

# A Comparison of Learners' and Native Speakers' English Academic Writing: A Case Study of Italian Learners

Mahnaz Aliyar

Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

## Abstract

Correspondence analysis is widely acknowledged as a powerful and efficient way of analysing corpus data to provide accurate and valuable information about different aspects of the language use, including register and writing style. The present study compared Italian learners' and English native speakers' English academic writing by applying correspondence analysis to two corpora: 1. Fifty English academic essays written by Italian university students who were advanced learners of English (27.551 tokens) 2. Forty-four essays (94.582 tokens) from the Art and Humanities sub-corpus of the British Academic Written English corpus. Adopting a hypothesis-finding approach, the study used R-studio – employing tidyverse, mclm, and quanteda packages – to examine quantitatively whether Italian learners' English academic writing diverged from English native speakers' academic writing in any significant way. Starting with the lexicon, the study investigated the use of both function words and content words to yield information about the writing style of each target group. Further, the use of informal words, connectors – conjunctions and linking adverbials – and modal verbs, were addressed quantitatively to identify possible differences in their usage by each group. While overall rather modest variations were observed between the writing styles of Italian learners of English and English native speakers, results of the different sets of correspondence analysis shed light on subtle discrepancies in the language choices and writing styles of the two groups. The study provided pedagogical implications for L2 learners to improve their English academic writing.

**Keywords:** Correspondence analysis, Learner corpus, Academic writing, English, Italian learners