

Language variation in institutional academic English: a case study on phraseology

University registers of an institutional kind—e.g. course syllabi, university brochures—are increasingly attracting scholarly attention (Biber 2006). Research so far has focused on native texts, yet it has been suggested that "in order to understand the use of English in present-day academic communities, it is vital to look at English as a lingua franca" (Mauranen 2010). Indeed, universities in non-English speaking countries worldwide also use English to communicate with their stakeholders, trying to stand out in the global educational market.

In this paper a corpus of online course syllabi is used to investigate phraseological patterns in native and non-native texts produced by European universities. The latter are sampled based on the language family of their official L1s, i.e. Romance (e.g. France), Slavic (e.g. Poland) and Germanic (e.g. Denmark).

Drawing on Durrant and Schmidt (2009), we extract contiguous *pre-modifier + noun* sequences from the non-native and the comparable native (British) subcorpora. Deriving frequency data from *ukWaC*, we classify word sequences according to three criteria: frequent vs. infrequent/unattested combinations, and "strong" vs. "weak" collocations based on two association measures, i.e. t-score and MI. Finally, we compare the degree to which the varieties represented in the corpus rely on different types of combinations.

Results point to a significant overuse of infrequent combinations and underuse of strong collocations in Romance and Slavic countries, while differences between native and Germanic non-native texts tend to be less marked. The paper discusses these results and their relevance for research on institutional academic English and native/non-native use of phraseology.

References

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