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LOOKING INTO ELF VARIANTS: A STUDY OF EVALUATIVE *IT*-CLAUSES IN RESEARCH ARTICLES

Abstract

Given the high number of non-native English speakers in academia, it becomes necessary to look at the use made of English as a lingua franca (ELF), especially in written communication. It is the aim of this paper to look at ELF in a written academic genre, the research article (RA), in the discipline of business management. A corpus of ELF RAs written by scholars with different linguacultural backgrounds will be compared with a corpus of RAs written by scholars affiliated to Anglo-American institutions. The analysis will focus on a particular genre-specific formulaic sequence (Hüttner, 2007), evaluative *it*-clauses. Results show differences in their frequency of use, the choice of adjectives, and (lack of) modality. The findings can be interpreted as lexico-grammatical innovations (Dewey, 2007), creative expressions (Seidlhofer, 2011), or emerging patterns (Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011) in the process of adaptation, evolution and dynamism of English as used in international written academic communication.

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Key words

research articles, academic writing, evaluation, English as a lingua franca, English for academic purposes.

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Sažetak

Zbog velikog broja govornika u akademskom okruženju kojima engleski jezik nije maternji, postalo je neophodno istražiti upotrebu engleskog kao lingua franca (ELF), naročito u pisanoj komunikaciji. Cilj ovog rada je da ispita ELF u jednom pisanim akademskim žanru, naučnim člancima iz oblasti poslovnog upravljanja. Uporedićemo korpus naučnih članaka autora različitog jezičkog i kulturnog porekla sa korpusom članaka koje su napisali istraživači sa anglo-američkih akademskih institucija. Analiza će se usredosrediti na poseban formulacijski niz (Hüttner, 2007), evaluativne klauze sa *it*. Rezultati ukazuju na razlike u frekvenciji upotrebe, izboru prideva i (pomanjkanju) modalnosti. Nalazi se mogu protumačiti kao leksičko-gramatičke inovacije (Dewey, 2007), kreativni izrazi (Seidlhofer, 2011) ili obrasci u nastajanju (Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011) u procesu adaptacije, evaluacije i dinamičnosti engleskog koji se koristi u međunarodnoj pisanoj akademskoj komunikaciji.

Ključne reči

naučni članci, akademsko pisanje, evaluacija, engleski kao lingua franca, engleski za akademske potrebe.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English has become *the* language of communication in numerous professional domains, and the academic one is no exception. Especially in certain disciplinary fields, academics are increasingly urged to use English to disseminate their research results in international conferences and publications to gain prestige and credibility, and even to obtain or maintain their position or to be promoted. As a result, the use of English has grown to the point of becoming a lingua franca in scientific and academic communication. In this context, it becomes necessary to describe English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in particular scientific and academic contexts. As stated by Mauranen (2012: 55),

“[a]mong the many, often diffuse communities that use English as their contact language, academic discourse communities are among the most prominent. They consist of networks of a growing number of mobile speakers representing different similect groups and simultaneously identifying with different imagined communities, disciplinary communities, national, institutional, and many others.”

The adoption of English as the language for international communication, especially in specific academic disciplinary communities, has also frequently entailed the adoption of Anglophone rhetorical conventions, beliefs and norms, which has created an extra burden on non-native English scholars and may have situated them in a disadvantageous position to publish their research internationally (e.g. Kourilova, 1998; Flowerdew, 1999, 2000; Englander, 2006; Li & Flowerdew, 2007; Lillis & Curry, 2006, 2010; Mur-Dueñas, 2012, 2013). Nevertheless, English as an Additional Language (EAL) scholars from different language and culture backgrounds, at least in some disciplinary communities (such as business, economics, linguistics or medicine), seem to have accepted the dominant role of English in academic publication, developing strategies to become successful in meeting English-medium top-journal requirements as a result of pressing institutional forces (e.g. Bocanegra-Valle, 2014; Li, 2014; Martín-Martín, Rey-Rocha, Burgess, & Moreno, 2014; Mur-Dueñas, Lorés-Sanz, Rey-Rocha, & Moreno, 2014; Muresan & Pérez-Llantada, 2014). It seems that institutional policies, at least across Europe, are encouraging 'core' or 'centring' publication practices which very often entail not only the use of English but the adoption of centre norms and values. Such practices have important ideological as well as discursive consequences and have not been accepted to the same extent across disciplines. Changes (towards homogenization) are taking place in national academic discourse styles in other languages (Bennett, 2014; Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2014), and, especially in the humanities, there have been contesting voices towards the current Anglophone dominance (e.g. Bennett, 2014; Burgess, 2014; Burgess, Gea-Valor, Moreno, & Rey-Rocha, 2014). The adoption of ELF in international academic publications seems to be triggering numerous tensions between traditional and modern writing styles, values and epistemologies, between hard sciences and humanities, between local and global practices (Bennett, 2014).

As a result of the increasing need of EAL scholars to publish in English, a great deal of intercultural research has been carried out in English for Academic Purposes (EAP), taking an intercultural perspective (Connor, 2004) between academic texts written in English by Anglophone scholars and academic texts written by scholars from different backgrounds in their own native languages and in English. The aim of these studies has been to identify similarities and differences between the two sets of texts to highlight and unveil the subsequent potential difficulties of non-native English scholars when drafting their research in English for an international audience. Intercultural research has been particularly prominent in the study of the research article – the genre *par excellence* in the academia (Swales, 2004) – focusing on the comparison of its macro-structure in different languages (e.g. Burgess, 2002; Árvay & Tankó, 2004; Hirano, 2009; Mur-Dueñas, 2010), and especially on particular lexico-grammatical and discursive features (e.g. Kreutz & Harres, 1997; Vassileva, 1997, 2001; Salager-Meyer, Alcaraz Ariza, & Zambrano, 2003; Moreno, 2004; Giannoni, 2005; Fløttum, Dahl, & Kinn,

2006; Vold, 2006; Sheldon, 2009; Molino, 2010; Mur-Dueñas, 2011; Williams, 2011; Murillo-Ornat, 2012). This research has shown rhetorical differences between texts written in English for an international readership and texts written in other languages for a local readership, and has generally considered that by highlighting differences, materials, guidelines or recommendations could be designed targeting such differences to help non-native English writers accomplish international publication in that language.

These studies have, thus, taken an exonormative approach, considering the English as a Native Language (ENL) as the norm (Seidlhofer, Breiteneder, & Pitzl, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2011) to which other users of English need to adjust in international academic publishing. As argued by Kumaravadivelu (2012: 17) in relation to English Language Teaching (ELT), there seems to have been in EAP too a tendency to carry out studies premised upon concepts “which are heavily tilted towards the episteme of the native speaker”.

Given the current status of ELF in the academic publishing context, descriptive studies are needed on how it is being shaped by scholars worldwide across different disciplinary fields, taking an endonormative approach (Seidlhofer et al., 2006; Seidlhofer, 2011). As Mauranen (2012) highlights, the study of the use made of English by its international users in professional and academic contexts should be a goal within EAP. As a result of globalism, an epistemic break from Anglo-centered premises and conventions should take place, that is, the English native speaker's episteme should be superseded and further analyses on English as being used and shaped by its many varied users in different domains need to be undertaken.

There has been quite a lot of research on the use of ELF in oral interactions (e.g. Mauranen & Ranta, 2009) based on big corpora such as VOICE (Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English) (e.g. Seidlhofer, 2009, 2011; Pitzl, 2012; Osimk-Tesdale, 2014), and ELFA (English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings) (e.g. Mauranen, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014; Hynninen, 2011; Metsä-Ketelä, 2012; Carey, 2013). The focus of such research has frequently been on speakers' (un)intelligibility in spoken encounters and its description determining possible characteristic features related to structural simplification, lexical complexity or simplicity, enhanced explicitness, and the process of accommodating (Mauranen, 2012). However, less research has been undertaken on the use of ELF in written texts; further studies are needed on the extent to which ELF is also being shaped in its written form by users with different L1s, so that changes are being instigated in English (Mauranen, 2012), and the standards of acceptability becoming more fluid in written registers (Anderson, 2010).

As such, this study aims at describing ELF in international publications in the field of business management, in which the number of contributions by scholars

representing different similects¹ is rather high. As Mauranen (2012: 29-30) points out, ELF implies second order contact in which “instead of a typical contact situation where speakers of two different languages use one of them in communication ('first-order contact'), a large number of languages are each in contact with English, and it is these contact varieties (similects) that are, in turn, in contact with each other”.

Even if published RAs have undergone a process of reviewing and editing – which may have entailed changes in the authors' use of English, rhetorical conventions, and even their voice (Mauranen, 2012: 10; see also Mur-Dueñas, 2013) – it is believed that they can still be considered ELF texts produced, and likely read, by scholars from different linguacultural backgrounds. As such, processes of lexico-grammatical innovation (Dewey, 2007) or creative expressions “which do not conform to what native speakers would recognize as the established idiomatic wording” (Seidlhofer, 2011: 139) can still be traced in these published texts which may have undergone, some or heavy, editing. To look into these innovations, business management RAs written by authors representing different similects will be compared to RAs written by Anglophone authors. However, the latter are not to be considered the norm to which to adjust, but just a term of comparison. This paper may, thus, contribute to providing answers to relevant questions in the study of ELF in written academic discourse: “Now that we have extensive corpus data, it is interesting to see what happens to frequencies in ELF: do they show a different distribution from ENL items, are the items themselves different, and is there more variation or less?” (Mauranen, 2012: 56).

The analysis will focus on a particular lexico-grammatical feature with significant rhetorical implications, evaluative *it*-clauses with adjective complementation. These *it*-clauses are a subtype of anticipatory *it* patterns in which a finite (*that*) or non-finite (*to*) clause is extraposed (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985), as shown in examples 1 and 2 below. The study focuses on anticipatory *it* patterns including an evaluative adjective expressing attitudinal or epistemic values, that is, adjectives which indicate the scholars' viewpoints or opinions (example 1), or their degree of commitment to or conviction regarding the extraposed statement (example 2).² Following Hunston and Thompson's (2000) evaluation framework, these structures can be considered evaluative in as much as they express affect (the writers' value or relevance towards the statement

¹ Similects are considered “lects of English spoken by those who share a particular first language but do not form a language community based on the use of EFL as a shared language” (Mauranen, 2014: 242).

² *It*-clauses with an attribution function (e.g. *it has been proposed*) or with a hedging or emphatic function not entailing the use of an adjective (e.g. *it could be argued*, etc.) have been left outside of the analysis since the aim was to analyse a particular evaluative formulaic sequence. Unlike in previous studies of *it*-clauses in novice academic writing (e.g. Hewings & Hewings, 2001, 2002; Ådel, 2014), no examples of noun-complementation (e.g. *It is of interest to...*) were found in the corpus.

that follows) or status (the degree of writer's certainty or commitment towards the statement it accompanies), as shown in the examples below respectively.

(1) Regarding the effectiveness of government expenditures it is relevant to know how new networks come to exist and what roles intermediate organizations play. (ELFBM18)

(2) Indeed, given that the S-1 filings by firms undertaking an IPO prominently list their TMT, it is likely that signals that stem from TMT backgrounds may be very instrumental during the IPO process. (ENGBM22)

It is believed that centering the analysis of ELF as used in RA writing on a particular evaluative feature will be especially interesting since past intercultural EAP research (e.g. Kreutz & Harres, 1997; Vassileva, 1997, 2001; Giannoni, 2005; Fløttum et al., 2006; Lorés-Sanz, 2011a, 2011b; Molino, 2010; Mur-Dueñas, 2011) has shown that the expression of evaluation tends to be differently encoded in different languages and cultures; hence, it can be considered to lend itself to different uses by scholars from different linguacultural backgrounds.

These evaluative *it*-clauses with adjective complementation can be considered genre-specific formulaic sequences (Hüttner, 2007), as they have been found to be recurrent in academic discourse (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finengan, 1999) and a particularly salient feature in academic genres such as the RA (e.g. Hewings & Hewings, 2001, 2002; Hyland, 2005; Mur-Dueñas, 2011). Genre-specific formulaic sequences are defined as "recurring multi-word chunks that are quantitatively typical of specific genres and thus constitute part of their specific 'idiomaticity'" (Hüttner, 2007: 97). Further, these evaluative *it*-clauses serve "to both express opinions and to comment on and evaluate propositions in a way that allows the writer to remain in the background" (Hewings & Hewings, 2002: 368).

The frequency of use of evaluative *it*-clauses will be analysed, together with the range of adjectives included and their evaluative potential – attitudinal, expressing value or relevance (Hunston & Thompson, 2000) vs. epistemic or expressing status (Hunston & Thompson, 2000). In addition, the inclusion of modal verbs as part of the formulaic sequence will also be investigated.

2. CORPUS AND METHOD

The analysis is based on a corpus of 48 RAs published in international English-medium journals in the field of business management published in the period 2002-2010. The total number of words, leaving out tables, figures, reference lists, appendices and footnotes can be found in Table 1. The corpus is part of a bigger collection of texts, SERAC 3.0 (Spanish English Research Article Corpus), compiled

by the InterLAE research group at the University of Zaragoza (Spain) (www.interlcae.com). The corpus on which this study rests is divided into two sub-corpora: ELFBM (English as a Lingua Franca Business Management), and ENGBM (English Business Management).

| | ELFBM corpus | ENGBM corpus | TOTAL |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------|
| Nº of RAs | 24 | 24 | 48 |
| Nº of words | 214,490 | 197,922 | 412,412 |

Table 1. Description of the corpus

The first sub-corpus, ELFBM, comprises 24 RAs published in 3 journals: *British Management Journal* (BMJ), *Journal of Management Studies* (JMS), and *Research Policy* (RP), in which a varying but significant percentage of publications is authored by non-native English scholars (judging by their names and affiliations) using ELF and representing different similect groups.³ The selection of RAs from different similect groups was carried out proportionally, that is, bearing in mind the number of RAs published by authors from a given linguacultural background, and at the same time trying to be inclusive so that the maximum number of similect groups was represented.⁴ As a result, after a careful analysis of the varied linguacultural backgrounds of the scholars authoring all published RAs in the different issues throughout the period 2006-2010, the following similect groups were included: Denmark (1 RA), Egypt (1 RA), Finland (2 RAs), France (1 RA), Germany (3 RAs), Greece (1 RA), Italy (3 RAs), Japan (1 RA), South Korea (2 RAs), Norway (2 RAs), Sweden (1 RA), Switzerland (1 RA), Taiwan (1 RA), The Netherlands (3 RAs), Turkey (1 RA).⁵ If any of the co-authors was affiliated to an Anglophone institution, such RA was not selected for inclusion as part of the corpus. As indicated in the Introduction, the texts written in English by scholars from different linguacultural backgrounds can be considered examples of ELF even if they may have been edited or proofread. In two of the selected journals (BMJ and RP) authors are advised to have their papers undergo professional revision and

³ The detailed analysis of the authors' affiliations corresponding to the articles published in all issues from 2006 to 2010 (excluding special issues), shows that the percentage of contributions authored by non-native English speakers is 27.3% in the case of BMJ, 52.8% in the case of RP, and 72.3% in the case of JMS.

⁴ Following the example of previous compilations of ELF corpora such as ELFA (English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings), "[t]he purpose was to ensure as much variety in the backgrounds as possible so as to minimize transfer effects, or excessive similect effects in the findings" (Mauranen, 2012: 79).

⁵ As the corpus belongs to a bigger compilation of texts that enables different comparative analytical perspectives, RAs written in these journals by Spanish scholars were not included in ELF sub-corpora. They are compiled under particular SPENG sub-corpora that allow us to look closely into the particular characteristics of ELF by the Spanish similect group.

proofreading.⁶ The third journal, JMS, does not provide any guidelines concerning the use of English by authors.

The second sub-corpus, ENGBM, comprises 24 RAs published in 3 journals (*Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Management*, and *Strategic Management Journal*) in which a very high percentage of publications is authored by scholars affiliated with Anglophone institutions, i.e. ENL users. For the compilation of both sub-corpora, those journals were selected which could be accessed through the library system of the University of Zaragoza and which were pointed out by the Spanish specialist informants as being frequently read and consulted. Although all the journals in the two sub-corpora are well known within the field and can be considered prestigious, the three journals in the ENGBM sub-corpus have a 5-year impact factor above 6.0 and are at the top of the Business and Management lists; the journals in the ELFBM sub-corpus have lower impact factors (1.584, 3.763, and 4.257, respectively).

The analysis was carried out using WordSmith Tools 4.0 (Scott, 1996). The searches *it is * to/ that*, *it * be * to/that*, and *it seems/appears * to/that* were made in the two sub-corpora; those instances in which '*' corresponded to an evaluative adjective were retrieved. The resulting concordances were then carefully revised in context. Only those *it*-clauses encoding the authors' evaluation were taken into consideration.

(3) Thus, it will be possible to test for complementarity using firm-level data, even if we have no information on firms' performance. (ELFBM23)

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(4) [...] this research indicates that it is possible to model and predict technological lock-out. (ENGBM1)

(5) In this regard, an emerging question that exhibits a growing debate is whether it is better to have one person to perform the duties of the CEO and chairman (i.e. CEO duality), or whether it is more commendable to split the two positions (i.e. CEO non-duality). (ELFBM2)

(6) Bacharach and Lawler concluded, "To pursue political action, it is inevitable that actors in the organization align themselves with others" (1998: 85). (ENGBM12)

⁶ The author guidelines of BMJ include the following information: "Authors for whom English is a second language may choose to have their manuscript professionally edited before submission to improve the English. A list of independent suppliers of editing services can be found here. All services are paid for and arranged by the author, and use of one of these services does not guarantee acceptance or preference for publication" ([http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1467-8551/homepage/ForAuthors.html](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1467-8551/homepage/ForAuthors.html)). In a similar vein, the author guidelines for RP state: "Please write your text in good English (American or British usage is accepted, but not a mixture of these). Authors who feel their English language manuscript may require editing to eliminate possible grammatical or spelling errors and to conform to correct scientific English may wish to use the English Language Editing service available from Elsevier's WebShop."

Examples in which the formulaic sequence expressed propositional meaning, denoting ability (or root possibility) (examples 3 and 4) rather than epistemic possibility were left out. Similarly, those tokens of evaluative *it*-clause in which the evaluation is not attributed to the RA author(s) (examples 5 and 6) were disregarded.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Evaluative adjectives as part of the *it*-clause

As can be seen in Table 2 the frequency of use and the array of evaluative adjectives used in the particular formulaic sequence under study is larger in the ELFMBM corpus than in the ENGBM corpus.

| | ELFMBM corpus | | | ENGBM corpus | |
|------------------------|---------------|------|------------------------|--------------|------|
| | Total | (%) | | Total | (%) |
| ATTITUDINAL ADJECTIVES | | | ATTITUDINAL ADJECTIVES | | |
| - <i>important</i> | 15 | 15.8 | - <i>important</i> | 11 | 23.9 |
| - <i>interesting</i> | 11 | 11.3 | - <i>difficult</i> | 3 | 6.5 |
| - <i>difficult</i> | 6 | 6.3 | - <i>critical</i> | 2 | 4.3 |
| - <i>necessary</i> | 5 | 5.2 | - <i>notable</i> | 2 | 4.3 |
| - <i>worthwhile</i> | 4 | 4.2 | - <i>beneficial</i> | 1 | 2.2 |
| - <i>critical</i> | 2 | 2.1 | - <i>comparable</i> | 1 | 2.2 |
| - <i>recommended</i> | 2 | 2.1 | - <i>convenient</i> | 1 | 2.2 |
| - <i>true</i> | 2 | 2.1 | - <i>feasible</i> | 1 | 2.2 |
| - <i>useful</i> | 2 | 2.1 | - <i>fruitful</i> | 1 | 2.2 |
| - <i>advantageous</i> | 1 | 1.1 | - <i>incumbent</i> | 1 | 2.2 |
| - <i>applicable</i> | 1 | 1.1 | - <i>informative</i> | 1 | 2.2 |
| - <i>appropriate</i> | 1 | 1.1 | - <i>interesting</i> | 1 | 2.2 |
| - <i>crucial</i> | 1 | 1.1 | - <i>necessary</i> | 1 | 2.2 |
| - <i>easy</i> | 1 | 1.1 | - <i>revealing</i> | 1 | 2.2 |
| - <i>essential</i> | 1 | 1.1 | - <i>slow</i> | 1 | 2.2 |
| - <i>hard</i> | 1 | 1.1 | - <i>useful</i> | 1 | 2.2 |
| - <i>imaginable</i> | 1 | 1.1 | - <i>valid</i> | 1 | 2.2 |
| - <i>imperative</i> | 1 | 1.1 | | | |
| - <i>intriguing</i> | 1 | 1.1 | | | |
| - <i>known</i> | 1 | 1.1 | | | |
| - <i>misleading</i> | 1 | 1.1 | | | |
| - <i>natural</i> | 1 | 1.1 | | | |
| - <i>noteworthy</i> | 1 | 1.1 | | | |
| - <i>open</i> | 1 | 1.1 | | | |
| - <i>preferable</i> | 1 | 1.1 | | | |
| - <i>premature</i> | 1 | 1.1 | | | |
| - <i>relevant</i> | 1 | 1.1 | | | |
| - <i>surprising</i> | 1 | 1.1 | | | |
| - <i>vital</i> | 1 | 1.1 | | | |
| - <i>wrong</i> | 1 | 1.1 | | | |

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| PISTEMIC ADJECTIVES (hedging) | | | PISTEMIC ADJECTIVES (hedging) | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------|----------------------------------|-----------|------|
| - <i>possible</i> | 11 | 10.6 | - <i>possible</i> | 9 | 19.6 |
| - <i>likely</i> | 6 | 6.3 | - <i>unlikely</i> | 3 | 6.5 |
| - <i>plausible</i> | 2 | 2.1 | - <i>likely</i> | 2 | 4.3 |
| - <i>probable</i> | 1 | 1.1 | - <i>probable</i> | 1 | 1.1 |
| - <i>unlikely</i> | 1 | 1.1 | (boosting) | | |
| (boosting) | | | | | |
| - <i>obvious</i> | 2 | 2.1 | | | |
| - <i>clear</i> | 1 | 1.1 | | | |
| - <i>evident</i> | 1 | 1.1 | | | |
| TOTAL | 95 | | | 46 | |

Table 2. Adjectives used as part of the evaluative *it*-clauses in the corpus

Some of the most frequent adjectives coincide in the two sub-corpora (e.g. *important*, *possible*, or *difficult*). However, some other adjectives in the ELFBM sub-corpus do not seem to be used at least within these *it*-clauses to the same extent or at all in the ENGBM sub-corpus. Here are some examples of plausible lexicogrammatical innovations, creative expressions or emerging patterns regarding this rhetorical formulaic sequence in the ELFBM sub-corpus:

(7) When VCs decide to bring in outsiders to the venture's TMT, it may be advantageous to pick individuals with previous work experience in the pharmaceutical sector. (ELFBM5)

(8) Since organizational characteristics, variables and priorities vary with the firm life cycle stage (Miller and Friesen, 1984; Quinn and Cameron, 1983), it may be worthwhile, for instance, to get a plausible answer for some questions, such as whether board leadership structure varies with firm life cycle stage and, if yes, is there any systematic relationship that can be detected in this regard. (ELFBM2)

(9) Under such circumstances, it is imaginable that the forthcoming merger is not perceived as a threat to the pre-merger workgroup identity. (ELFBM8)

The findings may point to increased lexical diversity or flexibility in the encoding of evaluative meaning through *it*-clauses in the ELFBM corpus. The results for ELF as used in RAs seem to be in line with previous studies showing higher variation and creativity in ELF as used in oral and written academic settings (e.g. Mauranen, 2010, 2012; Björkman, 2013; Carey, 2013) and non-academic settings (e.g. Pitzl, 2012).

The analysis of this genre-specific formulaic sequence in ELF written academic texts shows similar tendencies as regards the choice of adjectives to

those of learner language. In her study of anticipatory *it* patterns in academic essays, Ädel (2014: 72) found that *important* and *interesting*, “whose general function could be said to express stance, were significantly overused by the learners” in comparison to native speakers of English writing comparable texts. The findings reported in Table 2 point to the same direction – *important* and *interesting* are the most frequently used adjectives in these genre-specific formulaic sequences in the ELFBM corpus.

A closer look at the type of adjectives used in these genre-specific formulaic sequences (Table 3) reveals that they more commonly express attitudinal (value or relevance) than epistemic (status) evaluation in the two sub-corpora, even if the percentage of the latter is higher in the ENGBM corpus:

| | ELFBM corpus | ENGBM corpus |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| attitudinal evaluation | 70 (73.7%) | 31 (67.4%) |
| epistemic evaluation | 25 (26.3%) | 15 (32.6%) |

Table 3. Type of evaluation encoded in the *it*-clauses in the corpus

In other words, the evaluative adjectives in these formulaic sequences more commonly express the authors' opinions or viewpoints (examples 10 and 11), i.e. attitudinal evaluation, than the (lack) of commitment to the truth value of a statement (examples 12 and 13), i.e. epistemic evaluation.

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(10) One of these roles is often in a predominant position, though in the context of an individual case it is misleading to examine stakeholders solely on the basis of terms defined in advance. (ELFBM16)

(11) We thought it would be slow to promote interaction because that might cause the target's reputation to be blurred and indistinct in the marketplace. (ENGBM9)

(12) It is likely that ex-ante vertical scope configurations will have an important influence on later scope changes. (ELFBM12)

(13) It is possible that social status influences patterns of favor exchange, just as patterns of favor exchange influence social status. (ENGBM4)

Evaluative *it*-clauses expressing epistemic evaluation encompass constructions that make use of both hedging and boosting adjectives (Hyland, 2005; Mur Dueñas, 2011), the latter also referred to as emphatics (Hewings & Hewings, 2001, 2002); that is, adjectives which contribute to withholding full commitment from a proposition, to modulating the expression of uncertainty, commitment, probability or imprecision, on the one hand, and adjectives which contribute to the expression of certainty or conviction, on the other. Only the ELFBM corpus presents instances of sequences containing boosting adjectives, which express epistemic conviction or

certainty (e.g. *clear*, *evident*, *obvious*), as in examples 14 and 15. In addition, more marked attitudinal adjectives – and therefore more forceful in their conveyance of evaluative meaning (e.g. *critical*, *crucial*, *essential*, *imperative*, *vital*), as they can be considered ‘polarized’ rather than ‘centralized’ (Swales & Burke, 2003) – are also used in the ELFBM sub-corpus. That is, they can be taken to occupy a position towards one pole of an attitudinally evaluative gradation, especially as regards relevance or necessity.

(14) For the development and commercialization of therapeutics it is essential that these ventures form alliances with pharmaceutical incumbents, because [...]
(ELFBM5)

(15) Lastly, the case shows that it is vital to establish mechanisms that will ensure that the management and owners of the corporation work together in creative ways to serve the interests of the merged organization in avoiding structural fallacies.
(ELFBM6)

The authors in the ELFBM corpus may either see it as more necessary to underline their conviction regarding the statements evaluated through this sequence as well as to express their attitudinal evaluation, or they may transfer into their ELF writing a generally higher use of boosters or emphatics in their RA writing in their L1s, as previous EAP intercultural literature has shown (e.g. Vassileva, 2001; Salager-Meyer et al., 2003; Kuotsantoni, 2004; Vold, 2006; Mur-Dueñas, 2011).

The above findings in the use of boosting evaluative adjectives in the genre-specific formulaic sequences are only partially in line with previous research on learner language. On the one hand, Hewings and Hewings (2002) found non-native English authors of dissertations tend to include more *it*-patterns with an emphatic function than RA authors, a feature that, according to the authors, led to some overstatements. On the other hand, Ädel's (2014) study of anticipatory *it* patterns in academic essays shows a lower use of those patterns involving evidential markers in student non-native English writing than in comparable English native writing. This may be explained in terms of the different genre and degree of expertise of the writers. Student writers may not consider themselves in a position to express conviction regarding their statements. Again, while the differences in previous studies are described in terms of overstatement or underuse in the case of apprentice academic writing, the higher number of adjectives expressing certainty in the evaluative *it*-clauses with complementation in the ELFBM sub-corpus is to be interpreted as a possible tendency of written ELF, more specifically, of English-medium international publications.

3.2. Modalisation in evaluative *it*-clauses

Differences between the two sub-corpora were also found in the use of modal verbs in the formulaic sequences analysed. Although, as shown in Table 4, the percentage of modalised evaluative *it*-clauses analysed is similar in the two sub-corpora, some modal verbs are used as part of these sequences in the ELFBM corpus which are not found in the ENGBM one (e.g. *might*, *should*, *will*). Also, the incidence of use of *would* is higher in the ELFBM corpus. Example 16 shows how this modal verb is used as a part of an evaluative *it*-clause in an ELFBM RA giving way to a likely creative expression. It should be noted that other epistemic modal verbs such as *can* or *could* as part of the evaluative *it*-clauses analysed were not found in any of the two sub-corpora.

| | ELFBM corpus | ENGBM corpus |
|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| <i>may</i> | 3 | 5 |
| <i>might</i> | 2 | 0 |
| <i>should</i> | 2 | 0 |
| <i>will</i> | 3 | 0 |
| <i>would</i> | 11 | 3 |
| Total (%) | 21 (22.1%) | 8 (17.4%) |

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Table 4. Evaluative *it*-clauses used in combination with modal verbs in the corpus

(16) It would be intriguing to observe whether the evolutionary process suggested by multilevel selection theory (McAndrew, 2002) or similar types of cross-level processes (e.g. group-level helping operating as a pressure for individual helping, group-level removal of non-helpers or cheaters over time) actually occur in organizations. (ELFBM10)

It seems, therefore, that ELF scholars' lexical choices make their evaluations by means of *it*-clauses more assertive, as shown by the use of adjectives denoting certainty, whereas at the same time they more commonly include hedging modal verbs as part of these clauses. This may be a result of their transference of particular writing conventions from their L1s, or to their drafting in a language they use for international communication.

3.3. Overall frequency of use of evaluative *it*-clauses

Table 5 shows the total number of tokens of evaluative *it*-clauses with adjective complementation expressing the author's stance in the corpus. As pointed out above, their frequency of use is higher in the ELFBM than in the ENGBM corpus,

indicating that *it*-clauses with adjective complementation are a valuable rhetorical feature for ELF users to convey their evaluation in an indirect way in RAs as an academic genre.

| ELFBM corpus | | ENGBM corpus | |
|------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|
| ELFBM1 | 1 | ENGBM1 | 2 |
| ELFBM2 | 6 | ENGBM2 | 2 |
| ELFBM3 | 3 | ENGBM3 | 0 |
| ELFBM4 | 3 | ENGBM4 | 3 |
| ELFBM5 | 8 | ENGBM5 | 0 |
| ELFBM6 | 4 | ENGBM6 | 3 |
| ELFBM7 | 1 | ENGBM7 | 1 |
| ELFBM8 | 5 | ENGBM8 | 1 |
| ELFBM9 | 4 | ENGBM9 | 1 |
| ELFBM10 | 12 | ENGBM10 | 1 |
| ELFBM11 | 3 | ENGBM11 | 1 |
| ELFBM12 | 5 | ENGBM12 | 2 |
| ELFBM13 | 4 | ENGBM13 | 5 |
| ELFBM14 | 2 | ENGBM14 | 1 |
| ELFBM15 | 0 | ENGBM15 | 0 |
| ELFBM16 | 6 | ENGBM16 | 0 |
| ELFBM17 | 8 | ENGBM17 | 2 |
| ELFBM18 | 4 | ENGBM18 | 9 |
| ELFBM19 | 1 | ENGBM19 | 2 |
| ELFBM20 | 4 | ENGBM20 | 1 |
| ELFBM21 | 3 | ENGBM21 | 0 |
| ELFBM22 | 0 | ENGBM22 | 3 |
| ELFBM23 | 8 | ENGBM23 | 5 |
| ELFBM24 | 0 | ENGBM24 | 1 |
| Total | 95 | Total | 46 |
| Mean per RA | 3.96 | Mean per RA | 1.91 |
| Nº per 10,000 w. | 4.42 | Nº per 10,000 w. | 2.32 |

Table 5. Number of evaluative *it*-clauses in the corpus

Table 5 also reveals that this rhetorical feature is used to different degrees among scholars in the two sub-corpora, as it is employed from 0 to 12 times per RA in the ELFBM corpus and from 0 to 9 times per RA in the ENGBM. This may point to authors' preferences in the two sub-corpora; four RAs in the ELFBM corpus present a frequency of use well above the average (ELFBM5, ELFBM17, ELFBM23, and especially ELFBM10) and three in the ENGBM corpus (ENGBM13, ENGBM23,

and especially ENGBM18). In any case, these sequences can be included to express the authors' evaluation, especially in ELF RAs. It may be hypothesized that the sequence may be highly entrenched in ELF scholars so that they retrieve and use it effectively to express evaluative meanings in a rather impersonal way. In this respect, the results of this study may be in line with those of Carey (2013), who found a higher frequency of fixed organizing chunks in oral and written academic ELF than in ENL.

All in all, and in an attempt to answer Mauranen's (2012) detailed questions quoted in the Introduction, the study of evaluative *it*-clauses with adjective complementation in ELF business management RAs has shown that their frequency of use is higher than in ENL RA writing. It is a more common rhetorical mechanism in the unveiled expression of the authors' evaluation in the ELFBM sub-corpus. These genre-specific formulaic sequences can be considered productive and effective in the expression of, especially attitudinal, evaluation among business scholars using ELF in international publications. The findings further show that there is more variation in these *it*-clauses in the ELFBM sub-corpus. A higher number and a wider range of evaluative adjectives have been found in the ELFBM sub-corpus. Even if some of them would not be used by ENL scholars as they may not be considered idiomatic, they can be considered valid options in ELF written academic communication in this disciplinary field, especially as they have been used in published articles.

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4. FINAL REMARKS

The analysis presented of evaluative *it*-clauses with adjective complementation may contribute to our understanding of how ELF "is being shaped, in its international uses, at least as much by its non-native speakers as its native speakers" (Seidlhofer, 2011: 7). In the new context of academic communication in which ELF is used by scholars to disseminate their research results, they are to be considered legitimate users who may contribute to the shaping, evolution, change and dynamism of this international language (Seidlhofer, 2001, 2011; Llurda, 2004; Dewey, 2007; Mauranen, 2012).

Whereas some of the findings arising from this study of ELF RAs may be interpreted as erroneous or at least infelicitous or incongruous lexicogrammatical manifestations in ELT or traditional EAP approaches, it is argued here that they are to be considered lexicogrammatical innovations (Dewey, 2007), creative expressions (Seidlhofer, 2011), or emerging patterns (Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011), as a result of a possible process of adaptation by scholars of different linguacultural backgrounds that use English for international communication with their peers. As Seidlhofer (2011: 66) highlights, "[a]daptation naturally happens as a consequence of the very process of appropriation". Academics worldwide – especially in certain disciplines – have (un)willingly gone

through that process of appropriation of the English language to disseminate their research results, which has resulted in its adaptation and change. The findings reported seem to support Mauranen's (2012: 55) statement that "[i]t is reasonable to expect this second-order language contact [ELF] to result in rapid diffusion of innovation, in other words, alterations in English as (we think) we know it".

This adaptation, evolution and dynamism of the English language as used internationally also in written academic communication needs to be acknowledged in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching in general, and in EAP teaching in particular. This is especially necessary since, as pointed out by Dewey (2007) and Seidlhofer et al. (2006), there seems to be a gap between the findings of discourse analyses of English and current practices in ELT in general, and in ESP or EAP in particular. Furthermore, although the issue of legitimizing ELF features is controversial (Dewey, 2007), the fact that these lexico-grammatical expressions have been found in published sources may contribute to such legitimization, and in any case, they are to be seen as necessarily taken into consideration in EAP instruction.

However, the findings of this study are drawn from a rather small corpus. In order to be able to determine emerging ELF specific choices and to make generalizations regarding the possible lexico-grammatical innovations in the expression of evaluation in ELF published academic texts, the study should be replicated using bigger corpora of texts in this and other disciplines. Also, the analysis could be enlarged to incorporate other rhetorical uses of *it*-clauses with an interpersonal function, particularly with a hedging or boosting function (*it is reported, it can be expected, it is claimed, it could be argued*, etc.) and with an attribution function (*it has been argued, it is estimated*) (Hewings & Hewings, 2001, 2002). Finally, many other lexico-grammatical innovations, creative expressions or emerging patterns may be rendered in the expression of interpersonal or textual meaning in ELF RA writing. Further analyses into the use of ELF in international academic publications are indeed needed.

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