



Linguistic Features of the IELTS Writing Task 2 Band 7 Descriptor: A Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

The core of this study was the analysis of one of the most widely recognized English language proficiency tests, the IELTS. The study analyzed the IELTS Writing Task 2 Band 7 descriptor, as it played a key role in defining what constitutes successful writing. The study aimed to analyze the linguistic features of the descriptor, examining the evaluative language, repetition and coherence and cohesion used in the text, while identifying its main themes. In order to achieve these aims, the official IELTS Writing Task 2 Band 7 descriptor was closely examined using a qualitative approach with a focus on micro-level linguistic features. After a meticulous analysis of the descriptor, four main themes were identified: clarity, precision, organization and structure, and the development and support of ideas. This study provides insight into how assessment descriptors define and construct writing proficiency.

Keywords: IELTS Writing Task 2, Band 7 descriptor, Linguistic features, Qualitative approach, Assessment descriptors

1.0 Introduction

The IELTS, or the International English Language Testing System, is a globally recognized English proficiency test for non-native speakers that is used for study, work and migration purposes. The IELTS exam assesses the participants' skills in listening, reading, writing and speaking English (British Council et al., 2023).

According to the official IELTS website "The IELTS Band Descriptor 7 indicates that the test taker has operational command of the language with occasional inaccuracies and inappropriate usage (International English Language Testing System, 2023). The overall band score is the average of the four section band scores rounded to the nearest half band." The descriptor contains a range of linguistic features that establish the criteria for successful writing.

To briefly define discourse analysis "it is a qualitative research method that studies language in context to understand meaning, social dynamics, and power relations."

It is meant to help us extract everything we can for a text or a speech in both the lexical and social aspects. However, in this study we shall only analyse the micro aspect of it that is the language. This





study will analyse the linguistic features of the IELTS Writing Task 2 Band 7 descriptor, in terms of evaluative language, repetition and coherence and cohesion (James Paul Gee, 2014).

1.1 Objectives

This study aims to:

- Analyze linguistic features in the IELTS Writing Task 2 Band 7 descriptor.
- Identify recurring lexical and evaluative patterns.
- Examine coherence, cohesion, and grammatical structures.
- Investigate the recurring themes and organizational patterns within the text.

1.2 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What linguistic features are used in the IELTS Writing Task 2 Band 7 descriptor, and how do they contribute to the construction of successful writing?
2. What recurring themes can be identified within the IELTS Writing Task 2 Band 7 descriptor?

1.3 Significance of the study

The significance of this study lays in its contribution to discourse analysis and language assessment. The IELTS descriptors are treated as objective pieces of language but they have a far greater impact on shaping what is acceptable in successful writing. By analyzing the various lexical patterns that can be found in the descriptor such as evaluative language, repetition and other grammatical devices, it provides insight into particular academic standards.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study is limited to the analysis of the IELTS Writing Task 2 Band 7 Task Response descriptor. The research focuses specifically on the linguistic and discursive features embedded within the descriptor rather than on students' written responses or scoring outcomes. The analysis examines lexical choices, evaluative language, repetition, coherence, cohesion, grammatical structures, and recurring thematic patterns within the text of the descriptor.

Furthermore, the study focuses only on one IELTS writing criterion and one band level in order to provide a detailed and focused analysis. Other IELTS descriptors, scoring criteria, and language proficiency tests fall outside the scope of this research.

2.0 Study Foundation

2.1 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is the study of language in use beyond the level of individual words and sentences. It focuses on how language is used to create meaning within texts and communication. Rather than examining isolated linguistic elements, discourse analysis considers how different language features work together to convey ideas and messages (Stubbs, 1983; Gee, 2014).



The purpose of discourse analysis is to understand how meaning is constructed through language. It helps researchers identify linguistic patterns, recurring themes, and language choices within texts. Through the analysis of vocabulary, grammar, and textual organization, discourse analysis provides insight into how communication is achieved (Paltridge, 2021).

Discourse analysis can be conducted at different levels. One approach is micro-level discourse analysis, which focuses on the linguistic features of a text. These features include vocabulary, grammar, repetition, coherence, and cohesion. By examining these elements, researchers can identify patterns and understand how language contributes to the overall meaning of a text (Gee, 2014). Since the present study focuses on the linguistic features of the IELTS Writing Task 2 Band 7 descriptor, it adopts a micro-level discourse analysis approach.

2.2 Language Assessment and Assessment Descriptors

Language assessment refers to the process of measuring an individual's language ability. It is widely used in educational settings and language testing to evaluate learners' proficiency in different language skills, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). The results of language assessment help determine a learner's level of performance and achievement.

Assessment descriptors are an important component of language assessment. They provide detailed descriptions of performance at different proficiency levels and explain the criteria used for scoring. Assessment descriptors guide examiners by outlining the characteristics expected at each level of achievement and help ensure that evaluations are based on clearly defined standards (IELTS, 2023).

The use of assessment descriptors contributes to fairness and consistency in language testing. Because examiners follow the same criteria, descriptors improve the reliability of assessment results. They also help learners understand the expectations of a particular proficiency level and identify the qualities required for successful performance in writing tasks (Fulcher, 2010).

2.3 Evaluative Language

Evaluative language refers to language that expresses judgments, assessments, or opinions about the quality, value, or effectiveness of something. It is commonly used to show whether a particular performance, action, or outcome meets certain standards. Evaluative language can be positive, negative, or neutral depending on the purpose of the text (Martin & White, 2005).

In educational assessment, evaluative language plays an important role in describing levels of performance. Assessment descriptors frequently use evaluative terms to distinguish between stronger and weaker responses. Through these terms, examiners are able to communicate the qualities expected at different proficiency levels and provide clear criteria for assessment (Martin & White, 2005).

Common evaluative words found in assessment descriptors include terms such as "clear," "effective," "appropriate," "developed," and "accurate." These words signal the characteristics that are valued in successful writing and help define the standards that learners are expected to achieve. The use of evaluative language therefore provides insight into what is considered effective performance within a particular assessment context (IELTS, 2023).



2.4 Coherence and Cohesion

Coherence refers to the logical organization and overall flow of ideas within a text. A coherent text presents information in a clear and understandable manner, allowing readers to follow the writer's argument or message without confusion. Coherence is achieved when ideas are connected logically and progress in a meaningful sequence (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

Cohesion refers to the linguistic devices that connect different parts of a text. These devices include linking words, reference words, repetition of key terms, and other grammatical structures that create connections between sentences and paragraphs. Cohesion helps ensure that individual parts of a text function together as a unified whole (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

Both coherence and cohesion are important features of effective writing. They contribute to readability and help writers communicate their ideas clearly. In language assessment, coherence and cohesion are often considered important criteria because they demonstrate a writer's ability to organize information and maintain clear relationships between ideas throughout a text (IELTS, 2023).

2.5 Themes and Linguistic Patterns in Texts

Linguistic patterns refer to recurring language features that appear within a text. These patterns may include repeated words, phrases, grammatical structures, or particular vocabulary choices. Identifying such patterns helps researchers understand how meaning is constructed and emphasized within a text (Paltridge, 2021).

One common linguistic pattern is repetition. Repetition occurs when certain words or expressions appear multiple times throughout a text. The repeated use of particular terms often signals their importance and highlights key ideas that the writer wishes to emphasize. As a result, repetition is frequently examined in discourse analysis (Stubbs, 1983).

Another important aspect of linguistic analysis is lexical choice. Lexical choices refer to the selection of vocabulary used within a text. Different word choices can influence meaning, tone, and emphasis. By examining vocabulary selection and word frequency, researchers can identify the concepts that receive the greatest attention within a text (Paltridge, 2021).

Discourse analysts also examine recurring themes. Themes are central ideas or concepts that appear repeatedly throughout a text. The identification of themes allows researchers to recognize the main messages and priorities reflected in language use. Through the analysis of repetition, lexical choices, and recurring themes, discourse analysis provides a deeper understanding of how texts communicate meaning (Gee, 2014).

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative approach was chosen, as the core of this study was analyzing the language of the descriptor. Discourse Analysis was used to examine the linguistic aspect of the IELTS Writing Task 2 Band 7 Descriptor. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study focuses on words, themes and linguistic patterns.



3.2 Data of the Study

The core data that was used in this study was the IELTS Writing Task 2 Band 7 Descriptor, that was obtained from the official IELTS website, specifically from the IELTS Writing Band Descriptors PDF. Only Band 7 was analyzed not only because it contains detailed linguistic criteria but because it is the most realistic goal for participants, making its evaluative language and criteria a standard for proper writing.

3.3 Methods of Analysis

The descriptor was read carefully, focusing on each section with equal detail. Keywords were identified while assessing how frequent they were found in the text. Coherence and cohesion were also examined checking how they were maintained and presented. After the initial analysis was completed, the recurring themes were identified with their supporting ideas.

3.4 Analytical Framework

This study used discourse analysis as its main framework with a focus on micro-level linguistic features. The analysis focused on lexical features, repetition, evaluative language and recurring themes. The study aimed to identify the linguistic criteria that are associated with successful writing within the descriptor.

4.0 Data Analysis

4.1 Clarity

One of the main requirements in the band descriptor is clarity. It is mentioned multiple times throughout the descriptor such as in “A clear and developed position is presented.” and “Information and ideas are logically organised, and there is a clear progression throughout the response.” The repetition of the word “clear” emphasizes its importance within the descriptor and suggests that clarity is a fundamental part of successful writing. This further demonstrates that having good ideas and adequate grammar alone is not sufficient and ideas must be presented in a clear manner.

4.2 Precision

Another recurring theme in the descriptor is precision. As mentioned in “The resource is sufficient to allow some flexibility and precision.” and in “but there may be a tendency to over-generalise or there may be a lack of focus and

precision in supporting ideas/material.” Choosing words accurately to portray the meaning is a crucial skill in writing. This suggests that Band 7 writing is not just evaluated on the range of vocabulary used but also on the writer’s ability to communicate their ideas accurately.

4.3 Organization and Structure

When assessing any piece of writing, organization and structure play an important role in how the response is received. A writer needs to clearly organize their ideas to allow a smooth flow of thoughts throughout the text and follow a proper structure. Because of this, it is expected that organization and structure appear as a clear theme in the IELTS descriptor.



This is found in statements such as “Information and ideas are logically organized, and there is a clear progression throughout the response.” and “Paragraphing is generally used effectively to support overall coherence, and the sequencing of ideas within a paragraph is generally logical.”. The repeated emphasis on logical organization, clear progression, and effective paragraphing suggests that structure is considered an important feature of successful writing within the descriptor.

4.4 Development and Support of Ideas

Another important theme discussed in the descriptor is the development and support of ideas. This is evident in the statement, “Main ideas are extended and supported but there may be a tendency to overgeneralize there may be a lack of focus and precision in supporting ideas/material.” The use of the verbs “extended” and “supported” suggests the importance of detailed responses rather than simply stating an opinion.

The descriptor also highlights the importance of presenting ideas in a clear and organized manner as seen in the statement “Paragraphing is generally used effectively to support overall coherence, and the sequencing of ideas within a paragraph is generally logical.”

4.5 Data Analysis Summary

The analysis revealed that the descriptor places considerable emphasis on clarity, precision, organization and structure and the development of ideas. The repeated references to these themes suggest that Band 7 writing is expected to present a clear position, with a precise use of accurate language, maintain coherence through organization, develop, and support ideas appropriately. Together, these themes reflect the linguistic qualities that the Band 7 descriptor expects.

5.0 Conclusion

In this section, the research questions that are the core of this study are answered in accordance with the findings. The implications of the study are also presented.

5.1 Summary of Findings

After analyzing the linguistic features of the IELTS Writing Task 2 Band 7 descriptor, the main themes were identified. The first major theme identified was “clarity,” and it was emphasized in various sections of the descriptor. “Precision” was the second theme identified in the descriptor, as the precise and accurate choice of words is key to successful writing. The third theme found in the descriptor was “organization and structure”. It was referenced multiple times in the descriptor through logical progression, paragraphing and the correct use of cohesive devices.

The final theme was “development and support of ideas”. Expressing and supporting ideas smoothly shows strong communication skills and is considered a criterion for proper academic writing.

5.2 Answers to the Research Questions

The findings of the study answered the research questions. Regarding the linguistic features used in the descriptor and their contribution to successful writing, the analysis revealed the use of evaluative language, repetition and devices of coherence and cohesion. Furthermore, the analysis identified four



main recurring themes: clarity, precision, organization and structure, and the development and support of ideas.

5.3 Implications of the Study

This study focused on the wording used in assessment descriptors. The analysis of the descriptor provided insight into the expectations of written English and the criteria for assessing writing. Writing proficiency is represented through the proper use of language, with emphasis on clarity, accuracy, organization and the effective support of ideas.

5.4 Conclusion

This study analyzed the IELTS Writing Task 2 Band 7 descriptor using qualitative discourse analysis with a focus on micro-level linguistic features. The analysis aimed to identify the main linguistic themes within the descriptor. The analysis helped determine what is considered successful writing as represented in the assessment descriptor.

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