

Title: Corpus-Based Comparison of English NATIVE SPEAKER and NON-NATIVE SPEAKER essays

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Introduction: Recent advancements in computer technology and corpus linguistics have contributed to the growing research addressing the effective description of language used in various genres of writing. The features of writing defining specific academic genres (e.g., narrative, analytical, or technical), have been identified and explored by researchers using a variety of corpus tools and corpora. For example, Biber (2006) finds that the use of linguistic features such as linking adverbials (e.g., therefore, however, hence) and necessity/obligation modal verbs (e.g., should, must) distinguishes the types of writing in technical/laboratory reports, instructional manuals, and institutional texts (e.g., memos, notices) from fiction writing, short narratives, and reflective journals.

Purpose: This poster presentation explores the linguistic characteristics of academic essays written by non-native speakers (NNS) of English and native speakers (NS) in a university setting. Descriptions of NS writing, relative to NNS writing samples may show generalizable data of the linguistic characteristics of university-level writing similar to contexts here at GSU. It is interesting, and potentially useful, to examine the quality of NS/NNS writing, and produce comparative data that illustrate the degree of variation, gaps, or unique distribution of linguistic features of writing among these students. The descriptions of the linguistic characteristics of writing samples from NS/NNS have important pedagogical implications that apply to materials production and syllabus design, to aid the development of L2 writing for NNS, and support easier transition to advanced writing for NS students.

Methodology: The data for this study came from a corpus previously collected by faculty at the Department of Applied Linguistics and ESL here at GSU (and made available to us for linguistic analyses using computational tools: AntConc and also the Biber Linguistic Tagger. We compared the frequency distribution of a range of lexical and syntactic features of NNS academic writing from written responses to two essay prompts (over 600 texts, with approximately 354,000 words).

Results: Our exploratory results show that the distribution of some linguistic features in the corpus could be indicators of NNS writing quality (e.g., linking adverbials, stance markers, lexical verbs). In addition, variations exist in the linguistic characteristics of NNS essays based on the use and influence of specific writing prompts.

Conclusion: It is argued that results of comparative data in the present study have pedagogical implications for the teaching of academic writing and materials production especially for NNS students in intensive English programs in the U.S.

Recommendation: The importance of a corpus-based comparison of NNS texts with that of NS texts can certainly be researched further. By comparing NS/NNS corpora, instances of L2 learners' under- or over-use of a particular linguistic feature can be clearly identified, as well as how far, and in what ways, learners deviate from native speaker norms.