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Application of different tools to investigate features and development of UK-based international foundation students' academic lexis in assessed writing

Keywords: academic lexis, academic vocabulary, academic collocations, academic lexical bundles

Despite extensive research into academic writing of university students from various linguistic backgrounds and disciplines at various levels of study, little research has focused on longitudinal studies of assessed writing produced by heterogeneous groups of students at a foundation level. This study seeks to fill this gap by employing a number of tools complemented by qualitative interviews to investigate the most prevalent examples, features and development of academic lexis used in UK-based international foundation students' written assignments and the main contributors to this development.

These aims are addressed with the assistance of the Text Inspector (Bax n.d.), AntWordProfiler (Antony 2013) and AntConc (Antony 2014) which provide an insight into the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the students' use of academic lexis comprising individual words and phraseologies in accordance with the Academic Word List (Coxhead 2000), the New Academic Vocabulary List (Gardner and Davies 2013), the Academic Collocation List (Ackermann and Chen 2013), and the Academic Formulas List (Simpson-Vlach and Ellis 2010).

The results indicate that despite a rather extensive use of individual academic words, the use of academic collocations and lexical bundles remains limited. Moreover, the most prevalent examples of individual academic vocabulary and collocations seem to be relating to the assignment topics. There also seems to be a link between the use of certain academic collocations and the assignment type. The most prevalent examples of academic lexical bundles, on the other hand, do not appear to be linked to the assignment topic or type. In addition, interview data have identified formative feedback, teaching and exposure to academic lexis in reading materials as primary contributors. These findings have important pedagogical implications by highlighting the importance of feedback, explicit focus on academic items during class time and exposure to relevant reading materials.

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