELTS candidates.

3. The IELTS Study

The study reported on here forms part of a more extensive research project funded by the British Council (see Mayor et al. in press). This wider research involved a detailed error analysis of 186 IELTS scripts, as well as a close examination of candidates' use of Theme (following Halliday 1994) and aspects of tenor such as choices in speech function and interpersonal pronominal reference (Coffin and Hewings, forthcoming; Coffin and Mayor, forthcoming). The overarching aim of the wider project has been to contribute to the growing English for Academic Purposes (EAP) research literature as well as to provide IELTS with a research basis for ongoing review and revision of its practices (see Chalhoub-Deville and Turner, 2000: 533). The smaller research study presented in this article answers three main questions:

1. How do IELTS candidates typically organise and structure their argumentative essays?

2. Is there a relationship between the type of structure they use and their final score?

3. Is there a relationship between chosen argument structure and test design?

These questions were seen to be of particular interest because, although argument structure is not explicitly part of the IELTS assessment criteria nor a focus for rater training, the overall band descriptors[1] used in candidates' reports make general reference to their ability to argue. Band 8, for example, includes the descriptor 'Handles complex argumentation well' (Weigle 2002: 158-159). Two of the three global assessment criteria also make clear that candidates' writing is measured in relation to their use of *Arguments, Ideas and Evidence* and *Communicative Quality*. Therefore it was hypothesised that the presence of a clear argument structure and possibly a particular type of structure would have a bearing on test scores.

Findings in this area could therefore have practical implications for test preparation and test design (including assessment criteria) as well as rater training. At the same time, the difficulty of teasing apart the various variables affecting assessment scores (for example, the role played by the rater and the test prompt) was acknowledged. Results of the investigation were therefore to be interpreted with this in mind and the study largely viewed as exploratory to establish areas of significance which could be followed up in further large-scale studies.

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[1] Band scores in IELTS are between 1 (non user of English) and 9 (expert user of English)

3.1 The IELTS Data Sample

The data for the study consisted of scripts written in response to the *Academic Writing Task 2* section of the IELTS test. The task requires students to write a short essay in response to a specific prompt. This prompt consisting of a controversial proposition is framed within a general set of instructions (*present a written argument…you should use your own ideas etc.*) as illustrated below:

> *Present a written argument or case to an educated reader with no specialist knowledge of the following topic.*
>
> *Controversial proposition*
> *[e.g. It is now 30 years since man landed on the moon. Since then more and more money has been spent on space research and exploration. Some people think that this is not a good use of our resources and that any hope of establishing human colonies in space is unrealistic.]*
>
> *To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?*
> *You should write at least 250 words.*
> *You should use your own ideas, knowledge and experience and support your arguments with examples and relevant evidence.*

Responses to two different versions of Writing Task 2 (i.e. two different controversial propositions) were collected. These were referred to as Version A and Version B (Version B being as set out above). The initial data sample collected as part of the wider project consisted of 186 candidate scripts. These scripts were divided between 'high'-scoring (defined as a band score of 7-8 out of 9) and 'low'-scoring (defined as a band score of 5 out of 9)[2], and between first language Chinese and first language Greek candidates.

For the purposes of the study reported here, which took a qualitative rather than quantitative approach, a subset of 56 scripts was identified. This sub-set consisted of 14 scripts representing the band scores and test version as illustrated in Figure 2. Since cross-cultural issues were beyond the scope of this study, language groups were collapsed together.

Test version	Band Score	Script distribution
A	High-scoring	14
	Low-scoring	14
B	High-scoring	14
	Low-scoring	14

Figure 2. Distribution of scripts according to test version and band score

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[2] An IELTS band score of 5 falls below the cut off point for many courses.

3.2 Framework for analysis of argument structure

In order to examine how IELTS candidates typically organise their argumentative essays the analytical framework developed within functional linguistics (as represented in Figure 1) was drawn on. This framework has much in common with the Toulmin model (and the various educational applications thereof) in that it identifies similar elements of argumentation such as *Thesis* (cf. *claim* in the Toulmin model) and *Supporting Evidence* (cf. *data*). Unlike the Toulmin model, however, it distinguishes between one-sided arguments (exposition) and two or more – sided arguments (discussion) as well as hortatory and analytical styles. More significantly, these distinctions are 'unpacked' in terms of linguistic difference.

Such a framework for analysing and classifying arguments is set within the wider SFL theory of language in which a central tenet is the systematic relationship between language and context. Language use both reflects the social and cultural context which people inhabit and helps to shape it. The theory proposes that text structures and lexico-grammatical systems evolve within a particular culture to enable humans to achieve their social purposes. Such a theory thus lends itself to an exploration of language in use and enables linguistic analysis to answer questions relevant to applied studies such as that explored in this article:

> How do candidates draw on language to shape and structure their written texts to meet the rhetorical purpose required by the essay question?

With regard to the structuring and organisation of texts, SFL theory draws on the notion of genre. Within SFL, genres are defined as *staged, goal oriented social processes*. They are:

> referred to as *social processes* because members of a culture interact with each other to achieve them; as *goal oriented* because they have evolved to get things done; and as *staged* because it usually takes more than one step for participants to achieve their goals (Martin et. al 1994: 233)

In relation to the use of genre as an analytical framework for distinguishing argumentative processes and goals, its origins can be traced back to educational linguistic research conducted in Australia in the 1980's and the 1990's (referred to in Section 2). It should be emphasised that the genres emerging from such research do not represent an exhaustive categorisation of argument structures in English. However, based on research to date, they provide a general classification of four common types found in student academic writing. It was for this reason that the framework was adopted as a potentially useful means for examining the different ways in which candidates stage their written arguments in the IELTS test. At the same time, however, it was recognised that not all essays would necessarily fit into such an Anglo based framework given the potential influence of cultural background and the possibility of candidates being familiar with other kinds of argument structures embedded in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

Figure 3 shows how the genre framework makes explicit the relationship between each distinct purpose or goal in arguing and the phases or stages that a writer moves through to achieve the goal. In other words, each argument genre is made up of stages (referred to collectively as the text or generic structure), each of which performs a distinct function in achieving the overall purpose of the text. Stages that may or may not be taken up by a writer (such as the reinforcement of thesis in the hortatory exposition) are enclosed in brackets.

Genre	Hortatory Exposition	Analytical Exposition	Hortatory Discussion	Analytical Discussion
Purpose	to put forward a point of view and recommend a course of action	to put forward a point of view or argument	to argue the case for two or more points of view about an issue and recommend a course of action	to argue the case for two or more points of view about an issue and state a position
Staging	Thesis (Recommendation) Arguments + Evidence (Counter-Arguments + Evidence) (Reinforcement of thesis) Recommendation	Thesis Arguments + Evidence (Counter-Arguments + Evidence) Reinforcement of thesis	Issue Arguments + Evidence (2 or more perspectives) (Judgement/ Position) Recommendation	Issue Arguments + Evidence (2 or more perspectives) Judgement/ Position

Figure 3: Four common arguing genres in student academic writing

Figure 3 shows that in the hortatory and analytical *exposition*, a writer initiates their essay by stating a Thesis, an argumentative move similar to Toulmin's *claim* in that it refers to 'the conclusions whose merits we are seeking to establish' (1958: 97). In the body of an exposition essay, the writer puts forward a series of arguments and evidence which support the thesis. This stage is comparable to Toulmin's use of *data,* referring to support for the claim in the form of experience, facts, statistics etc. Counter arguments and evidence may be acknowledged so that the writer does not appear overly simplistic or polemical (cf. Crammond, 1998). Because the counter-argument stage is not obligatory it is placed in brackets (following the conventions of SFL genre analysis). In the final stage of the essay, the writer reinforces his/her position (the reinforcement of thesis stage) and/or recommends a course of action (the recommendation stage).

In the case of the hortatory and analytical *discussion*, the starting point is a controversial issue. The writer explores the issue from two or more perspectives before reaching a position and/or making a recommendation in the concluding section.

In order to illustrate how argument structures as outlined above can be applied to the analysis of written texts, a sample IELTS script (Text 1 below) has been broken down into its component stages. The essay was written in response to the prompt for Test

Version B (see Section 3.1). From the analysis, it is clear that the writer is drawing on a hortatory exposition structure. (Note that grammatical and spelling errors are retained as per the original script).

Text 1 - IELTS script illustrating the stages of a hortatory exposition

[Thesis]
Human beings endeavour for establishing colonies in the space is unrealistic and is a waste of limited resources on the earth.
[Argument 1 + Evidence for]
It has been 30 years since the United states successfully had its man landed on the moon and since then, countries like the US, the former Soviet Union and China have spent huge amount of manpower and money for the exploration of the outer space, mostly for military purpose. However the human beings have not benefited from such heavy investment. On the contrary, lives were lost in a number of accidents, including the explosion of a US spacecraft.
[Argument 2 + Evidence for]
The increased exploration, much in the name of establishing human colonies, is more or less the result of extensive arms race between a few powerful countries, which may accelerate the destruction of the earth itself. With advanced technologies gained from such attempts, human beings are in the jeopardy of a few who control the technologies.
[Argument 3 + Evidence for]
Our resources are very limited, and should be used for the benefit of the general public on the earth, many of them still fighting for adequate food and clothing. If the amount of money used for space development in the US are diverted to fighting against poverty, the whole Africa can be benefited. And if the current space technologies are used for the civil purpose, the productivity of the developing countries can be raised significantly.
[Argument 4 + Evidence for]
Increased publicity of establishing human colonies in the space will also make people less treasure the limited resources on the earth and dream that for one day we can move to another planet and explore the abundance of resources there. But do we have an idea even vaguely, how long it will take us to that day? Or can we arrive at that day?
[Recommendation]
Stop space race! And use our resources for the well-being of the earth and its residents!

(CH/51/7/252)

We have seen that in the argument framework adopted in this study, a primary distinction between the arguing genres turns on the degree to which the writer analyses and argues about the world as it is (the analytical exposition and discussion) rather than in terms of what should be done to change it (the hortatory exposition and discussion). These different argumentative purposes are most clearly reflected in the stages of Recommendation (in the hortatory genres) and Position (in the analytical genres). These stages deploy different lexicogrammatical resources as is illustrated in the following extracts (Extracts 1 and 2). Both extracts are taken from sample scripts responding to the controversial proposition of whether space research and exploration is a good use of resources. In Extract 1, the Recommendation stage illustrates the way in which the writer demands action for social change by using modals of obligation or necessity (underlined). In Text 1, we saw how such demands may be more directly stated through imperatives (i.e. Stop space race! And use our resources…).

Extract 1
(Recommendation stage taken from hortatory discussion)
In my opinion, more and more money should be spent on space research and explitation. No one can predict the future. The resources on the earth may also depleted one day. We should try our best to find out any other possible alternatives. The earth environment is getting worser and worser. May be the earth is no longer suitable for human being to live in the

future. We really <u>need to do</u> something and find out other possible alternatives before it is too late.
(CH/B/8/272)

Extract 2 (a position stage in an analytical discussion) consists of a series of declarative statements (apart from the interrogative – *isn't it worth a try?*) in which the majority of propositions are made tentative through the use of modal finites (*might, could*). Unlike in Extract 1 there is no demand for action. In general terms, analytical texts are less interpersonally charged than hortatory texts. Whereas in the latter, the writer takes a strong moral position exhorting their readers to bring about urgent social change, writers of analytical texts generally position themselves to have greater distance from, and less emotional investment in, the issue at stake.

> **Extract 2**
> **(Position stage taken from analytical discussion)**
> *All things considered, space research and exploration <u>might have</u> some drawbacks, since <u>is</u> very costly and this <u>could result</u> in relatively depriving funding to other domains, but isn't it worth a try? This new <u>opening could lead </u>us to many new exiting discoveries. All in all man <u>has opened</u> his wings and there <u>is</u> no turning back.*
> *(GR/B/8/511)*

The other main criteria distinguishing the types of arguing genres concerns the degree to which the writer engages with a range of perspectives or points of view. In the *exposition* genre (both analytical and hortatory), the writer is essentially putting forward a single line of argument (as stated in the opening Thesis stage), although counter arguments and evidence may be acknowledged at various points in the body of the essay. In the *discussion* genre, on the other hand, the writer negotiates two or more points of view regarding a controversial issue before reaching their own position. These different approaches to argument are clearly reflected in the opening stages of a piece of writing – the Thesis stage in the exposition and the Issue stage in the discussion. These two stages are illustrated in Extracts 3 and 4 below:

> **Extract 3.**
> **Thesis (presenting the overall position of the writer)**
> *The establishing of human colonies in space has created conflict among many people. I personally believe that money should be spend on space research and exploration provided that each state has taken care of certain more important priorities.*
> *(GR/B/8/509)*

> **Extract 4.**
> **Issue (presenting the overall proposition to be debated)**
> *Man landed on the moon 30 years ago. Since then more and more money has been spent on space research and exploration. Some people support on this while others think that it is unrealistic to spend our resources on space research and exploration.*
> *(CH/B/8/272)*

3.3 Analysis of argument structure

Having established an initial argument framework as outlined above, the corpus of IELTS essays was examined to establish a) the degree to which the essays could be adequately described using such a framework b) the particular type of argumentative structure favoured and c) any significant relationships between argument structure and band score.

It was hypothesised that candidates would be more likely to draw on the discussion rather than exposition genre in that the task explicitly asks:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?

Such a request suggests that candidates need to show an awareness of the controversial nature of the proposition, encouraging them to consider alternative perspectives prior to reaching an interpretation or recommending a course of action. Indeed, published IELTS guidance explicitly encourages candidates to evaluate different positions. For example:

> This kind of question is asking for your opinion: do you agree with the statement or not? However, a good answer will try to give arguments both for the statement and against it before stating the final opinion. (Hopkins and Nettle 1995: 36)

It was also hypothesised that more candidates would select an analytical rather than hortatory structure given that many of the target academic registers of university disciplinary writing value an objective, interpersonally distant, writer stance (Hill 1995, Biber et al.1999: 980)

The analysis and classification of the IELTS essays was carried out by a single rater. However, where there was difficulty in deciding which grouping a text belonged to, a second rater was consulted and criteria for resolving problems of categorisation were developed. As a result of this process, two further categories were added to the original four (see Table 1). One is referred to as 'incomplete', a category to which texts which lacked an obligatory stage were assigned. Thus, into this category were placed texts which lacked a final *Position* or *Recommendation* stage as well as those which lacked relevant or sufficient arguments (i.e. less than two or three) or lacked relevant or sufficient evidence. The second category referred to as 'other' was created to allow for the possibility of stages unaccounted for in the proposed argument framework.

The findings of the analysis are summarised in Table 1. This shows that candidates selected both hortatory and analytical and both exposition and discussion structures in their response to the test prompts. The table also shows how the different types of genre were distributed between high- and low scoring scripts and candidates taking test Versions A and B.

Argument genre	Hortatory exposition	Analytical exposition	Hortatory discussion	Analytical discussion	Total exposition / discussion	Total hortatory/ analytical	Incomplete	Other
All groups	16	12	8	6	28/14	24/18	9	5
High-scoring	11	6	4	6	17/10	15/12	1	0
Low-scoring	5	6	4	0	11/4	9/6	8	5
Version A	7	7	2	5	14/7	9/12	3	4
Version B	9	5	6	1	14/7	15/6	6	1

Table 1: Distribution of argument genres between different groups

The findings displayed in Table 1 suggest the following general patterns:

- Candidates show an overall preference for exposition over discussion argument genres: hortatory expositions are preferred over hortatory discussions; and analytical expositions over analytical discussions.

- Although this is less marked, there is also a preference for hortatory over analytical arguments.

In relation to band score they indicate that:

- The preference for exposition over discussion argument genres is stronger amongst low-scoring candidates: this reflects a fairly pronounced trend on the analytical genres only.

- There is little difference between high- and low-scoring candidates in their preference for hortatory over analytical arguments.

- In relation to test version they indicate that:

- There is no difference between test versions in candidates' preference for exposition over discussion genres.

- In Version B there is a greater preference for hortatory arguments than in Version A.

Of the 56 scripts in the sample, 9 were classified as 'incomplete' and 5 as 'other'. These were concentrated amongst low-scoring candidates: 13 low-scoring candidates compared to only 1 high-scoring candidate. With regard to the 'other' category, the stages that candidates included and which were not accounted for in the proposed SFL argument framework proved difficult to categorise. In each case these stages were not explicitly relevant to the overall thesis or issue focused on in the essay. Rather they comprised general/philosophical statements about life which were only loosely connected to the topic. Because this pattern recurred in five student scripts it was decided that such a stage could not simply be dismissed as irrelevant argumentation/evidence (as in the 'incomplete' category) but perhaps warranted further investigation. It was speculated that such staging could be valued in less linear forms of argumentation such as those favoured outside Anglo-based traditions and would make an interesting focus for future research.

4. Discussion

At the outset of the study it was hypothesised that candidates would select discussion rather than exposition genres. It was therefore surprising to find that the candidates in the sample produced more exposition arguments. One possible explanation for this finding is the overall framing of the essay question, namely the inclusion of instructions which emphasise the need to give one's own point of view -*You should use **your own** ideas, knowledge and experience*. It may be that weaker candidates, in particular, interpret such advice in a rather literal sense and therefore do not bring into

play alternative perspectives. The fact that even high-scoring candidates make slightly greater use of exposition genres than discussion genres indicates that, despite the emphasis in published advice on weighing up different positions, it is not necessary to follow such advice in order to gain a high IELTS score. This suggests that a change of wording in the instructions would be necessary if more candidates were to select a discussion structure. For example:

> *Present a written argument or case to an educated reader with no specialist knowledge of the following topic.*
>
> *To what extent should…. (controversial proposition)*
>
> *You should write at least 250 words. Present **more than one viewpoint** on the above proposition, supporting these viewpoints with examples and relevant evidence. You should also make clear **which viewpoint you think is the most plausible**.*

Advice to candidates to give their own ideas, knowledge and experience may also explain the slight preference for hortatory over analytical arguments. It may also be explained by the fact that, in many cases, candidates will have had little relevant prior topic knowledge with which to construct solid, evidence based arguments. This absence of 'content' is likely to lead to a concentration on what could or should be done rather than focusing on how things are. It is not clear why test Version B should produce more hortatory arguments, although there is some indication that it is related to topic. Whereas Test Version B is concerned with society as a whole (use of ***our resources***) and, at least in part, with future directions and actions (…*any hope of establishing human colonies in space is unrealistic*), Test Version A is more concerned with personal lifestyles and comparisons between the past and present.

More generally, the use of modals of obligation such as *should* in some IELTS questions is likely to encourage candidates to recommend some form of social action and change. Both practice books and tests tend to use, interchangeably, propositions which assert or deny (positive *it is so*, negative *it isn't so*) and proposals which prescribe and proscribe (positive *do it*, negative *don't do it*) (Halliday, 1985/94: 89). However, candidates' attention is not explicitly drawn to the distinct forms of argumentation appropriate to each type of framing. In the sample essay prompts below (de Witt, 1997: 39), I have used underlining to show how Prompt 1 is oriented towards responses which argue *how things are* (persuading that) whereas Prompt 2 invites a response oriented to social action, *how things ought to be* (persuading to).

> Prompt 1. Modern high-technology <u>is</u> transforming the way we work and <u>is</u> of benefit to all of society. (persuading that).
>
> Prompt 2. Higher mammals such as monkeys have rights and <u>should not</u> be used in laboratory experiments. (persuading to).
> (de Witt, 1997: 39)

The difference between high- and low-scoring candidates in terms of following a clear argument structure is perhaps predictable. Whilst scoring rubrics mean that examiners do not consciously award marks according to argumentative structure, they may be predisposed to essays that conform to a clear and cohesive structure. Not surprisingly, therefore, argument structures which lacked a Thesis or an Issue stage, or included

limited evidence in their Argument stage, were concentrated amongst low-scoring candidates. In addition, further investigation of high and low scoring scripts revealed that, whilst only two low scoring students included the non obligatory *counter-argument* stages in their essays (and in both cases lacked sufficient evidence), five high scoring students included relatively well developed counter arguments. Nevertheless it is clear that it is not necessarily an absence of argument structure which explains a low score. In fact, several low scoring candidates followed conventional English argument structures, showing that the reason for their low marks was related to their lack of control of other linguistic features.

Although not a major strand of investigation, in the course of the study, the question was raised as to the extent to which the test develops and measures the academic writing skills required of tertiary education. Conclusions in this regard need to be tentative in that the comparative corpora available (e.g. Longman, 1999) are frequently drawn from professional rather than student academic writing and are undifferentiated according to academic discipline, thus possibly conflating key variables. Nonetheless, as previously commented on, research indicates that a less personally involved, analytical style of argumentation is generally favoured at tertiary level. Therefore it is somewhat surprising to find that candidates may be successful in terms of band score despite their approach to argumentation being more reminiscent of letters to the press than of academic prose.

5. Conclusion
To conclude, it should be noted that in identifying and classifying different argument structures the sample size was relatively small. Differences shown in Table 1 (e.g. between Version A and B) may be meaningful but just as likely to be an artefact of the number of scripts under consideration. The findings discussed must therefore be regarded as tentative and further investigation is required. Nevertheless, the results suggest that it may be pedagogically useful for English language students preparing for tests such as IELTS to be made aware of common argumentative structures, particularly the distinction between 'calls for action' and less interpersonally charged analysis of 'states of affairs'. This would enable them to choose which argument structure may be more appropriate to the text prompt and 'persuade that' or 'persuade to' as the case may be. Equally, it may be important for scoring rubrics and rater training to take into account the notion of argument structure. If certain types of argument are preferred then this should be reflected in the scoring procedures as well as the task instructions.

It may, of course, be equally useful for language tests that aim to be a measure of English as an international language (IELTS, 1996: 16) to consider how to respond to the potential for academic genres to evolve new structures and language characteristics (in other words to display cultural hybridity) as part of the globalisation of tertiary provision.

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