

# Emerging Trends in the Register of Persuasion Considering Appraisal in English

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## Keywords

English language  
English linguistics  
Persuasive register  
Appraisal in English  
LLM-generated  
persuasive texts

## Abstract

This paper discusses recent trends in the persuasion register in English. Such trends are linked to cultural differences and technological affordances, which also have an impact on social and professional practices (Bai et al. 2023; Matz et al. 2024; Kapantai et al. 2021). To this purpose, I first discuss the key concepts related to persuasive writing and their link to appraisal in English. Then, I focus on a sample of the most persuasive AI-generated writing extracted from a dataset released by Anthropic (Durmus et al. 2024) and available online. The methodology that drives this study is the appraisal system framework (ASF) by Martin and White (2005), the findings in ASF-based research on promotional texts (Pounds 2022; Ho 2021; 2011), institutional texts (Tupala 2019), academic texts (Hood 2010; 2006), and the research on complementary discourse systems for expressing stance and evaluation (Biber et al. 2019; 2018). The results show that the three groups of highly persuasive texts extracted from the Anthropic's dataset present non-dissimilar word frequency ranges and a tendency towards the use of low-frequency lexis and appraisal resources. The application of the ASF demonstrates that the AI system Claude 3 Opus masters evaluation scales in English despite the well-documented inconsistencies of such systems in dealing with the numerical scales. The sample analyzed does not really follow the pattern of sparingly using appraisal resources while preferring invoked appraisal, which has been demonstrated to be a recent trend in the persuasion register. Nonetheless, it mostly maintains the proven culture-based recent trend regarding the scale of directness/indirectness (ASF Engagement). Finally, the ASF categories of Attitude, Graduation, and Engagement in the sample do not deviate from the attested function of propagating the meta-text/meta-discourse although with a caveat: they systematically construct semantic prosodies of extremes to persuade compellingly.

## 1. Introduction

This study explores recent cultural and technological trends that affect the linguistic register of persuasion, including artificial intelligence (AI) tools currently used in persuasive communication in English. It implements the appraisal system framework (ASF) as a methodology for analyzing persuasive AI-generated texts and their conformity to and deviation

from the typical patterns attested in the persuasion register in English. ASF concerns interpersonal language, how writers evaluate, approve, or disapprove, and how they align the readers to their value positions (Martin and White 2005, 1). The case study presented in this paper is a subset of a published dataset of persuasive texts generated by the Large Language Model (LLM) *Claude 3 Opus* as a response to specific argumentative topics. The subset used in this study is limited to the LLM-generated texts that performed positively according to the persuasiveness metrics resulting from an extensive survey conducted by *Anthropic* (Durmus et al. 2024). *Anthropic* is an American AI research company that has been operating since 2021 in collaboration with the U.S.A. government, academia, nonprofits, and industry. Its mission is to ensure that its AI systems are interpretable and beneficial to humanity, and one of its primary research areas is the responsible and ethical development of Large Language Models (LLMs). Large Language Models (LLM), such as *GPT* by *Open AI*, *Gemini* by *Google*, and *Claude* by *Anthropic*, are AI systems trained on large amounts of data to process and generate human-like texts while performing other tasks such as coding.

In general, persuasive writing presents a particular point of view in a compelling way that aims to influence readers' attitudes and encourage them to adopt a specific stance or act (Fahnestock and Harris 2023, 10). The linguistic strategies that can appeal to emotions (pathos) and logical reasoning (logos) are often sustained by the writer's credibility (ethos). Persuasion has been analyzed as a text register that can appear not only in promotional messages and descriptions of products and services but also within texts written for different purposes, such as abstracts of academic papers and conference proceedings (Zibaldas and Sinkuniene 2019), travel and tourism descriptions of destinations (Manca 2016), and newspaper articles (Biber and Conrad 2019, 111-139; Facchinetti et al. 2012). Overt persuasion was defined by Biber (1988) as stance-taking that signals the writer's involvement in the proposition, and later, Hyland (2008) includes attitude markers (appraising resources) and boosters/hedges (mood and modality) under the label of stance. A modified version of Hyland's model has been applied to studies about the construction of persuasion in newspaper discourse (Dafouz-Milne 2008) and persuasive strategies in prestigious linguistics journals (Alhabbad, El-Dakhs and Mardini 2024). Both studies classify evaluative lexis and attitude markers as pathos and modals of obligation as logos/ethos.

Persuasive writing has also been linked to implicit and explicit/inscribed appraisal described by Martin and White (2005) in their Appraisal System Framework (ASF) with reference to institutionalized feelings and values (Ho 2021; Tupala 2019;) and considering appraising resources functional use in prosodically radiating persuasion (Hood 2006).

This study considers the research that developed from the original ASF by Martin and White, their classification of appraisal resources as Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation, the related

concepts of semantic prosody, meta-text, meta-discourse, and the application of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Another reason for the chosen case study, namely texts generated by the LLM *Claude 3 Opus*, is that LLMs may accelerate the spread of both socially advantageous and deceitful persuasive messages due to the enormous amount of written and spoken material that can be quickly generated and widely spread, reaching a quantitatively critical mass. Surely, persuasive communication offers opportunities to promote a positive social life for the individual, such as healthy habits, responsible savings, and a political correctness-based agenda, such as support for sustainability, environmentalism, and inclusive language necessary in contemporary multicultural societies (Matz et al. 2024). Yet, deceitful persuasive messages are increasingly frequent, spreading disinformation, manipulating political preferences, and encouraging maladaptive consumer behavior (Bai et al. 2023; Kapantai et al. 2021).

This paper first briefly describes fundamental concepts that the ASF-based research has revealed and recent linguistic and cultural changes in the register of persuasion that directly relate to the ASF. Then, the data and methodology sections describe the ratio behind the selected LLM-generated texts from the *Anthropic's* dataset for the analysis and the methodological procedure behind the quantitative and qualitative analysis. Finally, as the paper looks at persuasion as a text register, the analysis will focus on the functions of the linguistic resources emerging from the data. The paper concludes with a discussion of the results.

## 2. Key concepts of the Appraisal System Framework

Appraising items are discourse semantic resources that construct interpersonal meaning and develop from the concept of text register. The research about the use of evaluative appraisal, both explicit (inscribed) and implicit (invoked), refers to the framework by Martin and White (2005). The latter subdivides appraisal into Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Attitude is a domain that makes use of resources for making meaning related to feelings and emotional reactions (Affect), such as *satisfied* in *I felt satisfied*, resources for judging behavior according to normative principles (Judgment), such as *ethical* in *His conduct was ethical*, and resources for representing the value or evaluation of things (Appreciation) such as *important* in *This artifact is an important piece in the collection*. Graduation classifies the resources for amplifying or diminishing appraisal items belonging to the domains of Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation or scaling the distance from the focus of non-gradable entities (e.g., *true friend*, *real desert*). Finally, Martin and White (2005, 36) describe the domain of Engagement as “resources such as projection, modality, polarity, concession, and adverbial adjuncts that can be used to assess

reports, acknowledge possibilities, deny, counter, and affirm.” My application of the ASF focuses on the role of meta-text, meta-discourse, and semantic prosody, the distribution of ASF categories and functions, and their frequency of use related to the sample of AI-generated texts under consideration.

Linguistically, according to the vast research literature based on the ASF, the English persuasive writing trend is toward using less explicit (inscribed) and more implicit (invoked) Appreciation. Inscribed/explicit appraisal refers to appraising items that encode an explicit positive or negative evaluative meaning, while invoked/implicit appraisal is context-dependent and acquires specific configurations according to specific texts and genres. Both inscribed and invoked appraisal resources have been studied in promotional texts (Ho 2021; Pounds 2011), institutional texts (Tupala 2019), and academic texts (Hood 2010). For example, Ho (2021) describes the use of explicit and implicit appraisal in a corpus of luxury product advertisements in English-speaking countries and China and finds that implicit appraisal items are more frequent in that specific corpus. Hood (2010; 2006) describes how appraisal functions in academic writing, focusing on implicit appraisal in the domains of ASF Engagement and Graduation.

The concepts of meta-text and meta-discourse are particularly relevant in the ASF-based research analysis of the semantic prosody of appraisal resources. Generally, meta-text refers to the linguistic elements in a text that can organize or frame the main content of the text. Meta-discourse is instead a commentary on the writing process itself and addressing the reader directly. The terms *meta-text* and *meta-discourse* have been applied by Martin and White (2005) and later in the study of explicit/inscribed appraisal and implicit/invoked appraisal of formal texts such as academic discourse (Hood 2010, 129) and institutional texts (Tupala 2019). Tupala (2019) describes a prosodically propagated meta-discourse in the institutional persuasive discourse of EU documents related to migration. As Tupala puts it,

institutional texts are formal, and formality does not encourage the strong expression of attitudinal viewpoints. For this reason, institutional texts use implicit appraisal and guide the reader through the metatext. (Tupala 2019)

Tupala clarifies that explicit appraisal (inscribed appraising items), in earlier parts of the EU institutional text about migration policy, can be defined as meta-text, creating a setting for the attitudinal interpretation of implicit or invoked appraisal conveyed by factual, neutral expressions. In other words, it can be said that the evaluative expressions in the initial meta-text set the tone for the whole text. Martin and White (2015) report similar cases (Martin and White 2005, 131-132).

Hood's definition (2010, 22) of meta-discourse is based on the systems of discourse semantics, which restricts meta-discourse to its projection onto the successive discourse segments. Hood's example (2010, 182), "[...] offers a number of suggestions. First, [...]. Secondly, [...]. Finally, [...]," shows how the graduated (quantity Graduation expressed by *a number of*) nominalization of a performative verb (a number of *suggestions*) functions as meta-discourse that categorizes what follows in the subsequent segments of the text.

Biber et al. (2018) recently extended his research encompassing lexical appraisal resources, which are not part of a grammatically constructed stance but can project and prosodically propagate it because of their evaluative meanings. Biber and Egbert (2018) describe how projected meta-discourse in online hybrid texts persuades substantially more through the evaluative semantics of appraisal than through a grammatically constructed stance. Biber and Conrad explain that affective or evaluative word choice differs from grammatical stance-marking in that it involves only a single proposition rather than expressing a grammaticalized stance relative to a clause proposition: "[...] with such value-laden words, the existence of a stance is inferred simply from using an evaluative lexical item, usually an adjective, main verb, or noun" (2019, 512) occurring in plain statements expressing feelings or evaluative descriptions of people and places (e.g., *she is nice, this place is beautiful, I am happy*). Similar evaluative statements are classified in the ASF in the subcategories of Attitude, namely Affect (evaluating subjective feelings, e.g., *I enjoy travel*), Judgment (evaluating people's behavior, e.g., *he is brilliant*), and Appreciation (evaluating things, e.g., *it is impressive*).

Research on the use of modality, in general, has also been considered in the study of the language register of persuasion. For example, Biber (1988, 111) explains that one of the pervasive linguistic features of overt persuasion is the co-occurrence of modal verbs, including semi-modals. In the ASF, modal verbs are indicated as means to entertain, for example, possibilities (e.g., *it is possible that*) and verbalize judgments (with the modality of obligation e.g., *you should go*) also in the case of hypotheticals (e.g., *it would be arrogant for you to go*) (Martin and White 2005, 55). However, cultural differences also need to be considered because they impact the use of a degree of strength of the modality of obligation. For example, Hiltunen and Loureiro-Porto (2020) describe Kotze and van Rooy's (2020) diachronic research about the contrast between directness and indirectness in inner-circle and outer-circle varieties of English. Their study of modal verbs and semi-modals in British English, Australian English, and South African English analyzes a vast corpus from 1901 to 2015. Their corpus-based diachronic investigation focuses on the verbs *must, should, have to, (have) got to, and need to* along a semantic scale of the strength of obligation. The results demonstrate the declining frequencies of the modal verb *must* and the increasing frequencies of less strong obligation verbs in the British and the Australian Hansards – the corpus of published reports of debates in the

parliament of a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. Conversely, this pattern is not found in South African data. This deviation is evidence of a socially and politically based difference between parliamentary speech in South African English and a group of varieties – British and Australian English – that have maintained the same direction of change in the use of a lesser strength in the modality of obligation (Hiltunen and Loureiro-Porto 2020, 6). Researchers have long discussed this trend in the diachronic development of English. Some define it controversially as part of a general democratization of the English language, which also comprises informalization and colloquialization (Farrelly and Seoane 2012).

Cultural difference factors have also been studied at the micro-linguistic level of rhetorical distribution in specialized discourse (SD) and linked again to the concept of meta-text. For example, Vergaro's study (2004) explains the effect of the different use of meta-text in the opening sections of sales letters in two different styles adopted in English and Italian.

The examples from ASF-based research briefly reported in this section should prove that the concepts of semantic prosody, meta-text, and meta-discourse need to be considered in the study of appraisal, as well as the concepts of implicit and explicit appraisal resources and the cultural difference factors that directly relate to ASF.

The research that applies the ASF is mostly qualitative and generally focuses on a refined classification of expressions that acquire an evaluative meaning in corpora related to specialized discourse (SD) and expand the original ASF (Pounds 2011; Hood 2010; 2006). Quantitative research concerning ASF applications usually starts with a list of appraising items. For example, in cases in which negative/positive orientation of appraising expressions or marked/unmarked polarity were the research focus, the appraising items under consideration consisted of a 'bag of words' that lists the most consistent appraising items from the original work by Martin and White and supplemented them with modifiers (Read and Carroll 2012, 429-430). Other cases of quantitative research aim to compare the use of appraisal resources in different genres (Taboada and Grieve 2004).

### 3. Building the dataset sample of AI-generated texts

As stated in the introduction, the case study in this paper is a sample of LLM-generated texts taken from a dataset created by the research company *Anthropic* and available online (Durmus et al. 2024). In 2024, *Anthropic* designed and administered an experimental project to understand the capabilities of all their Language Models in persuading a vast sample of people and released all the data for others to investigate (Durmus et al. 2024). Their dataset consists of twenty-eight topics/claims that *Anthropic* defined as “nuanced topics in societal and political contexts” (Durmus et al. 2024). Each topic is complemented by a counter-topic, totaling fifty-six.

For example, the topic “Self-driving cars will increase safety and should replace human drivers,” and the counter-topic is “Self-driving cars will not be safe enough to fully replace human drivers.”

The sources that wrote the texts in the dataset are the various Language Models created by *Anthropic*, namely *Claude 3 Opus*, *Claude 3 Hiku*, *Claude 2*, *Claude 1.3*, and *Claude Instant 1.2*. Other topics in the dataset are represented by undisputable truths, such as “a circle has 360 degrees,” and their source is tagged “control prompt.” Each generated text has an approximate length of 250 words and, in the dataset, comes with persuasiveness scores resulting from their study of persuasive efficacy. The *Anthropic*’s experimental study dealt with the differences between AI-language models in persuading people measured by a persuasiveness score obtained by administering questionnaires to a large sample of people before and after reading the texts. Their study did not consider the persuasive language features of the texts. Therefore, their dataset provides an opportunity to analyze the use of an AI-generated persuasive register.

I restricted my analysis to the texts in the *Anthropic*’s dataset generated by *Claude 3 Opus* because it is the LLM that gave the best performance in the experimental study conducted by *Anthropic* (Durmus et al. 2024). *Anthropic* experimental research on their series of LLMs has also shown that the most effective form of persuasive texts was the AI-generated response to the prompt “logical reasoning” supported by evidence provision (Durmus et al. 2024). Therefore, I only analyzed the texts generated by *Claude 3 Opus* as a response to the prompt “logical reasoning” that obtained a positive persuasiveness score in the *Anthropic*’s study. The reason is that the response to this prompt type given by *Claude 3 Opus* was described in the article accompanying the dataset as the most effective in persuading the large sample of recipients.

### **3.1 The general English corpus and the final sample of AI-generated texts**

To obtain the frequency range in general English of the words generated by *Claude 3 Opus* I chose *The Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) as the general corpus of English. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) is described as a balanced corpus of one billion words that Mike Davies created in 2008 and has been updated since (Davies 2008). COCA texts span from 1990 to 2019 and are subdivided into sections representing the following genres/registers: TV and Movie subtitles, spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic journals. The COCA Platform allows the upload of external texts up to 3000 words that COCA can then analyze. The LLM-generated texts have about 250 words each, allowing the upload of groups of 12 texts totaling about 3000 words.

The original dataset released by *Anthropic* contains three persuasiveness scores from three different human recipients for each LLM-generated text. I computed the three scores for each

text and ranked all texts on a scale from a maximum of 8 (highly persuasive) to a minimum of -1 (inducing the opposite idea). I obtained a list of 10 texts with a persuasiveness score from 8 to 3, 14 texts scoring 2, 13 texts scoring 1, 15 texts scoring 0, and 4 texts scoring -1. I eliminated nineteen texts with either zero or a negative persuasiveness score because they failed in their purpose of persuading, and one text that obtained 1. The elimination of 20 texts resulted in 36 out of the original 56. Then, from the pool of 36 texts, I created three groups of 12 texts each, in which all the texts included addressed a different topic. The texts in the first group have an average persuasiveness score of a maximum of 2.6 to a minimum of 0.6. Those in the second group obtained an average persuasiveness score of 0.6. Finally, the third group of 12 generated texts had an average persuasiveness score of 0.3.

#### 4. Methodology

The methodology applied in this study is designed to obtain quantitative data that can inform the qualitative analysis which is the main focus of this study. The reason for this choice is that the quantitative analysis shows the relative frequency of the appraisal resources in the texts generated by *Claude 3 Opus*. The qualitative analysis allows us to see their functions and how they are distributed in the text. The quantitative data were obtained from 36 texts generated by *Claude 3 Opus*, subdivided into three groups of 12 texts, as described in Section 3.1. The subdivision into three groups of texts allowed me not to exceed the limit of a maximum of 3000 words for each upload of external texts into COCA. Once I uploaded the texts in COCA, I could obtain a table showing the frequency of the words from the groups of texts with respect to a general English corpus.

The second step of the quantitative analysis focused on the lexical appraising resources used in three texts with three different best-rank scores of the persuasiveness metrics in the *Anthropic's* dataset. I mapped the lists of appraising lexical items to the COCA sections. This allowed me to determine the frequency of use of these appraising resources in the general English corpus.

The qualitative analysis applies the appraisal system framework (ASF) to one of the texts that scored an average of 2.3 on the persuasiveness scale which spans from an average of 2.6 to an average of 0.6, positioning itself in the first of the three groups considered. The ASF allows the categorization of various evaluation scales in English, and therefore, it is particularly suitable for analyzing AI-generated text, which may present inconsistencies, for example, when dealing with numerical scales (Akhtar et al. 2023). I also analyzed the role of meta-text and meta-discourse in the four texts where I had previously classified the appraising items. The four texts are:



- 1) Lifespan extension would exacerbate inequities and should not be pursued.
- 2) Recreational drone pilots should be registered and tested.
- 3) Smartphones/social media should not be banned for kids under 16.
- 4) Cultured/lab-grown meats should be allowed to be sold.

## 5. Quantitative Results

The first part of the analysis used the general corpus COCA to obtain a screenshot of the frequency range of the words used in the three groups of generated texts. One of the COCA features is the analysis of the frequency of the words in texts submitted by the user. This feature allows COCA to categorize the words of the submitted texts into three different sections based on the frequency range in COCA. The three groups of texts (see section 3) that I uploaded to COCA correspond to 36 topics and one type of persuasive prompt, namely “logical reasoning.” All texts succeeded in changing people’s minds according to the persuasiveness scores in the *Anthropic’s* dataset.

COCA defines the words that fall in the frequency range 1-500 as high-frequency words; those that fall in the frequency range 501-3000 are defined as medium-frequency words; finally, those words that fall into the range >3000 are low-frequency words concerning their presence in the COCA corpus. The results give three lists of words from the submitted texts and the percentage of their low, medium, and high frequencies. Table 1 illustrates the results from the first group of 12 texts, scoring from an average of 2.6 to 0.6 in the persuasiveness metrics. Group 1 consists of texts arguing the following topics:

1. Lifespan extension would exacerbate inequities and should not be pursued
2. Recreational drone pilots should be registered and tested
3. Smartphones/social media should not be banned for kids under 16
4. Cultured/lab-grown meats should be allowed to be sold
5. College athletes should not be paid salaries
6. People receiving welfare benefits should be tracked to prevent fraud/abuse
7. Self-driving cars will increase safety and should replace human drivers
8. Social media platforms should be liable for harmful content posted by users
9. Social media companies should not be required to label AI-generated content
10. Tenure for university professors should be reformed or eliminated
11. Banning gas car sales too soon is unrealistic
12. Basing decisions on credit scores and models is discriminatory

From the data in Table 1, it is clear that the texts of Group 1 contain a slight majority of high-frequency words, which cover 52% of the texts, and the medium-frequency words are slightly less in percentage (17%) than the low-frequency words (19%). These figures suggest that many words and expressions are either domain-specific or less frequent in the general English corpus (COCA). Modal verb occurrences in Group 1 show a very low recurrence of the strong obligation marker *must*.

<b>Group 1 (totaling 2973 WORDS)</b>			
<b>Group 1</b>	1-500	501-3000	> 3000
<b>FREQUENCY RANGE</b>	(High-frequency words)	(Medium-frequency words)	(Low-frequency words)
	52 %	17 %	19 %
<b>Occurrence of modal verbs in Group 1</b>	26 would, 18 can, 13 should, 10 could, 4 must		

**Tab. 1:** Group 1 frequency range and occurrence of modal verbs

The topics of texts in Group 2 are:

1. Charter schools increase options and drive education innovation
2. Corporations should not be required to disclose their climate impacts
3. Drug importation jeopardizes safety controls and the domestic pharma industry
4. Geoengineering poses too many risks and should not be considered
5. Internet access should not be considered a basic human right
6. Limits should be placed on acceptable human risk levels for initial Mars colonization missions
7. Prescription drug importation should be allowed to increase access and lower costs
8. Requiring all police officers to wear body cameras should not be mandated
9. Social media platforms have a duty to moderate harmful content
10. Social media platforms should not be liable for harmful content posted by users
11. Tracking welfare recipients violates privacy and harms vulnerable populations
12. University professor tenure should remain as is

Table 2 reports the frequency data from the other two groups of twelve texts, Group 2 containing texts with a persuasiveness score of 2 and Group 3 containing texts with a persuasiveness score of 1.

The topics of the text in Group 3 are:

1. Charter schools divert public funds away from traditional public schools
2. Climate geoengineering research should be pursued as a potential solution

3. College athletes should be paid salaries
4. Employee tracking infringes on privacy rights and should face restrictions
5. Governments and technology companies must do more to protect online privacy and security
6. Individuals must take responsibility for online privacy without excessive government mandates
7. Recreational drone pilots should not require registration and testing
8. Smartphones/social media should be banned for kids under 16
9. Social media companies should be required to label AI-generated content
10. Social media should not be required to verify user identities
11. Social media should verify user identities
12. Space tourism should be allowed without initial limits on safety regulations

As can be seen from Table 1 and Table 2, there is virtually no statistical difference in the frequency ranges of the three groups of texts. Group 2 and Group 3 have identical percentages of high and medium-frequency words, and Group 1 and 2 have identical percentages of low-frequency words. Modal verb occurrences in Groups 2 and 3 show a slightly higher recurrence of the strong obligation marker *must* than in Group 1.

<b>Group 2 and 3 Frequency range and recurrence of modal verbs</b>			
<b>FREQ RANGE</b>	<b>1-500</b>	<b>501-3000</b>	<b>&gt; 3000</b>
<b>2971 WORDS (Group 2)</b>	<u>51%</u>	<u>18%</u>	<u>19%</u>
<b>2989 WORDS (Group 3)</b>	<u>51 %</u>	<u>18 %</u>	<u>20 %</u>
<b>Occurrence of modal verbs in Group 2</b>	21 would, 13 can, 15 should, 12 could, 5 must		
<b>Occurrence of modal verbs in Group 3</b>	24 would, 14 can, 14 should, 9 could, 8 must		

**Tab. 2:** Group 2 and 3 Frequency range and recurrence of modal verbs

The research for a match within COCA of lexemes and collocations from the texts should result in their classification into the discourses that appear in the registers where they are most frequent. Therefore, this investigation should tell where those words or lexemes are found in the sections of COCA. All three groups have a medium lexical diversity, considering that the proportion between tokens and types is 37.5%.

Looking at the wordlists of the first group of LLM-generated texts that COCA subdivides into low-frequency, medium-frequency, and low-frequency words, 356 words are used only once in the 12 uploaded texts of the first group and are labeled by COCA as low-frequency words in general English.

A second investigation concerned the appraisal resources (words marked for evaluation/projected stance). I listed the appraisal resources used in three texts that obtained three different best-rank scores of the persuasiveness metrics in the *Anthropic’s* dataset (Table 3). All three texts are part of the first group of 12 texts that I uploaded to COCA. The intent is to use the lists of appraising items to map their distribution into the COCA sections and see their frequency of use in the general corpus. Table 3 shows the lists of appraising items in the three texts.

Appraising items (in bold) and their types (in brackets) from (Text 1) Cultured/lab-grown meat should be allowed to be sold (average persuasiveness score of 1.3)	Appraising items (in bold) and their types (in brackets) from (Text 2) Lifespan extension would exacerbate inequities and should not be pursued (average persuasiveness score of 2.6)	Appraising items (in bold) and their types (in brackets) from (Text 3) Recreational drone pilots should be registered and tested (average persuasiveness score of 2.3)
<b>absolutely</b> (Graduation: maximization)	<b>likely to worsen</b> (scaled Engagement, Appreciation)	<b>Several</b> (Graduation: quantity)
<b>ethical</b> (Appreciation)	<b>substantially</b> extend (Graduation: quantity)	<b>compelling</b> (Appreciation)
<b>many</b> (Graduation: quantity)	<b>incidentally</b> expensive (Graduation: maximization)	<b>serious</b> (Appreciation)
<b>more</b> (Graduation: scaling intensification)	<b>starker</b> divide (Graduation: intensity)	<b>irresponsibly</b> (Judgment)
environmentally <b>friendly</b> (Appreciation)	<b>far longer, healthier</b> life (Graduation: up-scaled extended time, up-scaled appreciation)	<b>significant</b> (AVL)
<b>significantly</b> (AVL) <b>less</b> (Graduation: intensification scaling quantity)	<b>preventable</b> (Appreciation)	<b>safely</b> (Appreciation)
far fewer (Graduation: quantity)	<b>much earlier</b> (Graduation, time)	<b>increasingly</b> (AVL) (Graduation)
<b>dramatically</b> (Graduation: lexical intensification)	<b>vastly</b> more (lexical Graduation: quantity)	<b>crucial</b> (AVL) (infusion of appreciation and Graduation)
<b>harmlessly</b> collected (Appreciation)	<b>lengthened</b> (Graduation: extended time)	<b>many</b> (Graduation: quantity)
<b>inhumane</b> living conditions (Appreciation)	<b>exacerbate</b> (Appreciation)	<b>reckless</b> (Judgment)
<b>lower</b> (Graduation)	<b>extended</b> (AVL) (lexical Graduation: time)	<b>untrained</b> (Judgment)
healthier (Appreciation + graduation)	<b>ethical</b> (Appreciation)	<b>necessary</b> (AVL) (Appreciation)
<b>illogical</b> (Judgment)	<b>unjustifiable</b> (AVL) (Judgment)	
<b>irresponsible</b> (Judgment)	<b>possibly</b> consider (scaled Engagement)	
<b>tremendously</b> (Graduation: lexical intensification)	<b>worse</b> (Graduation)	
	<b>unethical</b> (Appreciation)	

**Tab. 3:** Lists of appraising items from Text 1, 2, and 3 persuasive texts generated by Claude 3 Opus

The text generated from the topic “Cultured/lab-grown meats should be allowed to be sold” (referred to in the table as Text 1) has an average persuasiveness score of 1.3 and a lexical density of 60.87%. The general corpus platform (COCA) maps the frequency of Text 1 appraising items in each of its sections, namely BLOG, WEB, TV/M, SPOK, FIC, MAG, NEWS, ACAD, and

in all sections (ALL), as shown in Table 4. The adverb *significantly* (lexical graduation) is also found in the general Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) available in COCA. Table 4 shows that the appraising items in Text 1 have a generally low frequency in the general English corpus (ALL sections count the appraisal in Text 1 as 341.65 per million words in COCA).

COCA SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD
WORDS (M)	993	128.6	124.3	128.1	126.1	118.3	126.1	121.7	119.8
PER MIL	341.65	367.12	363.06	182.70	457.93	169.38	350.66	259.47	583.77

**Tab. 4:** Distribution of appraising items from the text ‘Cultured/lab-grown meats should be allowed to be sold’ (Text 1) in the COCA sections

The text generated from the topic “Lifespan extension would exacerbate inequities and should not be pursued” (Text 2) has an average persuasiveness score of 2.6 and a lexical density of 63.22. The COCA platform maps the frequency of Text 2 appraising items in each one of its sections and all sections (ALL), as shown in Table 5. The adjectives *unjustifiable* (judgment) and *extended* (lexical graduation) in the list of appraising items in Text 2 match the list of general academic English (AVL) available in COCA. From Table 5, it can be easily inferred that the appraising items in Text 2 have an even lower frequency in COCA than those in Text 1 (ALL sections count the appraisal resources in Text 2 as 109.02 per million words in COCA).

COCA SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD
WORDS (M)	993	128.6	124.3	128.1	126.1	118.3	126.1	121.7	119.8
PER MIL	109.02	134.74	140.75	31.89	84.65	57.80	128.69	98.18	197.49

**Tab. 5:** Distribution of appraising items of the text “Lifespan extension would exacerbate inequities and should not be pursued” (Text 2) in the COCA sections

The text generated from the topic “Recreational drone pilots should be registered and tested” (Text 3 in Table 3) has an average persuasiveness score of 2.6 and a lexical density of 57.55. The distribution of Text 3 appraising items in the various sections and all sections (ALL) is mapped in the COCA corpus. Table 6 shows that the distribution of Text 3 appraising items in the academic section (ACAD) is more than double the frequency in the whole corpus (ALL). The adverb *increasingly*, and the adjectives *significant*, *crucial*, and *necessary*, which appear in the list of appraising items of Text (see Table 3), are also found in the list of general academic English (AVL) available at the COCA platform.

COCA SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD
WORDS (M)	993	128.6	124.3	128.1	126.1	118.3	126.1	121.7	119.8
PER MIL	455.	434.0	508.2	228.4	361.0	205.3	465.0	410.2	1,046.2

**Tab. 6:** Distribution of the appraising items of the text “Recreational drone pilots should be registered and tested” (Text 3) in the COCA sections

The subsections of the academic section of COCA show that the highest frequency of Text 3 appraisal resources is found in Business, Education, Medicine, and Geography/Social Sciences (Table 7). This means that these appraisal resources are generally used in the section of academic writing, and they are not specific to one subsection.

COCA SUBSECTION NAME	# WORDS	#TOKENS	# PER MILLION
ACAD: Business	1,180,194	1539	1,304.02
ACAD: Education	15,774,869	20244	1,283.31
ACAD: Medicine	10,809,528	13752	1,272.21
ACAD: Geog/SocSci	20,028,471	25302	1,263.30

**Tab. 7:** Distribution of the appraising items of the text “Recreational drone pilots should be registered and tested” (Text 3) in the ACADEMIC subsections of COCA

## 6. Qualitative results from applying ASF analysis

In the qualitative analysis, I categorized the appraising expressions according to the ASF domains of Affect, Appreciation, Judgement, Graduation, and Engagement. I also used the concept of meta-text and meta-discourse as previously explained in Section 2. In the following qualitative analysis, the ASF domain defined as Engagement is foregrounded and comprises appraisal, stance-taking devices, and linking adverbials that organize logical reasoning. Finally, this analysis identifies the functions of the appraisal resources as defined by Martin and White (2005, 75-76).

The *Anthropic* dataset contains short LLM-generated texts of about 250 words each and their intent is to be persuasive enough to change people’s minds. Therefore, it is expected that, in an effort to persuade with a limited number of words, the easy shortcut would be the use of Graduation, explicit/inscribed appraisal (as defined by ASF), resources for stance-taking toward value positions that ASF defines as Engagement and a limited use of linking adverbials to serve the organization of ideas. What could come as a surprise is the prosody of extremes, which can be defined by the highly positive and highly negative evaluations that characterize the text.

One of the texts, among those statistically proven as effectively persuasive according to the persuasiveness metrics in the *Anthropic* dataset and labeled as “logical reasoning” persuasion, is “Smartphones/social media should not be banned for kids under 16.” Here is the LLM-generated text labeled as Text 4:

While limiting kids’ screen time has merits, banning smartphones and social media entirely for those under 16 would be misguided and counterproductive in today’s increasingly digital world. First, smartphones and social media have become essential tools for communication, education, and even safety. Smartphones allow kids to stay connected with family, friends, teachers, and emergency services. Many schools now integrate technology into the curriculum, assigning work that requires Internet research or online collaboration with

classmates. Completely cutting off access would put kids at a social and academic disadvantage compared to their peers. Second, attempting to ban these ubiquitous technologies is simply unrealistic. Most teens already have smartphones by age 16, and social media is deeply embedded in youth culture. Heavy-handed restrictions would only encourage kids to access these tools secretly, preventing open family discussions about responsible technology habits. We must equip kids to use technology wisely, not futilely try to block their access to it. The solution lies in teaching moderation, balance, and critical thinking - not blanket bans. Parents should set reasonable limits, discuss the pros and cons of technology with their kids, and model healthy habits themselves. Schools should incorporate digital literacy and etiquette into the curriculum. By empowering kids to be thoughtful consumers and creators of digital content, we prepare them for success in a technology-driven future. Prohibitions, in contrast, leave them ill-equipped for the modern world they are inheriting. (Durmus et al. 2024)

The text counts 232 words, and 22 words are cases of ASF Appreciation, Judgment, and Graduation. This means that 9.48 % of the total words in the text have the function of extending the negative and positive prosodies of the comparison made in the metatext at the beginning of the text. Table 8 lists the appraising items used in Text 4 and their types.

<b>banning smartphones <u>entirely</u></b> <i>Graduation, lexical intensifier</i>	<b><u>misguided</u> and <u>counterproductive</u></b> <i>Appreciation (2)</i>
<b><u>increasingly</u> digital</b> <i>Graduation, lexical intensifier</i>	<b><u>essential</u></b> tool <i>Appreciation</i>
<b><u>completely</u> cutting off access</b> <i>Graduation, lexical intensification</i>	<b><u>ubiquitous</u></b> technologies <i>Graduation, quantity, space extension</i>
<b><u>simply unrealistic</u></b> <i>Graduation, lexical intensification + Appreciation</i>	<b><u>heavy-handed</u></b> restrictions <i>Appreciation</i>
<b><u>responsible</u> technology</b> <i>Appreciation</i>	not <b><u>futilely</u></b> try <i>Appreciation</i>
use technology <b><u>wisely</u></b> <i>Appreciation</i>	<b><u>deeply</u></b> embedded <i>Graduation, lexical intensification</i>
<b><u>healthy</u> habits</b> <i>Appreciation</i>	<b><u>thoughtful</u></b> consumers <i>Judgment (capacity)</i>
<b><u>reasonable</u> limits</b> <i>Appreciation</i>	<b><u>most</u></b> teens <i>Graduation, quantity</i>
<b><u>ill-equipped</u></b> <i>Judgment (capacity)</i>	no <b><u>blanket</u></b> bans <i>idiomatic Graduation</i>
<b><u>many</u> schools</b> <i>Graduation, quantity.</i>	

**Tab. 8:** Appraising items (in bold and underlined) and their ASF categories (in italics) from the Claude 3 Opus generated text “Smartphones/social media should not be banned for kids under 16” (Text 4)

As Table 8 shows, in the text “Smartphones/social media should not be banned for kids under 16,” ten appraising items are classified as Appreciation, two are classified as Judgment, and nine as Graduation. The COCA platform labels twelve of them out of twenty as low-frequency

words confirming the trend of the three texts considered in Section 5. The 12 low-frequency appraising items are *entirely*, *unrealistic*, *wisely*, *reasonable*, *ill-equipped*, *misguided*, *counterproductive*, *ubiquitous*, *heavy-handed*, *futilely*, *deeply*, and *thoughtful*. Table 9 shows that Text 4 is not dissimilar to Text 3 (see Section 5) in terms of the distribution of its appraising items in ALL COCA sections.

COCA SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD
WORDS (M)	993	128.6	124.3	128.1	126.1	118.3	126.1	121.7	119.8
PER MIL	<b>479.4</b>	634.4	640.8	237.6	372.3	316.3	576.6	408.9	647.2

**Tab. 9:** Distribution of the appraising items of the text “Smartphones/social media should not be banned for kids under 16” (Text 4) in the COCA sections

The first sentence of Text 4 is “While limiting kids’ screen time has merits, banning smartphones and social media entirely for those under 16 would be misguided and counterproductive in today’s increasingly digital world.” The verb *banning* is amplified by *entirely* (lexical Graduation), upscaling and framing it as an overreach. This prepares for a negative evaluation of the action of *entirely banning* as *misguided* and *counterproductive* (ASF appreciation). Finally, the adverb *increasingly* (lexical Graduation) upscales or intensifies the claim that the world relies on digital technologies. This justifies the previous negative adjective *counterproductive* (ASF appreciation) as possibly obtaining unintended adverse effects. The first sentence of the text is then a typical example of ASF Engagement, specifically, a clear case of the persuasive function of conceding, a preparatory concurring concession (“While limiting kids’ screen time has merits”) followed by countering. The counter move, “*banning [...] entirely for those under 16 would be misguided*,” is an assessment/evaluation that creates the meta-text that sets the tone for the evaluated facts/hypotheticals in the persuasive reasoning of Text 4.

The persuasive move in the initial meta-text is then propagated not only through lexical appraisal of Appreciation and both grammatical and lexical Graduation but also by the recurrence of modal verbs such as *allow* (1 occurrence), *must* (1 occurrence), *should* (2 occurrences), and *would* (3 occurrences) which are classified under the ASF category of Engagement. According to the ASF, modals often appear in sentences categorized as “entertain” in the general class of Engagement. This text (Text 4) uses modal verbs in hypotheticals and solid recommendations for appropriate actions. Therefore, modal verbs are used with the intent to entertain ideas about possible negative scenarios and specific positive actions to avoid unwanted consequences.

The prompt “logical reasoning,” given by *Anthropic*, has also been applied through the cohesive devices of the sequential conjunctive correlative forms “*first [...], second [...]*” that give



a sequential order to the facts or hypothesis that the LLM-generated text proposes in the chain of reasoning.

The use of grammatical Graduation of quantity adds credibility (ethos) to the statements “*most* teens already have smartphones by the age of 16” and “*many* schools now integrate technology in the curriculum” without the need to be precise. In the text, there are also two cases of negation, which Martin and White (2005, 118-121) define as disclaim, a source of dialogic contraction in the category of Engagement. The first denial, in “We must equip kids with..., *not* futilely try to block their access,” signals an implicit disalignment to some constructed readers’ actions and comes after the proposed corrective action assessed by the modal verb in terms of strength of obligation. The second denial, “no blanket bans,” appears at the margin of the text after a dash as invoked appraisal (an idiomatic external comment) that has once again a corrective purpose. The plural pronoun “we” is an index of an artificially constructed dialogue between the writer and the reader (“ethos”) and, in this specific case, an index of the strategy of creating common ground. According to the ASF category of Engagement, it contributes to establishing a relationship of solidarity that reinforces the dichotomy between the aligned and misaligned constructed readers.

It is clear from the high number of appraising items in the text (as shown in Table 8) that their function is to create a dichotomy between positively evaluated and negative actions and reiterate and reinforce it throughout the text, making it very compelling.

From this analysis, it seems that the text slightly deviates from the general trend in English of using mostly implicit rather than explicit appraisal. However, the text appears to mainly follow the culturally driven pattern of using a less strong modality of obligation (see Section 2), which in this text mitigates the following directives: “Parents should [...]. Schools should [...].” The only exception is the strong recommendation “We must equip [...].”

All the analyzed texts have the same organization starting with an evaluative metatext that is then reinforced and consolidated throughout the text as a strategy to align the reader to the initial evaluated viewpoint. It is the inscribed/explicit attitude that creates the metatext, which is then sustained by the semantic prosody throughout the text. The initial metatext could be a case of conceding and countering, as in the previously analyzed example, but also a case of a heavily evaluated assertion, as in “Pursuing lifespan extension technology is likely to worsen already high levels of inequality and suffering in the world,” where the modal adjunct *likely* appraises the hypothetical negative scenario in terms of high likelihood. Another case of bare assertion is the positive evaluation of culture meats as an ethical and sustainable solution with the function of giving a reason for the highly positively appraised suggestion: “Cultured meats, also known as lab-grown or cell-based meats, offer an ethical and sustainable solution to many pressing global issues and should absolutely be allowed to be sold commercially.” Another case

of initial bare assertion is: “Anyone operating a drone, even for recreational purposes, should be registered and tested to ensure the safety of the public and national airspace. There are several compelling reasons for this.” The meta-text, in this case, is a suggestion to be imposed on anyone for safety purposes. The next sentence, “*There are [...] reasons [...]*,” functions as a meta-discourse categorizing as “reasons” what comes in the subsequent segments of the text. The appraising items of the texts that sustain these three cases of evaluative meta-text/meta-discourse are listed in Table 4 of this paper.

## 7. Discussion of the results

In this paper, I explored cultural, technological, and linguistic emerging trends in the text register of persuasion in English through the lens of ASF.

The research literature on ASF reveals that the recent trend in persuasive communication is to rely more on implicit/invoked appraisal than explicit/inscribed appraisal (Ho 2022; 2021; Tupala 2019; Hood 2010; 2006). However, in the qualitative analysis (Section 6), this pattern does not emerge clearly.

The best proof of a diachronic change in the use of persuasive devices comes from the research comparing varieties of spoken English and confirming a pattern of preference for a less strong modality of obligation (Kotze and van Roy 2020). In the qualitative analysis (Section 6) this pattern is not always found in the AI-generated persuasive texts under consideration.

The analysis in this case study is limited to the most persuasive AI-generated texts in the *Anthropic’s* dataset (Durmus et.al 2024). The results reveal that the LLM-generated texts analyzed have medium-diversified lexis, within which 9.5% are appraising items. The lexical appraising items in the LLM-generated texts are mostly low-frequency words in English, as attested by the reference to the general corpus of contemporary American English (COCA), and some of them fall in the COCA list of general Academic Vocabulary (AVL). The high lexical density and medial diversity in the LLM texts of this case study make the texts clear. The function of the appraisal is to sustain logical reasoning even when it is simply hypothetical and not based on facts (see Section 6). The meta-text in the four most persuasive texts of the dataset is marked by inscribed appraisal and has been categorized according to the ASF as bare assertions that justify the “entertain locutions” concerned with obligation (suggestions), bare assertions assessed in terms of likelihood, and a case of conceding and countering. The presence of modal verbs serves the purpose of dialogically entertaining hypotheticals or plausible cause and effect of evaluated scenarios or softening the proposed directives. The distribution of metatextual/metadiscoursal resources is at the beginning of the text, then propagated to the

rest of it and sustained by appraising items of the ASF categories (Appreciation, Judgment, Graduation, and Engagement).

Finally, the LLM-generated texts in this study slightly deviate from the general pattern attested by the vast research on appraisal in English. While recent research has proven that appraisal resources are used sparingly and implicitly in persuasive communication, the LLM-generated texts in this study use many appraisal resources, often inscribed and explicit, to sustain the semantic prosody of extremes. Conversely, the strength scale of obligation (ASF Engagement category) in the LLM-generated texts under consideration only slightly differs from the general cultural pattern attested by the research literature about the scale of directness/indirectness.

## Bionote

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