

Writer/reader visibility in learner writing across genres. A comparison of the French and Norwegian components of the ICLE and VESPA learner corpora

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Features of W/R visibility are used “to express personal feelings and attitudes and to interact with readers” (Petch-Tyson, 1998: 108) and include first and second person reference, speaker’s mental processes, monitoring of information flow, emphatic particles, evaluative modifiers, imperatives and questions. Learner corpus-based studies have shown that learner writing, whatever the learners’ mother tongue, exhibits many features of writer/reader (W/R) visibility. For example, Granger & Rayson (1998) have shown that French-speaking learners overuse first and second person pronouns. Virtanen (1998) has reported on EFL learners’ overuse of direct questions. EFL learners’ heavy reliance on *I think* to express their personal opinion is reported by Granger (1998) for French, Neff et al. *et al.* (2007) for Spanish, Aijmer (2002) for Swedish, and Hasselgård (2009) for Norwegian; Japanese, French and Swedish learners’ overuse of *of course* is highlighted by Narita & Sugiura (2006), Granger & Tyson (1996) and Altenberg & Tapper (1998) respectively.

Several explanations have been put forward to account for EFL learners’ involved style. These include the influence of speech, L1 transfer, aspects of teaching, and cultural and developmental factors (Petch-Tyson 1998; Gilquin & Paquot, 2008; Paquot, 2010). As noted by Recski (2004), however, in the case of argumentative essays such as those contained in the *International Corpus of Learner English* (ICLE), “personal references and subjective attitudes are certainly hard to avoid”, since learners are explicitly prompted to give their personal opinions. ICLE prompts for the essays include: “Some people say that in our modern world, dominated by science, technology and industrialism, there is no longer place for dreaming and imagination. What is your opinion?” and “*In his novel Animal Farm, George Orwell wrote ‘All men are equal but some are more equal than others’. How true is this today?*”

The aim of this study is to compare features of W/R visibility in learner writing across genres to investigate whether learner writers are generally more overtly present within their academic writing or whether the features commonly attributed to EFL learners’ involved style are prompted by the argumentative type of texts that have usually been analysed in learner corpus research. We investigate the frequency and use of 1st person singular and plural pronouns, second person pronouns, verbs denoting mental processes (e.g. *think, believe, guess*), “*lets’s*” imperatives and questions in the French and Norwegian sub-components of the *International Corpus of Learner English* (ICLE) and the *Varieties of English for Specific Purposes Database* (VESPA) learner corpus. The ICLE sub-corpora consist of argumentative essays written by intermediate to advanced EFL French and Norwegian learners within the framework of a language course. The VESPA sub-corpora investigated in this study are made up of essays and term papers written for linguistics courses (e.g. morphology, syntax, lexicology, corpus linguistics).

Ädel (2008) found that the presence of involvement features in learner writing correlates with task setting (including conditions of writing such as the timed/untimed factor). We may hypothesize that genre will be another interfering factor and that the more academic nature of linguistics papers will be less welcoming to such features. Petch-Tyson (1998) showed that Scandinavian learners of English have a higher degree of W/R visibility in their argumentative texts than French learners. It will thus be interesting to explore the extent to which the two learner groups differ in a similar way when writing in an academic discipline.

Corpora of native student writing will also be used as control corpora. ICLE data will be compared to data from the *Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays* (LOCNESS). The linguistics sub-component of the *British Academic Written English* (BAWE) corpus¹ will be used as a control corpus to the VESPA linguistics papers.

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¹ The BAWE corpus consists of texts produced by native (NS) and non-native (NNS) students. We will make use of the NS texts only.

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