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Finding a Voice: Lexical Bundles in Literary Writing in the Omani EFL Context

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Abstract
Authorial voice is an integral component of literary writing where interpretation and analysis play an important role. Based on Hyland (2008), this study focuses on functional lexical bundles, including text, participant, and referential-oriented bundles, to analyze samples of undergraduate students' writings in literature in an L1 Arabic EFL context. This article aims to investigate the extent to which students' written essays in literature used lexical bundles as a linguistic resource to assert their individual voice and stylistic identity. The study is significant as it contributes to an understanding of how lexical bundle usage shapes authorial voice among undergraduates, particularly in an L1 Arabic EFL context. The present corpus comprises 157 undergraduate literary essays from a public university in Oman. The corpus is over 90, 000 words. Analysis of frequency, variation, and functional roles is done using Ant Conc 4.0 software. The study adopts a corpus-based quantitative analysis complemented by qualitative contextual analysis by integrating quantitative analysis with textual interpretation to assess learners' communicative and argumentative competence in academic literary discourse. Findings suggest that students tend to use research-oriented bundles of place and time, with minimal usage of participant bundles, which are key markers of their authorial voice. The study further recommends a targeted intervention through bundle-usage teaching to clarify voice, agency, and authorship in literary analysis.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, literary writing, lexical bundles, Oman, stance, voice

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Introduction

Asserting an individual voice is an integral part of literary writing where interpretation plays a central role. Hyland (2002) suggests that "[w]riters have to select their words so that readers are drawn in, influenced and persuaded" (p. 1093), and such persuasion, in turn, leads to creating authorial identity. Words and expressions used in such contexts can include personal opinions, assertion through self-mentions, as well as statements of epistemic truths. Studies have shown that writers use available constructions, which may be appropriate for their specific discipline. Writers learn to use such bundles as a means to share facts and opinions in a familiar manner (Hyland & Jiang, 2018) and lend them credibility. However, such writing is problematized in EFL contexts where learner-writers have less mastery of lexical bundles and make minimal use of them, often for perceived cultural reasons (Matsuda, 2001; Sperling & Appleman, 2011) or a lack of training and pedagogical intervention (Pang, 2010; Rashtchi & Mohammadi, 2017). The present study aims to investigate the extent to which undergraduate students in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Omani context establish an authorial voice and presence in their literary writings. This genre has remained under-represented in bundle studies, particularly within an Arabic L1 context. This is a significant gap as literary writing focuses more specifically on having, and expressing, an opinion on literary texts through the use of appropriate language. This can be particularly challenging for non-native English-speaking learners who are writing a critical response to a literary text. This study investigates the extent to which such students' writing of essays in literature used stance or participant bundles to assert their individual voice and stylistic identity.

While the use of discourse bundles has been seen to offer organization, coherence, and fluency (Hyland & Jiang, 2018; Thornbury, 2010), their integration in literary writings by EFL undergraduates has been sparsely explored. Although literary writing is considered to be part of academic writing (Hyland, 2005, 2012; Gray, 2022), it calls for a particular discourse that involves specific use of voice which enables interpretation of literary texts. The aim of literary writing is also to facilitate the emergence of writer identity, as learners develop their interpretative capacity. Studies (Ivanic, 1998; Mhili, 2023) have conceptualized literary writing as a process through which learners construct individual identity. There has also been an emphasis on the role of linguistic choices in the construction of literary discourse (Abdelhamid and Zhang, 2023; Escobar and Fernández, 2017; Hood, 2011). Thus, a documentation and investigation of the specific use of discourse bundles in undergraduate students' literary writings will reveal strategies of hedging, stance-taking, and assertion of authorial agency. Comparatively less attention has been given to lexical bundles in literary writing in the context of EFL student writing**.** This gap becomes more pronounced in the Arabian Gulf, particularly in the Omani context, as limited attention has been paid to how Omani EFL students use lexical bundles in literary texts to construct voice and identity. The present study addresses this gap by examining lexical bundles' usage in Omani EFL students' literary writings, with particular attention to their role in the construction of voice, stance, and authorial identity. Thus, the study seeks to extend existing lexical-bundle research beyond predominantly academic and disciplinary writing contexts and contribute evidence from an underexplored EFL literary-writing context.

This study asks the following questions:

1. What are the common functional bundles observed in extended literary writings produced by L1 Arabic-speaking undergraduate students?
2. To what extent do L1 Arabic-speaking EFL students use functional lexical bundles appropriately to construct interpretations and claim an individual voice in literary analysis?

To this end, the paper outlines three specific objectives:

1. To identify and examine the functional lexical bundles used by L1 Omani Arabic-speaking EFL undergraduate students' writings of literary essays
2. To assess the extent to which L1 Omani Arabic-speaking EFL students use functional lexical bundles appropriately to construct interpretations and claim agency and voice in their literary analysis
3. To investigate the extent to which the use of specific functional bundles reveals the construction of voice among students in their literary writing

Lexical Bundles and Authorial Voice in EFL Writing

The use of discourse bundles in EFL in spoken and written contexts is increasingly well documented in the literature (Biber & Barbieri, 2007; Csomay, 2013; Dan et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2018; Hernández, 2013; Mehta et al., 2026). Existing studies suggest that while second or foreign language learners do use lexical bundles, their use is often inconsistent and less varied compared to that of native speakers (Pan & Liu, 2019; Sanosi, 2022; Subramaniam & Kaur, 2021). Nguyen (2023) and Oktavianti and Prayogi (2022) show that non-native speakers of English consistently overuse text-oriented functional lexical bundles, while native speakers show a wider range in the use of research and participant-oriented bundles (Qin, 2014; Aji & Haryanto, 2023). EFL writers demonstrate less frequent use of hedging proficiency and voice development (Escobar & Fern´andez, 2017; Kim et al., 2018; Min et al., 2019). Yoon, Casal, and Lee (2026) examine how interactional voice develops in social science writings through the use of metadiscourse markers and interactional lexical bundles across three social science disciplines. Sanosi (2022) found that native speakers used more range and variety, as well as more sophisticated verb-phrase structures, while both Min et al. (2019) and Escobar and Fern´andez (2017) found that explicit instruction of the use of lexical bundles, boosters, hedges, and stance would help learner-writers to develop agency as writers. This was also corroborated in studies among Chinese writers of academic English (Zhao & Liu, 2021; Zhang & Zhang, 2023). Research has also found that native English-speaking writers make more varied and strategic use of stance-related bundles, enabling them to express evaluation, hedge claims, and engage readers more effectively. However, research on Arab EFL writers suggests that their use of lexical bundles is often less diverse and less functionally developed than that of expert writers, which may limit the projection of authorial voice in academic writings (Assassi & Benyelles, 2016; Sanosi, 2022). Chen and Baker (2010) found that L2 writers used less varied lexical bundles than both native-speaking students and published academic writers. Their findings further revealed that non-native writers often overused a limited set of familiar bundles, whereas native speakers employed a wider range of phraseological patterns. Afzaal et al. (2025) explained that Saudi EFL writers at different proficiency levels used stance-taking devices differently from native speakers, with lower proficiency students overusing self-mention and approximate hedges, and upper-intermediate students overusing model hedges. These findings are consistent with a broader body of research indicating that EFL writers frequently rely on formulaic expressions to achieve cohesion and express stance and evaluation. More specifically, second or foreign language learner writings show frequent reliance on formulaic sequences, particularly text-oriented lexical bundles. According to Wood (2015), such formulaic bundles serve as linguistic anchors that help ESL and EFL learners structure sentences and organize discourse, even if they have not fully mastered the required content vocabulary. While this reliance can help learners produce academic and formal texts, it may limit the variety of language they use and reduce the fluency and effectiveness of their writing. In contrast, native speakers possess a broader and more functionally diverse

repertoire of lexical bundles, enabling them to construct arguments and present information more effectively (Biber et al., 1998; Hyland, 2005; Hyland, 2008; Pan et al., 2016).

The linkage between authorial voice and lexical bundles in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) writing has grown over the past two decades. More recent scholarship views authorial voice as a complex, context-dependent phenomenon rather than simply a collection of linguistic markers. A particularly relevant study is Siriwardana and Shin's 2026 systematic review of research on authorial voice in L2 academic writing, which found that research on authorial voice in L2 writing has concentrated overwhelmingly on academic writing, with relatively little attention to how voice develops across different genres and contexts. Their review highlights the importance of interpersonal resources through which writers position themselves toward their claims and their intended audience, while also pointing to continuing challenges in understanding how stance is constructed in successful written communication. Likewise, Mhilli (2026) reviews empirical research on voice markers, demonstrates the growing diversity of approaches to studying authorial voice, and emphasizes the complexity of identifying and interpreting voice markers in writing. In addition to the aforementioned studies on authorial voice, research on the rhetorical functions of lexical bundles in academic writing has shown that they play an important role in organizing and shaping writers' discourse. More recent studies have examined how bundles can be used to express stance and construct authorial voice, although most studies remain focused on academic rather than literary writing. Yue (2024), for example, examined stance adverbials in linguistics and English literature writing and found that literature writers used stance resources to express personal viewpoints, criticism, and individual voice, demonstrating the importance of stance in constructing disciplinary identity. AlShehri et al. (2022) worked with Arabic-speaking learners of English to examine whether learners projected individual, collective, or depersonalized voices, finding that individual voice was the most common. Their study establishes the relevance of voice as a construct in Arab EFL writing, but it does not identify the specific lexical resources through which voice is realized. Albaqami (2022) found that the increased exposure to lexical chunks helped improve Arabic students' written performance at the university level. However, the study focused on general writing and e-mail tasks rather than literary analysis and did not examine how lexical bundles contribute to students' expression of voice or agency. More closely aligned with the present study, Tarmizi and Azhar (2025) examined epistemic and attitudinal lexical bundles in students' literature-review writing, highlighting the role of bundles in expressing evaluation and criticality. However, their study focused on literature reviews rather than students' literary analysis essays. It did not specifically investigate how lexical bundles contribute to the authorial voice, leaving the relationship between bundle use and voice in literary writing largely unexplored. Meanwhile, Atcheson (2025) compared lexical bundles in published writings from three arts disciplines and found discipline-specific differences in participant-oriented and content-oriented bundles. However, her data consisted of expert academic articles rather than undergraduate literary writings. More broadly, Li and Lei (2025) demonstrated that lexical bundles vary structurally and functionally between L1 and L2 academic writers, while Zhao's 2025 overview emphasizes the complex, context-dependent nature of authorial voice in L2 writings. Thus, although these studies establish the importance of bundles and authorial voice, they do not explain how undergraduate EFL students construct and express an individual voice when writing analytical literary essays.

Within the Arabian Gulf, few studies have documented the use of lexical bundles and their relation to authorial voice in writing among university students (Alawad & Ahmed, 2026). Sanosi (2022), in a comparative study of native and non-native Arabic- speaking students, revealed that their writings varied quantitatively in the use of lexical bundles, based on an analysis of the BAWE (British Academic Written English) subcorpus. His study identified no clear advancement in the use of lexical bundles among

professional or postgraduate writers of English as compared to undergraduate students. Sanosi (2022) attributes this to the ineffectiveness of the writing or training programs at the university level. He did find that the use of lexical bundles among native speakers increased by 40% during the same period of time and across similar genres of writing. Alhusban and Vijayakumar (2021) employed the functional framework of Biber (2009), Hyland (2008), and Tribble and Wingate (2013) to study undergraduate student essays in Saudi Arabia, finding that the essays included a substantial quantity of research-oriented bundles. They also suggest that "[…] we must provide enough opportunities for students to notice these multi-word expressions either through intensive practice or extensive input" (p. 25). More recently, Al Hosni (2025) highlights the importance of linguistic and stylistic choices in maintaining students' authorial voice and individual identity in academic writings. However, her review considers authorial voice broadly and does not examine the specific linguistic resources through which voice may be constructed in students' writings. Consequently, greater attention to Arabic-speaking learners in corpus-based studies is essential for developing a more comprehensive and representative understanding of second-language writings.

Lexical Bundles in Literary Writing

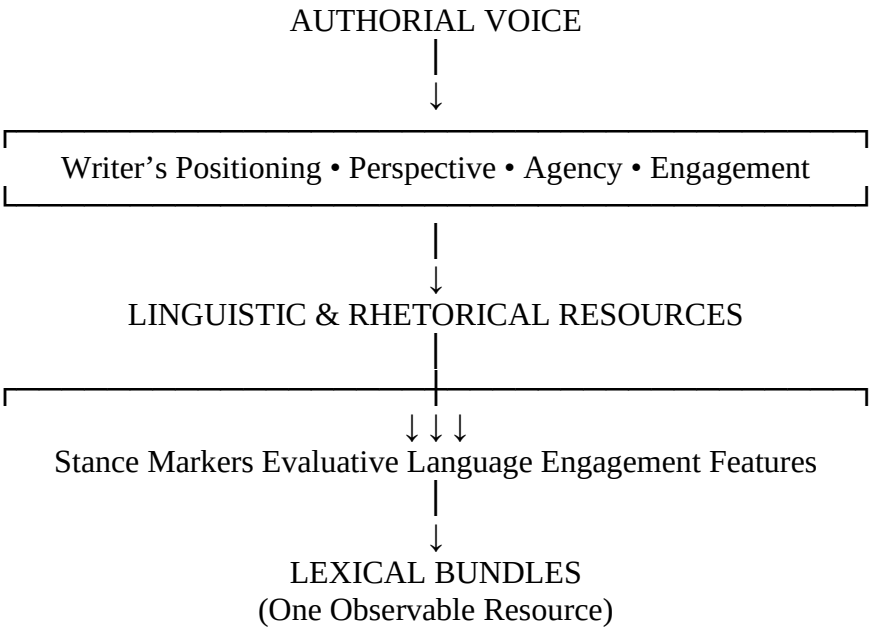
In the analysis of literature, interpretation and evaluation make writing more sophisticated than summarizing and explaining and this is achieved through mastery of individual voice. Learners often find this challenging as it is connected to the range of their other readings and the ability to connect different texts to their backgrounds with interpretive confidence. Literary writings involve negotiating multiple voices and perspectives. When responding to literature, students must balance their personal interpretations with the textual evidence and analytical frameworks associated with literary criticism. This process requires students to develop a voice that is both analytical and reflective, integrating their own insights while engaging with established interpretations. Understanding how students develop an analytical voice is essential to allow the transition from novice to competent writers. Abdelhamid and Zhang (2023) and Hood (2011) show that students' voice in literary writings can be realized through continuous use of stance markers and evaluative language. In fact, Hood (2011) acknowledges that developing and establishing authorial stance is one of the most challenging aspects of literary writings in second or foreign language contexts. Abdelhamid and Zhang (2023) provide a systematic review of studies examining student voice in English writings and argue that voice is often realized through discursive features and rhetorical positioning**.** They add that "linguistic markers can convey an individual's voice, establish the author's text ownership, and are important for second language (L2) student writing" (p. 1-2). Such linguistic markers allow writers to signal their presence in the text and to express individual analysis and interpretation.

Authorial voice is a complex and multifaceted construct that cannot be directly measured through any single linguistic feature. In this study, voice is understood as the writer's expression of perspective and positioning, conveyed through various linguistic and rhetorical resources, including stance markers, evaluative language, engagement features, and lexical bundles. Lexical bundles are therefore not treated as direct measures of voice but as observable resources that can provide evidence of writer positioning, agency, and engagement, offering one way of examining how authorial voice is constructed. This perspective is particularly relevant to literary writing, where authorial voice is closely connected to how writers interpret texts, construct arguments, and position themselves within the disciplinary discourse of literary analysis (Hood, 2011; Kromhout & Scheckle, 2021)**.** In this context, linguistic markers can signal the writer's presence and degree of commitment to an interpretation. Fields and Frankel (2021) argue that literary analysis is not simply a skill but a form of discourse that students must learn to participate in. This

discourse requires writers to engage with texts through interpretation, argumentation, and integration of textual evidence. The authors found that novice writers often struggle with this process and produce essays that are descriptive or summative rather than being interpretive. They conclude by stating that "[o]ur findings point to the utility of stance as a conceptual tool for researchers and educators to take a critical perspective on students' writing processes in the context of the ideologically laden, authoritative demands of secondary classrooms" (p. 393). The pedagogical implications of training in stance and voice have been explored for their potential to affect students' writing. Wilder and Wolfe (2009) address the debate over whether explicit instruction in disciplinary conventions like literary studies is beneficial. Based on an experimental and control group study, they conclude that such instruction can enhance students' rhetorical effectiveness without hampering their enjoyment or engagement with literature. Other studies (Fields & Frankel 2021; Kromhout & Scheckle 2021) similarly engage with pedagogical processes to explore ways in which students could be trained to assert voice through multiple interventions. Accordingly, the present study examines how Omani Arabic L1 EFL undergraduate students use different types of lexical bundles in literary analysis writings and how these bundles may help them express their authorial voice, position, and agency. It also addresses the limited research on this issue in Arabic L1 EFL contexts.

Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of Authorial Voice through Lexical Bundles

To guide the analysis of authorial voice in students' literary writings, this study adopts a conceptual framework that draws on previous approaches that view authorial voice as a multi-dimensional and context-dependent construct expressed through a range of linguistic and rhetorical resources (Hyland, 2008; Khuder & Petrić, 2026). Rather than treating lexical bundles as direct measures of voice, the framework positions them as observable textual resources through which aspects of writer positioning, agency, and engagement may be identified. The present analysis consequently focuses on the functional use of participant-oriented, text-oriented, and research-oriented bundles to examine how their use may contribute to writers' positioning, textual organization, and the development of authorial voice in literary analysis. The conceptual model below, which was created by the authors, is based on the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in this study.



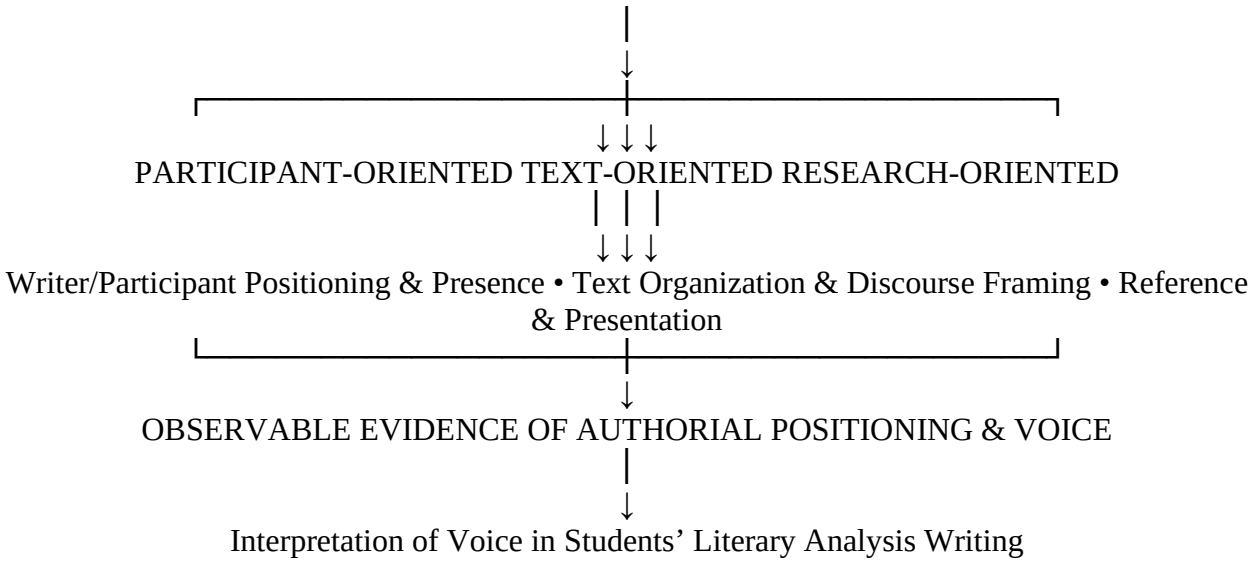


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the analysis of authorial voice through lexical bundles

Methodology

This study adopts a corpus- based quantitative analysis approach complemented by qualitative contextual analysis, with preliminary documentation of the established corpus of students' writings, using Hyland's (2008) and Cortes' (2004) foundational work on corpus across disciplines, to investigate the use of four-word lexical bundles in undergraduate literary essays. Corpus linguistics methods allow the identification of frequently occurring sequences of words across large collections of texts (Biber et al., 1998; Reppen & Simpson-Vlach, 2019). By compiling and analyzing a corpus of students' writings, the study aims to examine the functional characteristics of lexical bundles and their role in undergraduate analytical discourse. It also aims to examine the extent to which students in an EFL context can develop an authorial voice, which is central to literary writings, through the use of functional bundles as applied by Hyland (2005, 2012), Durrant (2017) and Hyland and Jiang (2018). Further manual analysis of data is based on specific work on undergraduate EFL writings by Ivanič and Camps (2001), Escobar and Fern´andez (2017) and Min et al. (2019).

The corpus used in this study consists of 157 undergraduate essays written for literature courses in an undergraduate literature program in a public university in the Arabian Gulf. The essays were produced by students at the same academic level, i.e., 3rd and 4th year students enrolled in literature courses, including survey and literary criticism courses. The student pool was relatively homogeneous, as all students were from 2 different cohorts that followed the same academic plan, completed identical foundation programs, and subsequently took the same courses in literature. As the entire student pool was used, there was a variety in terms of performance. In fact, none of the essays had visible grades. The essays were part of take-home term projects, not timed essays in exams. This allowed students to develop and consider their writings without the pressure of time. The essays were downloaded from data available on Turnitin, a plagiarism detection tool that also serves as a point of data storage. Essays from the period 2017 – 2021 were collected to ensure that there was no interference from Artificial Intelligence in student writings, as it has become increasingly the case after 2022 with the rise of AI writing tools. In this context, students' voices would be further problematized. The essays were downloaded as Word documents and converted into plain text (.txt) format to ensure compatibility with the corpus analysis software used. This

process also involved removing formatting elements that were irrelevant to linguistic analysis, such as tables, images, title pages, and borders.

All texts were carefully anonymized prior to analysis to ensure maintenance of ethical standards and to protect students' privacy and copyright. Personal identifiers, such as students' names, instructors' names, dates, and course information, were removed from the corpus. Institutional identifiers, including the university name and department title, were deleted to ensure anonymity and to eliminate their association with the frequency bundles. The data were also cleaned to remove other forms of non-linguistic repetition, such as essay titles, reference lists, headers and repeated institutional phrases. This process resulted in a cleaned and anonymized corpus consisting exclusively of the main body text of the essays in the correct format, focusing on students' discourse rather than on superfluous paratextual elements. Recurrent 4-word bundles, which followed specific prompts, were removed from the corpus. These included references to specific texts, like the play *The Merchant of Venice* or the film *Mangal Pandey*, or specific concepts/terms, like "The British colonization period," as they were too specific to be considered as bundle constructions.

Frequency and distribution thresholds were applied to ensure that only recurrent and widely used bundles were included in the analysis. A frequency of 6 times was retained, based on Biber, who states that there should be a frequency of 40 per million (Biber, 2012). All data were then exported to Microsoft Excel for further analysis and tabulation. The extracted bundles were then manually examined for context and classified according to Hyland's (2008) structural and functional taxonomy of lexical bundles, which provides a framework for analyzing how lexical bundles contribute to rhetorical functions in writing. The standardized and clean data were uploaded into AntConc, a widely used corpus analysis software developed by Anthony (2023). AntConc provides tools to examine n-gram clusters, word frequency, and concordance lines in lexical bundles in large text collections. Using the n-gram function in AntConc, the study extracted four-word lexical bundles from the corpus. This was a choice based on observations by Biber (2009) and Hyland (2008) that 4-word bundles were the most common in academic writing. While the n-gram function was used to generate these bundles, the KWIC [Key Words in Context] function was subsequently employed to examine specific bundle- usage collocations and contextual usage, providing a comprehensive understanding of how the bundles were in the data set. To ensure reliability and validation, all samples were manually annotated with particular attention to context. The annotation process involved the identification of errors in entry and ambiguities in bundle usage, and the removal of sparse data and inaccuracies in usage. All categories were documented to ensure uniformity of analysis.

Findings

Having cleaned up the corpus of all repetitions and incorrect usage, Table 2 (see appendix) documents the 4-bundle corpus of literary analysis writing. The rank in the list is consistent with the frequency of the type of bundle used. For example, the bundle *at the same time* and *the beginning of the* have a frequency of 12 and therefore share a rank of 6. An example for each use of bundle is given in the table as well.

When categorized according to Biber et al. (1998) and Hyland (2008), the functional categories of lexical bundles in the above corpus can be categorized as shown in Table 3.

Result

The results can be summarized as shown in Table 4:

Table 4. *Approximate percentage-wise distribution of functional bundles*

Functional Type	Number of Bundles	Percentage (approx.)
Research-oriented	12	58%
Text-oriented	10	35.5%
Participant-oriented	2	6.5%

Dominance of Research-oriented Bundles

The corpus of undergraduate students' literary writings in the present context indicates a dominance of research bundles under the functional category. These consist of 58% of the corpus. These 4-word bundles function as description entities, focusing on events and temporal contexts. This aligns with Hyland's (2008) observation that research- oriented bundles are most often used to structure propositional content in academic writing across disciplines. In this corpus, many of these bundles express temporal location, such as *in the 20th century*, *the beginning of the*, and *the end of the*. The prominence of such expressions reflects the need to contextualize a situation, as would be appropriate in literary analysis. For example, *is one of the* could be part of another bundle *one of the most* or a 5-word bundle *is one of the most*. Such a bundle ranks highly in frequency in Hyland (2012), both in academic writing generally and in discipline-specific writings in Sciences (Biology) and in Applied Linguistics (p. 163). In the present data set, *is one of the* is used for purposes of classification or general facts, often based on secondary readings, rather than on personal evaluation:

1.Naguib Mahfouz *is one of the* novelists who won the Nobel Prize.
2.Oman *is one of the* Arab Gulf countries located in the Middle East.
3.Senghor's poem "Prayer to Masks" *is one of the* poems that celebrates African culture.

In short, all uses reflect a use of *is one of the* + plural noun phrase, but with no reference to the author as the subject. This includes *is one of the famous*, *is one of the branches*, *is one of the literary works*. Only 7 of the 50 uses of *is one of the* refer to personal evaluation:

1. *is one of the* best
2. *is one of the* most significant
3. *is one of the* most effective

However, even those lack personal attribution or a direct source of reference. Although it is a widely used lexical bundle, as a research-oriented bundle (Hyland, 2012), it depends on systemic, non-agentic voice, basing the writing on widely known facts and minimizing authorial presence.

Text-oriented Bundles in Discourse Organization

Text-oriented bundles constitute the second- largest category in the dataset and play an important role in organizing the flow of ideas within the essays. Expressions such as *on the other hand*, *at the same time*, and *as a result of* function as discourse markers that signal relationships between propositions. These bundles help writers establish contrast, comparison and causal relationships, which are essential in argumentative writing when comparing characters, themes, or

critical perspectives. For example, students might contrast interpretations of characters' motivations by introducing a new viewpoint with *on the other hand*.

The use of contrastive bundles such as *on the other hand* suggests that students attempt to construct balanced arguments by presenting alternative perspectives. Similarly, causal bundles such as *as a result of* enable writers to explain historical developments or social phenomena. Such patterns indicate that writers are familiar with and use formulaic expressions to structure logical relations between ideas and guide content through various stages. Other research-oriented bundles, including *one of the most*, *one of the main* and *is one of the*, perform quantifying and evaluative functions, indicating events and hierarchies of texts. This is a finding corroborated by Hyland (2012), who states that "*One of the most* was by far the most frequent cluster, which occurred 100 times per million words and was more than twice as common as those next placed, *at the same time* and *in the case of*. The top 10 all occurred more than 60 times per million words, and the entire list was dominated by prepositional phrase constructions and noun phrases with *of* fragments" (p. 155). These ranking structures are useful for undergraduate writers to emphasize key points in argumentative essays and bring attention to specific texts, which could be the subject of further evaluation. Students consistently use *on the other hand* to create contrast, but their voice varies systematically depending on the grammatical structure that follows.

For example, only 3 of the 73 examples of *on the other hand* refer to a proper noun:

1. Maria, *on the other hand,* promotes untruthful romance.
2. Rashid, *on the other hand,* was motivated in some ways.
3. Raghave, *on the other hand*, does not care about love.

In fact, there are 17 examples of impersonal references to the bundle:

1. The interview, *on the other hand,* includes five questions which were given to readers.
2. *On the other hand,* the propaganda of the proletariat was loud.
3. *On the other hand*, women are the source of sins.

Similarly, there are citation- driven bundles, focusing on one specific source:

1. *On the other hand,* Adewale (2012) concludes his research with a recommendation.
2. *On the other hand,* Al-Mekhalfi (2011) shows that "a better ending is possible…"
3. *On the other hand,* Al Khudawi (2004) says that Amir in *The Kite Runner*….

There are also data- driven sentences such as

1. *On the other hand*, 30.3% of participants…
2. But, *on the other hand*, 47.5% of readers noticed that…
3. *On the other hand*, less than 50% of students had read the novel.

In all these cases, students tend to resort to an official source, data, or an impersonal entity, such as an anonymous "interview", to elaborate on an idea. The absence of proper nouns and the personal voice suggests an unwillingness or inability to assert agency and selfhood in academic writing, the focus of which is the individual student's voice. There is engagement through secondary sources and statistical and mediated discourse instead of individual authorial voice.

Limited Use of Participant-oriented Bundles

The present corpus has minimal representation of participant-oriented bundles, with only 2 mentions in the 31-word bundle corpus. While the bundle *this paper will discuss* is used 4 times over 88 samples, *In this paper I* is used only 2 times in the same sample size. The contexts of both usages are as follows:

1. *This paper will discuss* the rise of the modern novel
2. *This paper will discuss* one of Hosseini's novels, *The Kite Runner*.

1. *In this paper I* will discuss where can we see the tension between characters.
2. *In this paper I* discussed the racist scenes….
3. *In this paper I* will specifically examine how poems are used…
4. *In this paper I* will discuss the modern novel's rise…

Based on research into stance and engagement (Hyland, 2005, 2008; Tang & John, 1999), it is clear that the data set presented here lacks a clearly outlined stance as articulated in students' writings. The presence of only 2 and 4 examples, respectively, of the use of participant bundles suggests that students are negotiating academic conventions, but tend to rely on impersonal structures to project objectivity, often at the expense of a clear and authoritative voice. Hyland (2005) suggests that stance "can be seen as an attitudinal dimension and includes features which refer to the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgments, opinions, and commitments" (p. 176). His stance categories include hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions (Hyland, 2005, p. 177).

Durrant (2017) also notes that "[a]n important part of Humanities and Social Sciences writing, as distinct from Science and Technology writing, it seems, is that of expressing attitudes towards its objects of study" (p. 188). Using the British Academic Writing in English (BAWE) corpus, he concludes that students' writings in the Humanities were largely characterized by bundles, which focused on evaluation, "abstract constructs" (p. 190), and historical contexts. Within EFL contexts, such a use is less perceived. Using Durrant's (2017) and Min et al's. (2019) categories of stance in the Humanities, stance bundles such as *it is obvious that, it is possible that, it is difficult to, it is probably the, it is proven that* and hedges like *in general it can* were extracted using the KWIC collocation system in Ant-Conc. The following were some results:

It is obvious that – 3 hits:

1. According to this, *it is obvious that* the American dream was not based on reality.
2. From the previous studies, *it is obvious that* the language was not difficult.
3. *It is obvious that* the first person allows the character to speak clearly.

It is possible that – 1 hit:

1. We can conclude that as the novel developed in the previous centuries, *it is possible that* it may develop more and more in the future.

It is difficult to – 1 hit:

1. In some parts of the novel, *it is difficult to* determine the speaker….

There were no occurrences of stance bundles like *it is probable that, it is proven that* or *in general it is,* or any of their shorter variations, including *it is probable*, or *generally*.

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Discussion

The present study of undergraduate students in Oman writing literary essays shows specific traits that are in common with previous studies, including a concentrated use of research bundles and text-oriented bundles. With respect to the first question of this research regarding the most common functional bundles observed, it is clear from the sample data that there is a large representation of research-oriented lexical bundles, followed by text-oriented bundles. It also follows that, based on the second question of this research, students were not able to make appropriate use of a range and variety of lexical bundles in literary analysis writing at the undergraduate level. The writing sample showed minimal authorial identity as emanating from a considered use of a range of appropriate lexical bundles. In fact, what is of particular interest in this specific context is the almost complete absence of participant-oriented bundles whose presence indicates stance and voice. This is partially explained by Hyland's (2012) study in which he suggested that "[t]he infrequent use of participant sequences is often seen as a defining feature of expository writing by L2 students and perhaps reflects cultural preferences for a noninterventionist stance" (p. 161). This study revealed overreliance on repetitive bundles in students' writings, an absence of an assertive individual voice, an inflexible use of bundles that are repeated across contexts, and only a partial correct usage. It underlines the inability or reluctance of EFL writers engaged in literary writing to implement a dialogue in their academic writing, choosing instead to fall back on reliably known data, sources and paraphrasing. This indicates limited usage of expressions that successfully convey the writer's stance and authorial voice. Bundles like *this paper will discuss* and *is considered as a* assert authorial voice to some extent, with the latter being a sign of hedging. The presence of *this paper will discuss* reflects the use of metadiscoursal strategies of a beginner-level academic writing, where purpose and outline of an essay is being outlined. A more visible presence of participant-oriented lexical bundles in the text would signal an overt authorial role in interpretations of data and for claims of novelty (Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Hyland & Jiang, 2018).

The fact that undergraduate students in this study rely heavily on lexical bundles that focus on organization and context, while showing minimal use of participant-oriented bundles, suggests that students are more comfortable constructing their writings around the organization of information and the reporting of content rather than expressing an explicit authorial presence. Drawing on Hyland's (2005, 2008) model, this distribution suggests that students rely more on resources that organize discourse and provide information than on those that construct stance and engagement. Students seem to be prioritizing clarity and cohesion over interaction and persuasion. Research bundles such as *the results show that* and text bundles like *on the other hand* allow learner-writers to structure arguments and present information using learnt academic conventions. Largely, however, these bundles serve organizational and referential functions rather than interpersonal ones and reflect a novice standard of writing using authorial voice. The limited use of participant bundles, such as those involving first-person pronouns or having a direct engagement with the reader, indicates an unwillingness to assert personal opinion. This has significant implications for literary writing that is based on knowledge construction rather than consumption and synthesis, especially at an advanced level. While this aligns with previous studies, which show that novice writers perceive academic writing as being objective and detached, it often results in writings that may be structurally coherent but lack individual ownership. The absence of participant bundles means that students are losing out on the opportunity to evaluate, claim, or

assert a given argument. Often, such writings get called out for being descriptive and summative rather than critical and argumentative.

As EFL learner-writers, these characteristics could be perceived as belonging to a developmental stage that has yet to be mastered and may therefore require pedagogical intervention. Learner-writers will likely benefit from explicit instruction in engagement strategies. While structural and organizational features are essential for producing clear literary essays, students should be encouraged and trained to move beyond such constructions and to position themselves more explicitly in relation to the text. Their readings and their claims would further help them develop as critical writers of literature. This could be done by adopting strategies that encourage the appropriate use of clear, well-articulated, and contextualized participant-oriented bundles, thereby helping students develop a coherent authorial voice. This could be further reinforced through sample readings and feedback that facilitate the expression of stance and voice. This aligns with the recommendation offered by Ivanič and Camps (2001), who state that "[…] an L2 writing pedagogy that raises critical awareness about voice can help learners maintain control over the personal and cultural identity they are projecting in their writing" (p.3). Pang (2010) similarly states that "it will be advantageous to raise students' awareness of these often-overlooked lexical bundles explicitly and have them practice using them in communicative writing activities" (p. 11). Developing students' cognizance of interpersonal writing can help foster an appreciation of literature and its varied interpretations, moving students away from formulaic and text-focused writings to more nuanced and individual discourse.

Conclusion

This study explored the range of functional lexical bundles used by L1 Omani Arabic learners of English in literary writing and the extent to which their writing reflected an authorial voice. It investigated the common functional lexical bundles used in extended literary writing produced by Omani undergraduate students and the extent to which they used appropriate bundles to claim an individual voice in extended literary analysis. The corpus-based findings suggested that students' writings in the samples primarily depended on research-based lexical bundles, which focused on temporal placement to classify interpretations or to give general facts based on secondary readings, rather than to express original ideas. This was followed by discourse bundles that were used for organizational discourse. The study showed a very sparse use of participant-oriented lexical bundles such as *I think that the* or *In my opinion the*, which would highlight individual voice and assert a particular claim or interpretation. Such data suggests that these learners had not yet developed an individual writing voice, and were unable to articulate their opinions in a confident and clear manner. Such writing is central to literary analysis where individual interpretation is crucial. This finding is supported by Hyland's (2012) study, when he suggested that "[t]he infrequent use of participant sequences is often seen as a defining feature of expository writing by L2 students and perhaps reflects cultural preferences for a noninterventionist stance" (p. 161). Further, this study revealed overreliance on repetitive bundles, an absence of an assertive individual voice, an inflexible use of bundles that are repeated across contexts, and a partial correct usage. It underlined the inability or reluctance of EFL writers engaged in literary writing to implement a dialogue through their writing, choosing instead to fall back on reliably known data, sources, and paraphrasing. This indicates limited usage of expressions that successfully convey the writer's stance and authorial voice. Bundles like *this paper will discuss* and *is considered as a* assert authorial voice to some extent, with the latter being a sign of hedging.

The presence of *this paper will discuss* reflects the use of metadiscoursal strategies of a beginner-level academic writing, where purpose and outline of an essay are being provided. A more visible presence of participant bundles in the text would signal an overt authorial role in the interpretation of data and for claims of novelty (Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Hyland & Jiang, 2018).

The present study is limited to advanced-level Omani Arabic L1 literature students engaged in literary writing. It does not take into account the academic performance of the students, as it includes 4 cohorts of students taking literature courses. This research also focuses on students' corpora, with or without previous pedagogical intervention. In other words, students may or may not have been introduced to the use of lexical bundles in literary writing in a targeted manner. The present corpus was not compared with other existing corpora, as no identical corpus reflecting Arabic L1 writers' composition of literary writing is currently available. Comparisons with writers in other EFL contexts would not provide reliable data due to socio-cultural, linguistic, and educational variations. Triangulating these results with students' responses based on their experiences and feedback would add an important layer to this study, as it would take into account learners' own challenges, hesitations and reactions to asserting their voice in a written academic discussion. Finally, it has to be acknowledged that literary essays constitute a specialized genre within academic writing, posing particular challenges for EFL learners who are learning to make linguistic choices before asserting authorial voice and agency. The present study has shown that non-native English writers face various challenges in articulating and establishing individual voice and authority, evidenced by their choice of text- and research-oriented lexical bundles. A sustained pedagogical intervention may be required to help students to assert individual interpretation with confidence, and contribute to the academic discourse, which is a central purpose of literary analysis.

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