

Article

A Developmental Trajectory of Stance and Modality in Second Language Hebrew Argumentative Writing: A Function-to-Form Analysis of Arabic-Speaking Learners

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Abstract

Second language (L2) writing, particularly in demanding areas like argumentative discourse, requires learners to effectively manage interpersonal resources such as stance and modality. Despite the centrality of stance in academic literacy, its development in L2 Hebrew writing remains largely underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining how Arabic-speaking learners of Hebrew realize epistemic, deontic, and evaluative stance in their interlanguage writing. Using a qualitative, concept-oriented, function-to-form analytical approach, the analysis examined 92 authentic argumentative essays (11,572 words) produced by L1 Arabic speakers under standardized examination conditions and systematically classified each modal expression into one of three empirically derived interlanguage developmental levels. The findings reveal a clear and consistent developmental progression across all three modal domains. Developmental patterns are inferred from interlanguage variation across proficiency levels rather than tracked longitudinally. Basic-level expressions relied primarily on high-frequency, spoken-like vocabulary and explicit personal opinion markers. Intermediate-level expressions displayed greater lexical variety and a shift toward a more abstract stance but remained marked by morphosyntactic instability and L1 influence, often producing hybrid or non-target-like constructions. Advanced writers effectively deployed idiomatic, low-frequency, and structurally more complex modal constructions aligned with conventions of Hebrew academic writing.

Keywords: stance and modality; interlanguage development; academic writing development; Arabic-speaking learners; L2 Hebrew



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1. Introduction

Second language (L2) writing is a linguistically and cognitively demanding domain in which learners must simultaneously construct meaning, organize discourse, and manage interpersonal resources that signal attitude, certainty, and authorial presence. Among these resources, stance and modality play a central role in shaping how writers position themselves in relation to their propositions and audiences (Berman, 2005; Jiang & Hyland, 2015). Effective use of stance markers—such as hedges, boosters, evaluative (also referred to as affective) adjectives, modal verbs, and nominalized stance constructions—is essential for producing coherent and persuasive argumentative writing. Yet for L2 learners—particularly those writing in typologically distant or structurally complex languages—these interpersonal features often develop more slowly and unevenly than grammatical or lexical skills (Aull & Lancaster, 2014; Barbara et al., 2024).

Research has shown that the development of stance and modality in L2 writing is shaped by multiple factors, including genre conventions, disciplinary norms, instructional practices, and learners' first language (L1) background (Ostovar-Namaghi et al., 2022; Wu & Pan, 2023; C. Chen & He, 2024). Crosslinguistic studies consistently demonstrate that L1 transfer affects the frequency, form, and function of stance markers, with learners often relying on culturally familiar or syntactically simpler expressions in early and intermediate stages (C. Chen & Zhang, 2017; Zhang et al., 2023). At the same time, explicit instruction and increased exposure to academic discourse can lead to more nuanced, varied, and rhetorically appropriate stance-taking, especially in argumentative genres where modality and evaluation are integral to constructing a persuasive claim (Bax et al., 2019; Yu & Poehner, 2025).

Within this broader landscape of L2 writing research, the case of Arabic-speaking learners of Hebrew represents a particularly rich yet underexplored area. Despite extensive scholarship on interlanguage development in domains such as vocabulary (Degani et al., 2018; Abu-Rabiah, 2020, 2023, 2025a), syntax (Henkin, 2020; Abu-Rabiah et al., 2023), morphology (Asli-Badarneh & Leikin, 2018), and discourse (Haskel-Shaham et al., 2018), the development of stance and modality in L2 Hebrew writing has not been systematically investigated. This gap is noteworthy given that Hebrew, like Arabic, is a morphologically dense Semitic language (Henkin, 2020; Abu-Rabiah, 2025b), yet differs in syntactic patterns, written conventions, and pragmatic norms. This combination of structural proximity and functional divergence creates conditions in which crosslinguistic influence may both facilitate and complicate the development of stance constructions in L2 Hebrew writing.

The present study addresses this gap by examining how Arabic-speaking learners of Hebrew express epistemic, deontic, and evaluative stance in argumentative essays, and how these expressions reflect their broader interlanguage developmental patterns. Grounded in a concept-oriented, function-to-form analytical framework (Bardovi-Harlig, 2020) and informed by interlanguage theory (Selinker, 1972; Tarone, 1999), the study focuses not merely on error analysis but on mapping the emergence, transformation, and sophistication of stance-taking resources across developmental levels.

Because Arabic and Hebrew share genealogical roots yet diverge in syntactic organization and discourse conventions, examining stance development in this pairing provides a valuable opportunity to observe how learners navigate structural similarity alongside pragmatic divergence. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Arabic-speaking learners of Hebrew realize epistemic, deontic, and evaluative modality in their L2 argumentative writing?
2. What developmental patterns in stance-taking emerge across interlanguage levels, and how do these patterns reflect learners' evolving linguistic and pragmatic control?

Based on prior findings in L2 stance development, it is hypothesized that learners will rely heavily on L1-influenced, personal, and colloquial forms at basic levels; will produce structurally hybrid or non-target-like stance expressions at intermediate levels; and will exhibit more conventionalized, register-appropriate academic stance markers at advanced levels.

This study makes two main contributions. Empirically, it provides the first systematic account of how stance and modality develop in L2 Hebrew writing among Arabic-speaking learners, drawing on a sizable, naturally occurring corpus of exam-based argumentative essays. Theoretically, it advances an interlanguage-based model of stance development that integrates conceptual meaning, pragmatic function, and structural form, offering a nuanced account of how learners construct authorial presence in a typologically related yet pragmatically distinct L2. Through this dual contribution, the study deepens our un-

understanding of the developmental trajectory of stance-taking and offers actionable insights for pedagogy, assessment, and future research in L2 Hebrew and beyond.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Interlanguage Development and the Emergence of Stance*

Interlanguage theory conceptualizes L2 development as a dynamic, evolving system shaped by L1 transfer, partial L2 knowledge, and ongoing restructuring (Selinker, 1972; Tarone, 1999). Research across linguistic domains—including lexicon (H. Chen & Xu, 2019), pragmatics (Alotaibi, 2025), phonology (Fauzi, 2021), syntax (Huebner, 1985), and morphology (Toth et al., 2023)—consistently shows that learners pass through qualitatively distinct stages. Early stages are marked by high variability, unstable rule formation, and pervasive L1 influence (Hopp, 2022; Falk & Bardel, 2024), while intermediate stages display systematic errors, overgeneralization, and hybrid L1–L2 forms (Fauzi, 2021; Hao et al., 2021; Hassan & Rami, 2024; Maie & Godfroid, 2025). At advanced stages, learners approach target-like structures but may retain persistent non-native features or fossilized forms (Fauzi, 2021; Hopp, 2022; Hassan & Rami, 2024).

Within this framework, stance and modality are particularly revealing markers of interlanguage development because they require not only structural accuracy but also pragmatic, discourse, and genre awareness. As Bardovi-Harlig (2020) argues, a concept-oriented approach highlights how learners express meaning even when formal grammatical control is incomplete. Stance expressions thus serve as sensitive indicators of how learners manage interpersonal and epistemic meanings while navigating the constraints of their developing linguistic systems.

2.2. *Stance and Modality in L1 and L2 Writing*

Stance encompasses the linguistic means by which writers express attitudes, judgments, and degrees of certainty toward propositions (Berman, 2005; Jiang & Hyland, 2015). Modality is central to this construct, encoding possibility, necessity, obligation, and evaluation through modal verbs (e.g., may, must), adverbs (possibly, certainly), and nominalized stance expressions (Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Alghazo et al., 2021b; Huang & Li, 2023; Barbara et al., 2024; Smirnova & Pérez-Guerra, 2025). These markers enable writers to soften claims through hedges, strengthen commitments through boosters, and align themselves with or distance themselves from their arguments (Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Barbara et al., 2024; Smirnova & Pérez-Guerra, 2025).

Extensive research shows that stance-taking varies systematically across genres, disciplines, and proficiency levels. Academic writing in the hard sciences tends to minimize subjectivity, whereas soft sciences allow for more evaluative and interpersonal stance (Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Huang & Li, 2023; Wu & Pan, 2023; C. Chen & He, 2024; Smirnova & Pérez-Guerra, 2025). Narrative genres encourage personal stance, while argumentative and expository texts rely more on modalization and evidential strategies (Berman et al., 2002; Berman, 2005; Reilly et al., 2005; Xiao-Desai, 2021). Importantly, proficiency strongly predicts stance complexity: advanced L2 writers deploy a wider range of interpersonal resources and use stance markers more flexibly and appropriately. In contrast, novice writers often underuse hedges and overuse boosters, producing texts that sound overly categorical or insufficiently academic (Aull & Lancaster, 2014; Bax et al., 2019; Ostovar-Namaghi et al., 2022; Liao & Lü, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023; Barbara et al., 2024; C. Chen & He, 2024; Fajri & Oktavianti, 2024; Römer-Barron, 2024).

While existing developmental research is heavily skewed toward Indo-European languages such as English, these findings may not fully capture the typological and morphological complexity of Semitic languages. In Hebrew, stance is not realized solely through

lexical devices such as modal verbs, but is also encoded through inflectional morphology, including the binyanim system and tense–aspect distinctions that carry modal implications. In addition, nominalized stance constructions and formulaic expressions—often rooted in culturally specific discourse traditions—play a central role in academic positioning. These structural and pragmatic characteristics suggest that the developmental trajectory of stance in Hebrew may not mirror the patterns identified in predominantly English-centered research.

2.3. Crosslinguistic Influences and L1 Transfer in Stance Development

A substantial body of research demonstrates that L1 background significantly influences how learners construct stance in an L2. Learners often transfer stance preferences, evaluative norms, or modal constructions from their L1 to their L2 writing (C. Chen & Zhang, 2017; Zhang et al., 2023; Fajri & Oktavianti, 2024). Crosslinguistic studies reveal that L2 writers may avoid direct self-mention and prefer stronger reporting verbs, while native writers use more moderate, flexible stance markers (Liu & Zhou, 2014; C. Chen & Zhang, 2017; Fajri & Oktavianti, 2024).

Instruction, feedback, and task conditions can also modulate stance development. Explicit instruction on modality enhances learners' ability to use hedges, modal verbs, and evaluative expressions appropriately (Fu, 2002; Bax et al., 2019; Yu & Poehner, 2025). Technology-mediated and AI-based writing environments have been shown to support self-regulation and increase the range of stance-taking devices learners employ (Aladini et al., 2025). Dynamic assessment interventions targeting argumentative writing further demonstrate measurable gains in learners' ability to express epistemic and evaluative stance (Yu & Poehner, 2025).

Research directly comparing Hebrew and Arabic stance practices further underscores the importance of examining this pairing developmentally. Studies of discourse markers in contact settings show that stance-taking resources such as *ya'ani/ya'an* circulate between colloquial Arabic and Hebrew, functioning as reformulation markers and ironic hedges (Marmorstein & Maschler, 2020), illustrating how interpersonal positioning is shaped by ongoing language contact. Contrastive pragmatic research also reveals both overlap and divergence in evaluative practices, such as flattery and politeness, between Israeli Hebrew and Palestinian Arabic (Danziger & Kampf, 2020). In academic discourse, Arabic writing has been shown to rely more heavily on boosters and explicit self-mention, while using fewer hedges compared to English (Alghazo et al., 2021a), suggesting culturally patterned preferences in stance expression. Structural contrasts are likewise evident in modal and dative constructions, where Arabic and Hebrew encode speaker attitude through partially overlapping but formally distinct grammatical mechanisms (Al-Zahre & Boneh, 2010). Taken together, these findings indicate that stance in Arabic–Hebrew contexts is shaped by typological proximity, pragmatic divergence, and sociolinguistic asymmetry—factors that make the developmental trajectory of stance in L2 Hebrew a theoretically compelling and empirically necessary object of study.

2.4. L2 Hebrew Development Among Arabic-Speaking Learners

Although a growing body of work examines how Arabic speakers acquire Hebrew, research has concentrated largely on lexical, morphological, and syntactic domains. Studies show that vocabulary acquisition benefits from cognate facilitation (Abu-Rabiah, 2025b), but is hindered by increasing lexical sophistication (Abu-Rabiah, 2024). Syntactic interference from Arabic persists even among advanced learners, particularly in prepositional usage, agreement and clause structure (Henkin, 2020; Abu-Rabiah et al., 2023). Morphological development, while partially supported by bilingual advantage, is shaped by so-

ciolinguistic factors such as Arabic diglossia (Asli-Badarneh & Leikin, 2018). Literacy research highlights additional challenges stemming from the abjad writing systems of both languages (Abu-Gweder, 2023; Chan, 2024).

Despite these advances, stance and modality in L2 Hebrew writing among Arabic speakers remain almost entirely unexplored. No prior studies have systematically examined how these learners construct epistemic, deontic, and evaluative meanings in Hebrew, nor how stance-taking develops across interlanguage stages in a Semitic L2. Persistent transfer effects documented in other linguistic domains suggest that stance development may likewise be shaped by structural, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic influences unique to Arabic–Hebrew bilingualism.

Beyond these general findings, the close genealogical relationship between Arabic and Hebrew further complicates transfer dynamics in L2 development. Research on cross-linguistic influence between typologically related languages shows that structural similarity often encourages transfer, but such transfer is developmentally constrained and does not necessarily involve direct replication of L1 structures. For example, studies of Swedish learners acquiring German—two closely related languages—demonstrate that learners may initially produce intermediate constructions that are ungrammatical in both languages rather than transferring identical syntactic patterns (Håkansson et al., 2002). More recent work likewise suggests that cross-linguistic influence is driven not only by broad typological proximity but also by property-by-property structural similarity between languages, allowing for both facilitative and non-facilitative transfer effects (Westergaard et al., 2017). Evidence from bilingual acquisition contexts further shows that learners tend to rely on the typologically closer language when acquiring an additional language, even when it was not acquired first (Cawhalho & Bacelar da Silva, 2006). In the case of Arabic-speaking learners of Hebrew, such dynamics may be particularly salient because the two languages share Semitic morphological resources while differing in syntactic organization, modal realization, and discourse conventions. As a result, stance constructions in L2 Hebrew may reflect not only straightforward L1 interference but also structural mapping across partially overlapping linguistic systems.

2.5. *The Need for a Developmental, Function-to-Form Examination of Stance in L2 Hebrew*

Taken together, existing research establishes that (a) stance is central to the construction of argumentative writing; (b) stance development is sensitive to proficiency, genre, and L1 influence; and (c) Arabic-speaking learners of Hebrew face well-documented challenges in lexical, morphological, and syntactic domains. Yet, no study to date has analyzed how these learners deploy stance markers in Hebrew argumentative writing, nor how such markers develop across interlanguage levels.

Collectively, the literature reviewed above highlights three important gaps. First, while stance and modality have been widely examined in L2 writing, developmental analyses remain concentrated in Indo-European languages, particularly English. Second, although a growing body of research documents lexical, morphological, and syntactic development in L2 Hebrew among Arabic-speaking learners, the development of stance-taking resources in Hebrew argumentative writing has not yet been systematically investigated. Third, the close genealogical relationship between Arabic and Hebrew introduces unique conditions for crosslinguistic influence, where structural proximity may facilitate certain mappings while simultaneously producing hybrid or non-target-like constructions. Addressing these gaps requires an analytical framework capable of capturing how learners express stance meanings even when formal linguistic control remains incomplete. The present study therefore adopts a concept-oriented, function-to-form approach to examine

how epistemic, deontic, and evaluative stance emerge and develop in the interlanguage writing of Arabic-speaking learners of Hebrew.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study employed a qualitative, concept-oriented research design (Lazaraton, 2003; Bardovi-Harlig, 2020) to investigate how Arabic-speaking learners of Hebrew realize epistemic, deontic, and evaluative stance in L2 argumentative writing. A concept-oriented approach (Bardovi-Harlig, 2020) was selected because it prioritizes the functional meanings that learners intend to express—such as certainty, obligation, and evaluation—regardless of the grammatical completeness of the linguistic forms through which these meanings are encoded. This framework is well suited to addressing the study’s research questions, which focus on (1) identifying how learners linguistically construct stance in Hebrew argumentative essays and (2) tracing developmental patterns across interlanguage stages.

Interlanguage theory (Selinker, 1972; Tarone, 1999) informed the developmental orientation of the analysis by conceptualizing learner language as a systematic yet evolving linguistic system shaped by L1 influence, restructuring, and partial control of L2 resources. Developmental patterns are inferred from interlanguage variation across proficiency levels rather than tracked longitudinally. Within this framework, modal expressions were examined not as isolated errors but as developmental indicators reflecting learners’ progression toward target-like stance marking.

3.2. Corpus and Participants

The corpus consisted of 92 handwritten Hebrew argumentative essays (11,572 running words), drawn from an entrance examination administered at an academic institution in southern Israel. The sample was selected from an original pool of 149 essays. Scripts scoring below 40 points—primarily due to incoherence, insufficient length, or failure to express a discernible opinion—were excluded to ensure that all texts contained analyzable stance expressions.

Participants were prospective undergraduate students, typically aged 19–22, applying for admission to higher education. All were L1 Arabic speakers who had received approximately 11 years of formal Hebrew instruction beginning in Grade 2 (approximately 3–5 instructional hours per week within the national curriculum). Hebrew proficiency was estimated at CEFR B1–B2 levels based on institutional placement benchmarks used for academic language support. These benchmarks reflect internal assessment criteria rather than an externally administered standardized CEFR test.

No additional demographic background data (e.g., socioeconomic status or detailed educational profiles) were collected as part of the examination procedure. All essays were anonymized prior to analysis in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines.

3.3. Writing Task

The essays were produced under standardized, invigilated examination conditions. Students were presented with a single argumentative prompt:

“Should children help their parents with household chores, and should such help be financially compensated?”

This topic elicits reasoning, evaluation, and personal argumentation—discourse functions that naturally require stance-taking and modal expression. Students were instructed to express and justify their opinion in writing within a fixed time limit. No dictionaries, digital tools, or external aids were permitted, ensuring that all stance constructions reflected spontaneous L2 production.

3.4. Analytical Framework

3.4.1. Identification and Categorization of Modal Expressions

All stance-related expressions were identified manually following semantic, pragmatic, and discourse-functional criteria. Tokens were classified into one of three major stance domains:

1. Epistemic modality—expressions of belief, knowledge, likelihood, or certainty (Halliday, 1970; Palmer, 1986; Papafragou, 2006).
2. Deontic modality—expressions of obligation, permission, or necessity (Han, 1999; Charlow & Chrisman, 2016; Rantsudu & Bartlett, 2024).
3. Evaluative modality—expressions of value judgment, attitude, or interpersonal evaluation (Benamara et al., 2017).

A coding manual was developed that included operational definitions, prototypical examples, and criteria for resolving borderline cases. The coding process included assessment of lexical, phrasal, and clausal structures functioning as stance markers. For illustrative purposes, representative examples were selected from the corpus to demonstrate how modal meanings were realized across developmental levels. Example sentences were chosen based on three criteria: (1) clarity of the modal meaning expressed (epistemic, deontic, or evaluative), (2) representativeness of recurrent patterns observed in the corpus, and (3) the presence of structural features characteristic of the developmental level being illustrated. The examples therefore function as analytical illustrations of broader patterns identified through corpus-wide coding.

3.4.2. Interlanguage Developmental Classification

Each identified modal expression was analyzed and assigned to one of three empirically derived interlanguage developmental levels. Level assignment focused on the stance expression itself rather than the overall grammatical complexity of the sentence in which it appeared. The classification was determined through the interaction of four analytic dimensions: lexical sophistication, morphosyntactic stability, pragmatic-discursive positioning, and degree of L1 (Arabic) transfer.

- Level 1: Basic

Characterized by high-frequency, spoken-like stance markers and explicitly personal opinion framing. Expressions at this level typically include common cognition verbs and simple evaluative adjectives (e.g., אני חושב [ʔa'ni xo'ʃev], צריך [tsa'rix], טוב [tov]), often accompanied by agreement errors, simplified clause structures, or direct lexical and structural calques from Arabic.

- Level 2: Intermediate

Defined by lexical expansion and emerging abstraction in stance expression, frequently involving nominalized or formulaic constructions (e.g., בדעתי [be-daʕa'ti], חוב/חובה [xov/xo'va], אין בעיה [ʔen baʕa'ja]). While these forms demonstrate a broader repertoire of stance devices, they often appear in hybrid constructions reflecting partial morphosyntactic instability or cross-linguistic structural mapping from Arabic.

- Level 3: Advanced

Consisting of lower-frequency, lexically specialized, and register-appropriate stance constructions characteristic of Hebrew argumentative discourse (e.g., לעניית דעתי [le-ʕa'nijut daʕa'ti], נאליץ [neʔe'lats], מגבש [mega'bef], מייק [ma'zik]). These expressions demonstrate greater morphosyntactic control, increased lexical specificity, higher idiomaticity, and reduced reliance on overt first-person anchoring.

The developmental grid was constructed and refined through iterative examination of the data, ensuring that category boundaries reflected clear and recurring patterns in the corpus. L1 influence was treated as a developmental indicator rather than solely as error, with overt calques clustering primarily at the Basic level and attenuating at higher levels.

Importantly, “Advanced” refers to relative interlanguage sophistication within the corpus rather than native-like or C2-level proficiency. Given that participants’ Hebrew proficiency was estimated at CEFR B1–B2, near-native (“superior”) discourse production would not be expected to occur frequently in the dataset.

Each example presented in the Section 4 includes the original Hebrew sentence as produced by the learner, followed by an IPA transcription, a literal word-by-word translation, and an intended meaning rendering. The literal translation preserves the learners’ original morphosyntactic structure in order to make deviations from target-like Hebrew visible, while the intended meaning provides an interpretation of the communicative intention underlying the utterance. This dual translation format allows the analysis to capture both the formal properties of the interlanguage construction and the functional stance meaning expressed by the learner. When relevant, examples were also examined for potential crosslinguistic influence from Arabic.

3.5. Coding Procedure and Validation

The analysis followed a multi-stage coding procedure designed to ensure transparency and replicability.

1. Pilot coding: A subset of 10 essays was coded in an initial analytic round to test the preliminary coding scheme. These essays were subsequently re-coded after refinement of the operational criteria to ensure internal consistency and category stability.
2. Full corpus coding: All 92 essays were systematically coded using the revised manual. Each modal expression was annotated for modal type and developmental level.
3. Analytic memoing: Throughout coding, reflexive memos were maintained in accordance with qualitative research standards (Birks et al., 2008). These memos documented coding decisions, emerging themes, and rationales for interpretive judgments, creating an audit trail to minimize subjectivity and support reliability.

All coding and level classification were conducted by the author. Given the qualitative, concept-oriented nature of the analysis, which required interpretive judgments concerning pragmatic function, lexical sophistication, and crosslinguistic influence, coding was not treated as a purely mechanical categorization task. Rather than calculating interrater reliability, methodological rigor was ensured through iterative re-coding, systematic memoing, and the development of explicit operational criteria for level assignment. The author’s expertise as a native speaker of Arabic, a specialist in Hebrew linguistics, and a researcher in Hebrew as a second language further supported the validity of crosslinguistic interpretation and transfer analysis.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The essays were collected as part of standard institutional assessment procedures and were used for research only with explicit institutional approval. All scripts were anonymized prior to analysis, and no identifying or demographic information was retained.

4. Results

The qualitative analysis of the 92 argumentative essays yielded a total of 112 distinct modal expression types across the corpus. These expressions were distributed across three stance domains—epistemic, deontic, and evaluative modality—and were systematically categorized into three empirically derived interlanguage developmental levels (Basic, In-

intermediate, Advanced), as outlined in the Section 3. Themes and developmental patterns were identified through iterative coding, constant comparison across texts, and repeated verification of category boundaries until no new patterns emerged.

The findings reported below describe how learners realized stance within each modality domain and how these realizations patterned developmentally across levels. Epistemic modality was typically expressed through cognition and perception *verbs* (e.g., *חושב אני* [ʔa'ni xo'jev], *אני רואה* [ʔa'ni ko'e]), as well as nominalized stance expressions (e.g., *בדעתי* [be-daʕa'ti], *לעניות דעתי* [le-ʕa'nijut daʕa'ti]). Deontic modality was realized through modal predicates and obligation constructions (e.g., *צריך* [tsa'rix], *אסור* [a'sur], *חובה* [xo'va], *לשמור* [ʕa'leihem lif'mor]), while evaluative modality was encoded through adjectives, nominal evaluative structures, and lexically specific verbs expressing judgment (e.g., *טוב* [tov], *יפה* [ja'fe], *אין בעיה* [ʔen baʕa'ja], *מגבש* [mega'bef], *מגביר* [mag'bir]).

Across all three domains, a consistent developmental configuration was observed. Basic-level writing relied primarily on high-frequency lexical items, spoken-like stance markers, and explicitly personal framing. Intermediate-level writing displayed greater lexical variety and experimentation with more abstract stance constructions, but frequently included morphosyntactic instability and L1-influenced structures. Advanced-level writing incorporated lower-frequency lexical items, idiomatic expressions, and structurally more complex constructions associated with Hebrew argumentative and academic discourse.

4.1. Epistemic Modality

Epistemic modality was expressed across all developmental levels, with systematic differences in lexical choice, structural complexity, and degree of abstraction.

4.1.1. Basic-Level Epistemic Expressions

At the Basic level, epistemic stance was predominantly realized through high-frequency verbs of cognition and perception, most notably *חושב אני* [ʔa'ni xo'jev] ('I think') and *אני רואה* [ʔa'ni ko'e] ('I see'). These constructions framed propositions explicitly as personal opinions.

Example 1

(St.9) *אני חושב שהילדים חיוניים (=חייבים) לעזור להורים שלהם בכל מה שנדרש מהם*

IPA: [ʔa'ni xo'jev ʃe-ha-je'ladim xi'vavim la'ʕazor le-ho'rim ʃe'lahem be-'xol ma ʃe-nid'raf me'hem]

Literal translation: I think that the children obligated must help the parents their in all what is required from them

Intended meaning: I think that children must help their parents with everything required of them.

In spoken Bedouin Arabic, speakers frequently use expressions such as *أنا بفكر* [ʔana bafakkir] ("I think") to introduce personal opinions in everyday argumentation. The use of first-person cognition verbs to frame a stance is therefore a common discourse strategy in the learners' L1. Arabic-speaking learners may transfer this pattern into Hebrew argumentative writing by relying on constructions such as *חושב אני* [ʔa'ni xo'jev] ("I think") to introduce their viewpoint.

Example 2

(St.16) *אני רואה שההורים לא צריכים לשלם כסף לילדים שלהם מכיוון שהם עוזרים להם בעבודות הבית*

IPA: [ʔa'ni ko'e ʃe-ha-ho'rim lo tsri'xim leʕa'lem ke'sef la-je'ladim ʃe'lahem mi-ke'van ʃe-hem o'zrim la'hem be-ʕavo'dot ha-ba'jit]

Literal translation: I see that the parents not need to pay money to the children their because they help them in the works of the house.

Intended meaning: I see that parents do not need to pay their children money because the children help with household chores.

In Arabic, speakers frequently use the verb أرى [ʔa'ra:] (“I see”) to express personal opinions, and the noun for “opinion,” رأي [raʔj], derives from the same root. This lexical relationship reinforces a conceptual link between “seeing” and “having an opinion.” As a result, Arabic-speaking learners may transfer this discourse strategy into Hebrew, producing expressions such as אני רואה [ʔa'ni ʔo'e] (“I see”) as epistemic stance markers in argumentative contexts. At early stages of interlanguage development, these personally anchored cognition verbs often function as default epistemic stance markers, allowing learners to frame arguments using familiar discourse structures from their L1.

4.1.2. Intermediate-Level Epistemic Expressions

At the Intermediate level, learners employed a broader epistemic repertoire, including nominalized stance expressions and contrastive framing, often with non-target-like morphosyntax.

Example 3

בדעתי לא חייב על ההורים שלנו לשלם אולנו (=לנו) כסף (St.5)

IPA: [be-daʕa'ti lo ɣa'jav ʕal ha-ho'rim ʕe'lanu leʕa'lem la'nu ke'sef]

Literal translation: in my opinion not must on the parents our to pay to-us money

Intended meaning: In my opinion, our parents are not obligated to pay us money.

The standard Hebrew formulation would be לדעתי ההורים אינם חייבים לשלם לנו כסף [le daʕa'ti haho'rim ei'nam ɣaja'vim leʕa'lem la'nu ke'sef] (“In my opinion, the parents are not obligated to pay us money”). The learner’s use of בדעתי [be daʕa'ti] appears to reflect structural transfer from the Arabic expression برأيي [bi-raʔji:] (“in my opinion”). In Arabic, the preposition بـ [bi] (“in/with”) is used before رأيي [raʔji:] (“my opinion”), forming the phrase برأيي [bi-raʔji:]. The learner therefore appears to map this structure directly onto Hebrew by selecting the equivalent preposition ב־ rather than the conventional Hebrew stance marker ל־ [le] (“to/for”) in לדעתי [le daʕa'ti] (“in my opinion”). As a result, the expression בדעתי [be daʕa'ti] (“in my opinion”) represents a prepositional calque from Arabic rather than a target-like Hebrew argumentative construction.

The phrase חייב על ההורים [ɣa'jav ʕal ha ho'rim] also appears to reflect a calque from the Arabic obligation structure يجب على [ja'dʒib ʕala] (“must on”), which is frequently used in Arabic to express obligation (e.g., يجب على الوالدین [ja'dʒib ʕala al-wa:li de:n] “it is obligatory for the parents...”). The learner appears to map this structure directly onto Hebrew by combining the preposition על [ʕal] (“on”) with the modal predicate חייב [ɣa'jav] (“must/obligated”). While Hebrew can use על to encode obligation in certain constructions (e.g., עליכם לגשת למשרד [ʕale'ɣem la'geʃet la-mis'rad] “you must go to the office”), it is not typically used together with חייב. The resulting phrase therefore represents a hybrid modal construction influenced by Arabic syntactic framing.

Example 4

אני בהפך זה אני בשמחה אעזור להורים שלי (St.56)

IPA: [ʔa'ni be-he'fex ze ʔa'ni be-sim'ɣa ʔeʕa'zor le-ho'rim ʕe'li]

Literal translation: I in-opposite this I with joy will help to the parents my

Intended meaning: On the contrary, I will gladly help my parents.

The standard Hebrew expression would be להפך, אני בשמחה אעזור להורים שלי [le'hefex ʔa'ni be sim'ɣa ʔeʕa'zor le ho'rim ʕe'li] (“On the contrary, I will gladly help my parents”). The learner’s form בהפך [be'hefex] appears to reflect a calque from the Arabic discourse marker

بالعكس [bil-ʕaks] (“on the contrary”). In Arabic, the expression is formed with the preposition → [bi] (“in/with”) attached to العكس [al-ʕaks] (“the opposite”). The learner appears to map this structure directly onto Hebrew by using the equivalent preposition בִּ [be] before הֶפֶךְ [ʔhefex], producing בְּהֶפֶךְ [beʔhefex]. In standard Hebrew, however, the conventional expression is לְהֶפֶךְ [leʔhefex] (“on the contrary”), illustrating how learners may transfer familiar Arabic discourse patterns while substituting Hebrew lexical material.

4.1.3. Advanced-Level Epistemic Expressions

Advanced-level epistemic stance was encoded through idiomatic and low-frequency constructions characteristic of formal Hebrew discourse.

Example 5

(St.79) לעניות דעתי ההורים לא צריכים לשלם על עזרת ילדיהם

IPA: [le-ʕaʔnijut daʕaʔti ha-hoʔrim lo tsriʔxim leʕaʔlem ʕal ezʔrat jelʔde:hem]

Literal translation: to-poverty-of opinion-my the parents not need to pay for help-of children-their

Intended meaning: In my humble opinion, parents do not need to pay for their children’s help.

Example 6

(St.29) בסוף אני רוצה לאמור אסור על ההורים לתת ילדיהם כסף או מתנה על כל עזרה ילדיהם עושים

IPA: [baʔsof ʔaʔni roʔtse le-ʔaʔmor aʔsur ʕal ha-hoʔrim laʔtet jelʔde:hem keʔsef o ma-taʔna ʕal kol ezʔra jelʔde:hem oʔsim]

Literal translation: in the end I want to say forbidden on the parents to give children-their money or gift for every help children-their do

Intended meaning: In conclusion, parents should not give their children money or gifts for every act of help they do.

These examples illustrate advanced-level epistemic stance through the use of relatively low-frequency and idiomatic expressions characteristic of formal Hebrew argumentative discourse. In Example 5, the expression לעניות דעתי [le ʕaʔnijut daʕaʔti] (“in my humble opinion”) is a conventionalized idiom used to introduce a personal stance while simultaneously softening the claim. As a fixed formulaic expression, it is associated with formal written discourse and rhetorical politeness, and its use reflects an attempt to adopt a more sophisticated argumentative register.

Similarly, Example 6 includes the expression אני רוצה לאמור [ʔaʔni roʔtse leʔeʔmor] (“I wish to say”/“I would like to state”), another discourse formula that signals a concluding or summarizing claim. However, while the stance marker itself reflects an advanced rhetorical choice, the sentence as a whole is not fully grammatically stable. For example, the construction אסור על ההורים לתת ילדיהם כסף [aʔsur ʕal ha hoʔrim laʔtet jelʔde:hem keʔsef] (“It is forbidden for the parents to give their children money”) is non-standard in Hebrew. These mixed patterns illustrate a common feature of advanced interlanguage development, in which learners successfully employ idiomatic stance markers while still exhibiting morphosyntactic irregularities.

4.2. Deontic Modality

4.2.1. Basic-Level Deontic Expressions

Example 7

(St.58) ההורים צריך לשלם על זה הרבה

IPA: [ha-hoʔrim tsaʔrix leʕaʔlem ʕal ze harʔbe]

Literal translation: the parents need.SG to pay on this a lot

Intended meaning: Parents need to pay a lot for this.

In standard Hebrew, the modal predicate should agree with the plural subject: *ההורים צריכים לשלם על זה הרבה* [ha ho'rim tsri'chim lefa'lem ʕal ze har'be] (“the parents need to pay a lot for this”). In the learner sentence, however, the singular form *צריך* [tsa'rix] (“must/need to”) is used with the plural subject *ההורים* [ha ho'rim] (“the parents”). This lack of agreement may reflect transfer from Arabic obligation expressions such as *الأهل لازم* [al-ʔahl la:zim] (“the parents must”), where the modal *لازم* [la:zim] (“must/need to”) does not inflect for number or gender. As a result, learners may map this invariant modal structure onto Hebrew, producing forms in which the modal predicate does not agree with the grammatical subject.

Example 8

לפי דעתי אסור לשלם לילדים שלהם כסף (St.69)

IPA: [le-fi daʕa'ti a'sur leʕa'lem la-je'ladim ʃe'lahem ke'sef]

Literal translation: according to opinion-my forbidden to pay to-children their money

Intended meaning: In my opinion, it is forbidden to pay their children money.

The modal predicate *אסור* [a'sur] (“forbidden”) is a very frequent deontic marker in Hebrew and closely corresponds to the Arabic modal *ممنوع* [mam'nu:ʕ] (“forbidden/not allowed”), which is widely used to express prohibition. The learner’s use of *אסור* therefore reflects an appropriate lexical choice for encoding deontic modality. However, the sentence remains structurally incomplete because the grammatical subject is not specified. In standard Hebrew argumentative writing, the agent responsible for the action would typically be made explicit, for example: *לפי דעתי אסור שההורים ישלמו לילדים שלהם כסף* [le fi daʕa'ti a'sur ʃe ha ho'rim jiʃal'mu la je'ladim ʃe'lahem ke'sef] (“In my opinion, parents should not pay their children money”). The learner’s formulation thus illustrates a simplified prohibition structure in which the modal predicate is present but the clause lacks a clearly expressed subject.

4.2.2. Intermediate-Level Deontic Expressions

Example 9

עזרה להורים חוב (=חובה) ובלי כסף (St.48)

IPA: [ez'ra le-ho'rim ʁov ve-bli ke'sef]

Literal translation: help to parents duty and without money

Intended meaning: Helping parents is a duty and should not involve money.

The sentence itself is structurally simple and may resemble Basic-level constructions in terms of syntactic complexity. However, the deontic expression *חובה/חוב* [ʁov/ʁo'va] (“duty/obligation”) reflects a more advanced lexical choice. Unlike Basic-level modal markers such as *צריך* [tsa'rix] (“must/need to”) or *אסור* [a'sur] (“forbidden”), which are high-frequency and common in everyday speech, *חובה* [ʁo'va] represents a more abstract nominalized form used to express obligation. According to the developmental criteria adopted in this study, the classification focuses on the stance expression itself rather than the overall sentence complexity.

Example 10

והילדים באותו זמן עליהם (=חובתם) לשמור על הבית שלהם (St.70)

IPA: [ve-ha-je'ladim be-o'to zman ʕa'leihem liʃ'mor ʕal ha-ba'jit ʃe'lahem]

Literal translation: and the children at that time on-them to keep on the house their

Intended meaning: At the same time, children are obligated to take care of their home.

The expression עליהם לשמור [ʕa'leihem liʃ'mor] (“it is upon them to keep/maintain”) reflects a deontic structure that parallels Arabic obligation constructions such as على عليهم الحفاظ... [ʕa'lei:hum al-ħif'fa:ð ʕala...] (“it is upon them to maintain...”), which are frequently used in Arabic to express duty or responsibility. The learner appears to map this structure directly onto Hebrew by using the preposition על [ʕal] (“on/upon”) with a pronominal suffix to encode obligation. Hebrew can employ a similar construction in certain contexts (e.g., עליכם לגשת למשרד [ʕa'leixem la'geʃet la-mis'rad] “you must go to the office”), but in this sentence a more natural formulation would be הילדים חייבים לשמור על הבית שלהם [ha je'ladim χaja'vim liʃ'mor ʕal ha ba'jit ʃe'lahem] (“the children must take care of their home”). Another acceptable formulation would be the nominalized structure חובתם של ילדים היא לשמור על הבית שלהם [χova'tam ʃel jela'dim hi liʃ'mor ʕal ha ba'jit ʃe'lahem] (“children’s duty is to take care of their home”). The learner’s form לשמור הילדים עליהם [ha je'ladim ʕa'leihem liʃ'mor] therefore reflects structural transfer from Arabic discourse patterns, where obligation is commonly expressed through a prepositional phrase indicating responsibility.

4.2.3. Advanced-Level Deontic Expressions

Example 11

הילדים נאלצים לעזור להוריהם בעבודות הבית (St.16)

IPA: [ha-je'ladim ne-ʔe'latsim la'ʕazor le-ho'rehem be-ʕavo'dot ha-ba'jit]

Literal translation: the children are-forced to help to-parents-their in works the-house

Intended meaning: Children are compelled to help their parents with household chores.

Example 12

הילדים שלה יודעים העזרה שלהם בבית דרושה מהם (St.72)

IPA: [ha-je'ladim ʃe'la jo'dim ha-ez'ra ʃe'lahem ba-ba'jit dru'ʃa me'hem]

Literal translation: the children hers know the help their in-the-house required from-them

Intended meaning: Her children know that their help at home is required of them.

These examples illustrate advanced-level deontic stance through the use of less frequent lexical items and passive constructions. In Example 11, the verb נאלצים [neʔe'latsim] (“are compelled”) expresses obligation indirectly through a passive form, creating greater rhetorical distance than basic modal verbs such as צריך [tsa'rix] (“must/need to”). Similarly, Example 12 uses the participial form דרושה [dru'ʃa] (“required”), framing the obligation through a passive construction (העזרה שלהם בבית דרושה מהם [ha ez'ra ʃe'lahem ba'bajit dru'ʃa me'hem] “their help at home is required of them”). Such passive and lexically specific forms are characteristic of more advanced stance expression in Hebrew argumentative writing.

4.3. Evaluative Modality

4.3.1. Basic-Level Evaluative Expressions

Example 13

העזרה להורים תמיד משהו טוב ולא לשלם (St.59)

IPA: [ha-ez'ra le-ho'rim ta'mid ma'ʃu tov ve-lo leʃa'lem]

Literal translation: the help to parents always something good and not to pay

Intended meaning: Helping parents is always a good thing, and parents should not pay.

Example 14

דבר יפה שהילד יעזור לאמא שלו (St.74)

IPA: [da'var ja'fe fe-ha-je'led jaʕa'zor le-ʔi'ma fe'lo]

Literal translation: thing beautiful that the child will-help to mother his

Intended meaning: It is a beautiful thing for a child to help his mother.

These examples illustrate Basic-level evaluative stance through the use of very frequent and semantically simple adjectives. In Example 13, the expression משהו טוב [ma'ʃehu tov] (“something good”) relies on the high-frequency adjective טוב [tov] (“good”), which functions as a general and unspecific evaluative marker. Similarly, Example 14 uses יפה [ja'fe] (“beautiful/nice”), a very common adjective in everyday Hebrew. Such basic evaluative vocabulary reflects early interlanguage stages, where learners rely on simple and highly frequent adjectives to express judgment.

4.3.2. Intermediate-Level Evaluative Expressions

Example 15

אין בעיה שהאב או האם ישלמו לילדיהם פעם או פעמיים רק לעודד אותם (St.28)

IPA: [ʔen baʕa'ja fe-ha-av o ha-em jiʕal'mu le-jil'de:hem paʕam o paʕa'majim rak le-ʕo'ded o'tam]

Literal translation: there is no problem that the father or the mother will-pay to-children-their once or twice only to encourage them

Intended meaning: There is no problem with parents paying their children once or twice just to encourage them.

The expression אין בעיה [ʔen baʕa'ja] (“there is no problem”) represents a slightly more developed evaluative construction than the basic adjective-based evaluations illustrated above. Rather than using a simple adjective such as טוב [tov] (“good”) or יפה [ja'fe] (“nice/beautiful”), the learner employs a nominal evaluative structure to assess the situation. In Hebrew argumentative discourse, a more explicit evaluative formulation would often be זה לא בעייתי [ze lo baʕja'ti] (“this is not problematic”). The use of אין בעיה therefore reflects an intermediate stage in which the learner moves beyond simple adjectives toward nominalized evaluative expressions, while still relying on a highly familiar spoken formula.

Example 16

בכל מקרה העזרה היא הדבר הראשון (=החשוב ביותר) בבית (St.59)

IPA: [be-χol mi'kre ha-ez'ra hi ha-da'var ha-ri'ʕon ba-ba'jit]

Literal translation: in every case the help is the thing the-first in-the-house

Intended meaning: In any case, helping is the most important thing at home.

The expression הדבר הראשון [hada'var ha ri'ʕon] (“the first thing”) is used here evaluatively to indicate importance. While the intended meaning corresponds to “the most important thing,” Hebrew would more naturally express this as הדבר החשוב ביותר [hada'-var ha χa'ʕuv bejo'ter] (“the most important thing”). The learner’s formulation may reflect transfer from Arabic, where the adjective الأول [al-ʔawwal] (“the first”) is frequently used metaphorically to convey the meaning of “most important.” This illustrates how learners may rely on familiar evaluative strategies from Arabic when constructing stance expressions in Hebrew.

4.3.3. Advanced-Level Evaluative Expressions

Example 17

(St.54) זוה מגבש את המשפחה ומגביר הביטחון העצמי של הילד, ונותן לילד תחושת משמעות

IPA: [ze mega'beʃ et ha-miʃpa'ħa u-meg'bir ha-bita'ħon ha-ʕats'mi ʃel ha-je'led ve-no'ten la-je'led tħu'ʃat miʃmu'ʕut]

Literal translation: this consolidates the family and increases the confidence the-self of the child and gives to-the child feeling of meaning

Intended meaning: This strengthens the family, increases the child's self-confidence, and gives the child a sense of meaning.

Example 18

(St.71) שלהם זה עולל (=עלול) לפעמים להשפיע על האישיות של הילד בצורה לא טובה ומקשה עליהם לחיות הילדות

IPA: [ve-ze ʔa'lul le-faʕa'mim le-ħaʃpi'a ʕal ha-iʃi'jut ʃel ha-je'led be-tsu'ra lo to'va u-meqaf'e ʕa'leihem liħ'jot ha-jaldut ʃe'lahem]

Literal translation: and this may sometimes to-affect on the personality of the child in way not good and makes-difficult on-them to live the-childhood their

Intended meaning: And this may sometimes affect the child's personality negatively and make it difficult for them to experience their childhood.

These examples illustrate advanced-level evaluative stance through the use of less frequent lexical items and more complex verbal constructions. In Example 17, the learner employs three evaluative verbs—*מגבש* [mega'beʃ] (“strengthens/cohesively builds”), *מגביר* [mag'bir] (“increases”), and *נותן* [no'ten] (“gives”)—to construct a multi-part evaluation. The verbs *מגבש* and *מגביר* are less frequent and more lexically specific than basic evaluative adjectives such as *טוב* [tov] (“good”) or *יפה* [ja'fe] (“nice/beautiful”), reflecting a higher level of lexical sophistication. Example 18 similarly includes the modal expression *עלול* [ʔa'lul] (“may/is liable to”), which introduces a more nuanced evaluative judgment. However, despite these advanced lexical choices, both sentences still display grammatical instability, such as the missing object marker *את* [ʔet], illustrating how learners may employ sophisticated evaluative vocabulary while still developing full morphosyntactic control.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a clear and consistent developmental progression in the use of epistemic, deontic, and evaluative modality among Arabic-speaking learners of Hebrew. Developmental patterns are inferred from interlanguage variation across proficiency levels rather than tracked longitudinally. Across all three domains, Basic-level expressions relied heavily on high-frequency vocabulary and spoken-like multiword expressions; Intermediate-level expressions displayed broader lexical variety but were marked by morphosyntactic instability and L1-driven structural deviations; and Advanced-level expressions incorporated low-frequency lexical items, idiomatic stance markers, and structurally complex constructions associated with Hebrew argumentative discourse. These patterns demonstrate that stance development in L2 Hebrew writing unfolds along a lexically and structurally cumulative continuum. Learners initially express modal meanings through accessible discourse routines and gradually acquire more specialized linguistic forms for encoding those meanings.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to systematically document how Arabic-speaking learners of Hebrew realize epistemic, deontic, and evaluative stance across interlanguage levels using naturally occurring argumentative writing. Empirically,

the study fills a significant research gap by providing the first developmental description of stance realization in L2 Hebrew argumentative writing by Arabic-speaking learners. Theoretically, the study extends interlanguage research by integrating conceptual meaning, pragmatic function, and formal structure into a unified developmental model, thereby advancing a function-to-form perspective on stance development. In doing so, it directly addresses the research questions posed in the Introduction and provides a detailed account of how learners express certainty, obligation, and evaluation as their linguistic and pragmatic control increases.

The developmental patterns observed align closely with existing literature on L2 stance and interlanguage development. The reliance on high-frequency, personal, and colloquial forms at Basic levels supports earlier findings that novice L2 writers tend to overuse boosters and personal stance markers while avoiding more nuanced, academic forms (Aull & Lancaster, 2014; Bax et al., 2019; Ostovar-Namaghi et al., 2022; Liao & Lü, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023; Barbara et al., 2024; C. Chen & He, 2024; Fajri & Oktavianti, 2024; Römer-Barron, 2024). Similarly, the presence of hybrid, structurally unstable Intermediate-level forms reflects the well-documented role of L1 transfer and partial restructuring during this stage (Fauzi, 2021; Hao et al., 2021; Hopp, 2022; Falk & Bardel, 2024; Hassan & Rami, 2024; Maie & Godfroid, 2025), particularly in contexts where typologically related languages encourage structural mapping across partially overlapping systems (Håkansson et al., 2002; Cawvalho & Bacelar da Silva, 2006; Westergaard et al., 2017).

The emergence of idiomatic, low-frequency, and nominalized stance constructions at Advanced levels is consistent with research showing that increased proficiency brings greater sensitivity to genre conventions and more effective deployment of modal and evaluative resources (Aull & Lancaster, 2014; Bax et al., 2019; Ostovar-Namaghi et al., 2022; Liao & Lü, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023; Barbara et al., 2024; C. Chen & He, 2024; Fajri & Oktavianti, 2024; Römer-Barron, 2024). The appearance of idiomatic and formulaic stance expressions at Advanced levels further indicates learners' developing sensitivity to discourse conventions and rhetorical positioning in Hebrew argumentative writing. At the same time, some features—such as persistent prepositional interference and mixed-register constructions—echo findings from L2 Hebrew research demonstrating that specific structural challenges for Arabic-speaking learners continue even at higher proficiency levels (Henkin, 2020; Abu-Rabiah et al., 2023). These convergences suggest that stance development interacts closely with the broader linguistic challenges characteristic of Arabic–Hebrew bilingualism.

At the level of linguistic pragmatics, the results also complement broader crosslinguistic studies showing that stance preferences and modal repertoires are shaped by culturally embedded discourse norms (C. Chen & Zhang, 2017; Zhang et al., 2023; Fajri & Oktavianti, 2024). The learners' early reliance on direct personal stance aligns with patterns described in languages where explicit self-positioning and booster-like expressions are pragmatically conventional, as documented in Arabic academic discourse (Alghazo et al., 2021a), while their later uptake of Hebrew-specific formulaic expressions suggests a gradual internalization of L2 discourse norms. These findings thus bridge insights from stance theory and interlanguage development while offering preliminary insights into how learners navigate structural proximity alongside pragmatic divergence between Arabic and Hebrew.

6. Conclusions

This study set out to examine how Arabic-speaking learners of Hebrew construct epistemic, deontic, and evaluative stance in argumentative writing, and to trace how these modal resources develop as part of learners' evolving interlanguage systems. Adopting a qualitative, concept-oriented, function-to-form approach, the analysis moved beyond surface-level accuracy to capture how learners mobilize available linguistic resources to

express stance and negotiate meaning in a high-stakes academic genre. In doing so, the study provides a detailed account of how stance functions as a developmental meaning-making resource in L2 writing.

Across the 92 argumentative essays analyzed, the findings reveal a systematic developmental trajectory in which stance marking progresses from accessible, high-frequency, and spoken-like forms toward increasingly abstract, lexically diversified, and register-appropriate academic constructions. Early interlanguage realizations foreground personal opinion through formulaic expressions that prioritize communicative immediacy over rhetorical distance. As linguistic resources expand, learners begin to experiment with more abstract and varied stance devices, though these attempts are frequently accompanied by morphosyntactic instability and hybrid forms reflecting continued L1 influence. At more advanced stages, stance is realized through idiomatic, structurally complex, and low-frequency constructions that align closely with the conventions of Hebrew academic discourse. Taken together, these patterns point to a cumulative developmental process in which functional control over stance precedes—and ultimately supports—the emergence of target-like formal precision.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings underscore the value of a function-to-form analytic lens for understanding interlanguage development. Rather than treating non-target-like forms as deficiencies, the study demonstrates how such forms index learners' interim solutions for encoding epistemic commitment, obligation, and evaluation under conditions of partial grammatical control. The persistence of Arabic-influenced patterns at intermediate stages highlights the role of L1 resources in shaping modal realization, while the gradual attenuation of these features at advanced levels reflects ongoing restructuring toward Hebrew-specific academic norms. In this respect, stance development emerges as a key site where linguistic, pragmatic, and rhetorical competencies converge in L2 academic writing.

Empirically, the study contributes a first developmental account of stance and modality in L2 Hebrew argumentative writing by Arabic-speaking learners. Despite the centrality of stance to academic literacy, this domain has remained largely unexplored in Hebrew L2 research. By systematically documenting how epistemic, deontic, and evaluative meanings are encoded across interlanguage stages, the study fills a significant gap and establishes a foundation for future work on modality, register development, and academic discourse in Semitic language contexts.

More broadly, the developmental trajectory identified here has important implications for L2 academic literacy and assessment. The results suggest that learners' difficulties with advanced academic stance are not merely a matter of limited vocabulary or grammatical accuracy, but reflect deeper challenges in mapping complex modal meanings onto appropriate linguistic forms. Recognizing stance as a developmental construct may therefore enable more nuanced evaluations of learner writing and more targeted pedagogical interventions.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest the value of explicitly modeling Hebrew academic stance constructions that extend beyond basic personal opinion markers. Instruction may benefit from highlighting contrasts between high-frequency personal expressions such as *אני חושב* [*ʔa'ni xo'jev*] (“I think”) and more formal stance devices such as *לעניות דעתי* [*le ʕa'nijut daʕa'ti*] (“in my humble opinion”) or nominalized evaluative structures like *מן הראוי ש* [*min ha-ra'ʔuj ʃe*] (“it is appropriate that...”). In addition, targeted feedback on modal and prepositional constructions—particularly structures influenced by Arabic such as *חייב על* [*xa'jav ʕal*]—may help learners develop greater control over Hebrew argumentative stance.

In conclusion, by illuminating how Arabic-speaking learners gradually acquire the capacity to express epistemic, deontic, and evaluative stance in Hebrew argumentative writing, this study advances our understanding of interlanguage development at the discourse-pragmatic level. The function-to-form trajectory documented here provides a principled framework for future SLA research and pedagogical assessment, and positions stance development as a central dimension of advanced L2 academic proficiency.

Despite the robustness of these findings, two limitations warrant consideration. The corpus was restricted to a single argumentative prompt, which may have constrained the breadth of stance expressions elicited; however, the prompt was deliberately chosen because it reliably evokes epistemic, deontic, and evaluative meanings, thereby supporting comparability across learners. The data consisted of handwritten, exam-based essays, which may not fully represent learners' performance in less constrained writing environments. Nevertheless, the controlled context ensured that all stance markers reflected spontaneous production rather than dictionary-supported or digitally assisted writing.

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