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2022, Vol. 19 (2), 127-147(228)
journals.uni-lj.si/elope
https://doi.org/10.4312/elope.19.2.127-147
UDC: 811.111'243:808.1

Reporting Verbs in L1 and L2 English Novice Academic Writing

ABSTRACT

The paper contributes to the research on academic attribution by exploring syntactic-semantic patterns of English reporting verbs used by three types of academic writers, namely L2 novice (with Czech as their L1), L1 novice and L1 expert academic writers. It investigates the impact which both the EFL and EAP challenge has on the use of these verbs by L2 novice academic writers. Our approach combines contrastive analysis and learner corpus research, focusing on academic writing in English in the discipline of economics. The results suggest that although similarities among the groups prevail, Czech novice academic writers tend to resort to patterns associated with informal, conversational rather than academic style. Pedagogical implications of the findings could include raising students' awareness of the practice of appropriate academic reporting as one of the skills needed for them to accommodate themselves to the conventions of English as the academic *lingua franca*.

Keywords: reporting verbs, academic written English, learner corpora, novice academic writers, EFL

Glagoli poročanja v začetniškem znanstvenem pisanju v angleščini kot J1 in J2

POVZETEK

Članek prispeva k raziskovanju pripisovanja avtorstva z identifikacijo skladenjsko-pomenskih vzorcev angleških glagolov poročanja, kakor jih uporabljajo tri skupine piscev, tj. začetniki v J2 (kjer je J1 češčina), začetniki v J1 in pa izkušeni pisci v J1. Članek ugotavlja, kakšen vpliv imajo izzivi v angleščini kot tujem jeziku oziroma jeziku stroke na uporabo tovrstnih glagolov pri tujejezičnih piscih, ki so začetniki pri znanstvenem pisanju. Uporabljeni pristop je kombinacija kontrastivne analize in raziskovanja s korpusom usvajanja, osredotoča pa se na znanstveno pisanje v angleščini na področju ekonomije. Rezultati kažejo, da so si skupine med sabo pretežno podobne, se pa češki pisci začetniki pogosteje zatekajo k vzorcem, ki so bolj značilni za neformalni in pogovorni kot za akademski slog. V pedagoškem smislu ugotovitve nakazujejo npr. potrebo po dvigu ozaveščenosti o ustreznih praksah poročanja v znanstvenem pisanju kot eni od potrebnih veščin, s katerimi se tujejezični govorci približajo konvencijam angleščine kot »akademske lingue france«.

Ključne besede: glagoli poročanja, akademska pisna angleščina, korpusi usvajanja tujega jezika, znanstveni pisci začetniki, poučevanje angleščine kot tujega jezika

1 Introduction

In academic discourse, referencing other authors is a crucial skill to indicate the writer's belonging to the discourse community. Novice academic writers, however, find it difficult to use the varied ways of reporting in accurate and appropriate ways (cf. Hyland 2002). This seems to be a hindrance to non-native English writers in particular, since they have to face not only the challenge of academic writing but also the general challenge of using English as a foreign language (EFL).

In addition to this, trying to become members of the international academic discourse community, with English as its "academic *lingua franca*" (Mauranen, Hynninen and Ranta 2016), non-native novice academic writers have to "accommodate themselves to different epistemological and literacy conventions" (Dontcheva-Navratilova 2014, 40; cf. Chovanec 2012). The differences between Czech and Anglophone academic literacies most relevant to our study are associated with writer-reader interaction. Traditionally, Czech academic discourse has been writer- rather than reader-oriented, characterized by a low degree of interactiveness, backgrounded authorial presence, and "patterns of interaction marked by symbiosis and avoidance of tension" among the members of the small academic community (Dontcheva-Navratilova 2014, 42; cf. Chamonikolasová 2005; Čmejrková 1996; Čmejrková and Daneš 1997). This is reflected, for instance, in the frequent use of impersonal structures, tentative formulation of claims, a lower degree of dialogicality, and generally lower number of bibliographical references. While a gradual shift towards the Anglophone academic writing conventions can be observed in the English-language academic texts written by Czech writers, particularly after the year 2000 (Kozubíková Šandová 2019), the current Czech university students will have been exposed rather to the Czech "stylistic" tradition, with the main focus on "stylistic variation" (Čmejrková 1996, 142).

Previous research into reporting verbs has focused mainly on the usage of reporting verbs across various disciplines both by experienced researchers (Swales 1990; Hyland 1999; 2002) and learners of academic English (Jarkovská and Kučírková 2021, dealing with Czech learners; Charles 2006a, 2006b). The scope of the present study is narrowed to a single discipline, economics, in order to investigate how Czech learners of English use reporting verbs in their academic texts compared to native novice and expert academic writers. The current study contributes to the research by exploring syntactic-semantic patterns of reporting verbs and by highlighting the impact of both the "foreign language" (EFL) and "academic" (English for academic purposes – EAP) challenge on the use of these verbs by English L2 novice academic writers.

2 Theoretical Background

It is generally acknowledged that citation, i.e., "the attribution of propositional content to other sources" (Hyland 1999, 341), is an important constitutive feature of research papers. Hyland (1999, 343) points out "its increasingly prominent role in the ways writers seek to construct facts through their communicative practices." In academic writing we not only present our own work and ideas, but we refer to works of other researchers, their findings and claims. By citing other authors, we build a necessary framework for our research, placing it in

a larger context in order to "establish credibility by showing affiliation to particular views and methods, provide justification for arguments and positions, and/or claim novelty for a position or findings presented" (Dontcheva-Navratilova 2008, 98). At the same time, "[s]tance plays a particularly important role in reporting, since the writer's attitude to the reported proposition can be encoded in the reporting clause" (Charles 2006a, 493). Reporting verbs, as one of the overt means of referring to other authors, are at the same time used to express the writer's attitude to the cited authors and their findings.[1]

In recent decades, citation in academic discourse has received considerable attention. Some studies have explored the citation practices in selected disciplines, e.g., in medical and biomedical journal articles (Thomas and Hawes 1994; Dubois 1988), or agricultural biology and biochemistry (Shaw 1992). Numerous other studies have dealt with reporting in the field of English studies or second language acquisition (Manan and Noor 2014; Yeganeh and Boghayeri 2015; Jalilifar 2012), while the practical application of research into reporting verbs was discussed in Bloch (2010). Several studies concentrated specifically on the academic writing of English L2 writers. The reporting practices of L2 writers (mostly Chinese university students) were discussed in Kwon, Staples and Partridge (2018), or Dontcheva-Navratilova (2008) for Czech learners, and lexical verbs used by L2 writers in academic discourse were explored by Granger and Paquot (2015), who found differences in stylistic preferences between English L1 and L2 writers:[2]

> EFL learners significantly underuse the majority of "academic verbs", i.e., verbs like *include*, *report* or *relate*, that express rhetorical functions at the heart of academic writing, and instead tend to resort to "conversational verbs", i.e., verbs like *think* or *like*, that are characteristic of informal speech (2015, 32).

Considering the syntactic structures in which lexical verbs are used, they found that L2 writers "tend to restrict themselves to a very limited range of patterns, which contrasts sharply with the rich patterning that characterizes expert writing" (2015, 32).

3 Forms of Academic Citation and Functions of Reporting Verbs

In general, there are two main forms of academic citation, namely integral and non-integral citation (cf. Swales 1990, 148–49). While in integral citation the author's name is integrated in the sentence and a reporting verb is typically used, in non-integral citation the name of the author is given in brackets or in footnotes/endnotes. As noted by Hyland (1999, 344), "[t]he use of one form rather than the other appears to reflect a decision to give greater emphasis to either the reported author or the reported message."

Reporting verbs can be classified into three categories according to their function, or to be more specific, according to the activity or process they refer to (Hyland 2002, 118; cf. Thompson and Ye 1991, 369–70):

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1 Drawing on Thompson and Ye (1991), Hyland (1999) and Dontcheva-Navratilova (2008), we refer to the person who is citing as the "writer" and the person cited as the "author".

2 The learner data in this study comes from the *International Corpus of Learner English*, containing essays written by EFL university students of 16 different mother tongue backgrounds (Bulgarian, Chinese, Czech, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Tswana and Turkish).

1) **Research acts**. "Verbs in this category represent experimental activities or actions carried out in the real world" (Hyland 2002, 118). They typically occur in statements of findings, e.g., *observe*, *discover*, *notice*, *show*, or procedures, e.g., *analyse*, *calculate*, *assay*, *explore*, *recover*.
2) **Cognition acts**. "These verbs are concerned with the researcher's mental processes" (Hyland 2002, 118), e.g., *believe*, *view*, *assume*.
3) **Discourse acts**. "These involve linguistic activities and focus on the verbal expression of cognitive or research activities" (Hyland 2002, 118), e.g., *ascribe*, *discuss*, *hypothesize*, *state*, *report*, *claim*.

As demonstrated by Thompson and Ye (1991) or Hyland (1999; 2002), "apart from indicating the type of activity referred to – research acts, cognition acts and discourse acts – reporting verbs may be exploited by writers to take a personal stance towards reported information [...] or [...] the writer may attribute a position to the original author" (Dontcheva-Navratilova 2008, 98). By using a specific reporting verb writers can express their attitude towards the original source and author, portraying "the author as presenting true information or a correct opinion", e.g., *acknowledge*, *demonstrate*, *identify*, *notice*, *prove*, *recognize*; or "false information or an incorrect opinion", e.g., *confuse*, *disregard*, *fail*, *ignore*, or giving "no clear signal as to [… their] attitude towards the author's information/opinion", e.g., *advance*, *believe*, *claim*, *examine*, *propose* (Thompson and Ye 1991, 372). Thus, reporting verbs enable the writer to take either a supportive (e.g., *advocate*, *argue*, *hold*), neutral (e.g., *address*, *cite*, *claim*, *comment*), tentative (e.g., *believe*, *suggest*), or critical (e.g., *condemn*, *object*) stance towards the reported claims (cf. Hyland 1999, 350; 2002, 118–19).

4 Material and Method

The approach adopted in the present study combines contrastive analysis and learner corpus research to explore the use of reporting verbs by three types of academic writers – English L2 novice academic writers, and English L1 novice and expert writers. For the purposes of our research, we have compiled two corpora of English undergraduate theses in the discipline of economics and business, one comprising texts written by students of the Prague University of Economics and Business between 2016 and 2020 (L2 novice corpus), and the other theses from three US universities written between 2012 and 2020[3] (L1 novice corpus). The third corpus (L1 expert corpus), which serves as a yardstick against which the students' essays are compared, contains expert articles from the same field published in high-impact American journals (*The Quarterly Journal of Economics* and *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*) between 2020 and 2022.[4] The corpora are comparable in size (one million tokens each, see Table 1). We uploaded the corpora into *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff et al. 2014) and used the automatic lemmatization and part-of-speech tagging (Tree Tagger) provided by the tool.

[3] The L1 undergraduate theses are texts written by students of Department of Economics at Stanford University, University of Michigan and University of Arkansas.

[4] Since approximately half of the Czech students' essays follow American English language norms, and half British English norms, the choice of American English L1 corpora for comparison was mostly due to the availability of comparable academic texts.

Table 1. The corpora used in the present study.

Corpora	Tokens	Words	Number of texts
L1-expert	1,005,723	780,500	116
L1-novice	1,018,226	764,848	84
L2-novice	1,011,026	775,979	51

The research comprised two stages. The first stage (Section 5.1) aimed at identifying the range and types of reporting verbs used by the three groups of writers. The reporting verbs were located in the three corpora semi-manually: parentheses were used as indicators of a possible attribution of content to a particular author or a group of authors. Searching the adjacent text manually, we excerpted the initial 300 tokens of reporting verbs from each corpus.[5] Prepositional and phrasal verbs, e.g., *account for*, *focus on*, *point out*, *come up with*, were also included in the dataset. Instances of self-citation were disregarded, and so was attribution to organizations and the media. Since we focused on reporting verbs, non-integral citations and various verbless forms of reporting remained outside the scope of this paper. Apart from prepositional forms (ex. 1a), these often comprised de-verbal nouns (ex. 1b) related to the reporting verbs.

(1) a. ***According to*** *Bhargavi (2003) there are three specific features common among remittance senders*. (L2-novice)

b. *In Piketty*, *Saez and Zucman (2018),* ***the estimate*** *of rapidly growing wealth underlies* ***the finding*** *that top capital shares have surged in the past 20 years, reaching 56 percent in 2014. Conversely, the alternative* ***assumptions*** *in Smith, Zidar, and Zwick (2019) imply that, in 2014, only 41 percent of income for the top 1 percent comes from capital.* (L1-expert)

The reporting verbs were categorized using Hyland's (2002) functional classification, drawing on Thompson and Ye (1991) and Thomas and Hawes (1994), into three classes: research (real-world) acts, cognition acts, and discourse acts (Hyland 2002, 118ff; see also Section 3 above). While some verbs can generally belong to more than one category, following Hyland (2002, 118), we tried to "attribute a particular meaning to all the verbs using this system", relying on collocations for disambiguation where necessary. Depending on its complementation, the verb *offer*, for instance, was classified as a research act verb in ex. (2a), a cognition act verb in ex. (2b), and a verb related to a discourse act in ex. (2c).[6]

(2) a. *Mathioudakis et al. (2017)* ***offer an analysis*** *of groups of advanced (2G, 3G) biofuel feedstocks and their water footprint.* (L2-novice)

b. [...] *whereas Ocampo (2004)* ***offers a nuanced view****, worrying particularly about procyclical macroeconomic policies and weak productivity growth.* (L1-expert)

[5] The number of texts needed to identify the initial 300 tokens of reporting verbs differed across the three corpora: eight papers (96,000 tokens) from the L1 expert corpus, 13 theses (140,000 tokens) from the L1 novice corpus, and five theses (85,000 tokens) from the L2 novice corpus. As a consequence, in each corpus there were individual texts that remained unexamined by this process at the first stage of the analysis.

[6] Cf. also Hyland's (2002, 118–21) classification of *analyse*, *view* and *critique*, corresponding to the multi-word expressions in examples (2a-c), as verbs referring to research, cognition and discourse acts, respectively.

c. *A current University of Chicago sociologist Robert Vargas (2020) has* ***offered a trenchant critique*** *of the Chicago Crime Lab for its history of research partnerships and deep entanglements with the Chicago Police Department*. (L1-expert)

Our results (see Table 4 below) differ from the overall functional distribution of reporting verbs presented in Hyland (2002, 119)[7] in showing a high percentage of research-act oriented verbs. This, however, may reflect the scope of the category in our approach. Apart from prototypical research-act verbs, such as *show*, *find* or *analyse*, we included in the category the verb *use*, one of the most frequent verbs in our data. This decision can be justified by the fact that in all the corpora the verb occurs as a part of recurrent multi-word units which are used to report "experimental activities or actions carried out in the real world" (Hyland 2002, 118), i.e., research acts, such as *use* […] *data*, *approach*, *model*, *measure*, *method*, etc.[8] Treating such multi-word units as reporting verbs resulted in the inclusion of individual occurrences of *make*, *do* and *have* in various functional classes, depending on their complementation, e.g., *work done by* […] (research), *make* […] *conclusion* (discourse), *make* […] *assumptions* (cognition).

At the second stage of the research, five reporting verbs were selected on the basis of the results of the first stage, and their lexico-grammatical patterns were explored in detail (Section 5.2). We focused on the verbs (types) *argue*, *say*, *suggest*, *note*, and *find*. The discourse-act verbs *argue* and *suggest* rank among the most frequent reporting verbs in all three corpora. The representation of *say* and *note*, on the other hand, differs across the corpora, with *say* overused, and *note* underused in L2 theses, compared to L1 texts. *Find* was selected as the most frequent representative of the research verbs. Being generally infrequent in all the corpora (5.4% of the 900-word sample), verbs referring to cognition acts were not included in the selection.

In order to examine the uses of the five selected verbs, we searched for all instances of the verb lemmata in the three corpora, randomized the results using the *Sketch Engine* "shuffle lines" function, and then manually selected the first 50 tokens of each verb (including only verbs in reporting function) from each corpus, if available (see Table 2). It should be noted that in several cases (with verbs *note*, *say* and *suggest*) the number of tokens of the particular verb was lower than 50; in such cases, all available tokens were included. This stage of data collection revealed that Czech students are quite reluctant to use *find* as a reporting verb. Out of all tokens of *find* in the corpora, it is used as a reporting verb in approximately 50% in the L1 corpora, but only in 20% in the L2-novice corpus.[9] The 600 occurrences of reporting verbs (Table 2) identified at stage two were analysed in terms of the syntactic pattern, voice and tense of the verb, and the animacy of the subject. Using bootstrapping, 95% confidence intervals (CI) were estimated for each population.[10]

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7 The distribution of verbs in process categories in Hyland's (2002, 119) data was 35% research, 8% cognition, and 57% discourse act verbs.

8 The classification of *use* as a research-act verb corresponds to Jarkovská and Kučírková's (2021, 136) approach. Hyland (2002) does not mention the class of the verb explicitly.

9 The following example illustrates a non-reporting use of the verb *find* in the L2 corpus: *On the other hand*, *Czechs* ***found*** *EU membership beneficial the most at the beginning of the refugee crisis.*

10 Calc tool at https://www.korpus.cz/calc/ (accessed November 24, 2022) was used to establish CIs.

Table 2. The numbers of reporting verbs analysed at stage two of the research.

Verb	L2-novice	L1-novice	L1-expert	Total
argue	50	50	50	150
find	50	50	50	150
note	14	50	50	114
say	28	8	4	40
suggest	46	50	50	146
Total	188	208	204	600

5 Analysis

5.1 Stage One

The first stage of the research revealed some general tendencies in the use of reporting verbs across the three corpora. As shown in Table 3, American students and expert academics display a similar range of reporting verbs (84 and 87 verb types, respectively; 33 verb types are shared by both groups of writers), but the students tend to repeat the same verbs frequently (ex. 3).

(3) *Wu et al. (2011)* ***examine*** *the heterogeneity of the lending channel of monetary policy with respect to foreign and domestic banks and* ***find*** *strong evidence of internal capital markets. The authors* ***find*** *consistent evidence that foreign banks are less responsive to monetary policy shocks by analyzing the loan granting behavior of banks. Gambacorta (2005)* ***examines*** *the bank lending channel and* ***finds*** *that this transmission channel of monetary policy is muted among banks affiliated with multinational banks*. (L1-novice)

Czech students, on the other hand, use a broader range of verb types than either group of American writers. This may reflect the traditional Czech approach to stylistic norms, postulating variation as a feature of "good" writing. At the same time, being new to the realm of academic discourse, Czech students seem to display the same uncertainty as their L1-novice colleagues, resorting to frequent, "well-used" verbs.

Table 3. Numbers of reporting verbs (types and tokens) in the stage one dataset.

Reporting verbs	L2-novice	L1-novice	L1-expert	Total
Types	108	84	87	279
Tokens	300	300	300	900

Apart from the overall high proportion of research and discourse act verbs in our data, Table 4 shows the differences in the representation of the three functional classes of verbs between expert writers, on the one hand, and novice academics on the other. Both groups of novice academic writers slightly overuse verbs referring to discourse acts, and underuse research-act oriented verbs, compared to expert writers (the difference, however, is not statistically significant). At the same time, American and Czech students differ in their lexical choices of reporting verbs both from the expert writers and from each other (Table 5).

Table 4. The functional classification of reporting verbs in the three corpora, based on the 900-verb sample.

	Cognition acts			Discourse acts			Research acts			Total (100%)
	freq.	%	CI freq.	freq.	%	CI freq.	freq.	%	CI freq.	
L2-novice	17	5.7	10–25	145	48.3	128–162	138	46.0	121–155	300
L1-novice	18	6.0	10–27	139	46.3	122–156	143	47.7	126–160	300
L1-expert	14	4.7	7–22	115	38.3	99–132	171	57.0	154–188	300
Total	**49**	**5.4**	**36–63**	**399**	**44.3**	**370–428**	**452**	**50.2**	**422–481**	**900**

Some of the differences may be explained by the novice writers' avoidance of "taking an explicit stance towards the sources cited" (Dontcheva-Navratilova 2008, 101). However, within the class of research act verbs, all groups of writers prefer "to comment on research findings non-factively, with no clear attitudinal signal as to their reliability" (Hyland 2002, 119), using the verbs *find*, *analyze*, *use*, *study*, *examine*, etc. The evaluative factive verb *show*, acknowledging the "acceptance of the author's results or conclusions" (Hyland 2002, 119) occurs more frequently in the L1 texts, especially in the expert ones (31 instances, as opposed to the five occurrences in L2 theses).

The comparison of discourse act verbs across the three groups of writers reveals little similarity beyond the use of the frequent verbs *argue* (an "assurance" verb, "which introduce[s] cited material in [...] positive and conclusive terms" (Hyland 2002, 121)) and the tentative verb *suggest*. The non-evaluative verbs *state*, *focus on*, and *conclude* are used frequently by novice writers, who may be reluctant to interpret the reported information. American students share the preference for the verbs *note* and *propose* with the expert writers. Czech students, on the other hand, were found to use a variety of verbs which are not frequent in the native writers' papers – a) verbs which may be considered essential vocabulary for academic writing *describe*, *explain*, and *define*, and b) the verbs *say*, *write*, *point out*, and *come with*, which are not peculiar to academic writing.[11] The use of *come with something* (ex. 4) for reporting may be considered a case of negative lexical transfer from Czech, where the expression that corresponds literally to the English one, viz. *přijít s něčím*, is used to present someone's new suggestion, idea, plan, solution or explanation.

(4) *Daioglou et al. (Daioglou et al. 2017)* ***come with*** *a novel approach to life cycle analysis (LCA)*. (L2-novice)

[11] Group a) comprises verbs which appear on the written sub-list of the *Oxford Phrasal Academic Lexicon* (OPAL), a list of "the most important words to know in the field of English for Academic Purposes" based on the *Oxford Corpus of Academic English*, see https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/wordlists/opal (accessed November 24, 2022). The verbs in group b) are not on the written sub-list of OPAL; at the same time, *say*, *write*, and *come* are listed among the 500 most frequent words on the *New General Service List*, "providing common vocabulary items that occur frequently across different texts" (Brezina and Gablasova 2015, 1).

Table 5. The most frequent reporting verbs – functional classification.[12]

	Discourse act verbs	Research verbs	Cognition verbs
L2-novice	*describe* (18), conclude (7), focus on (7), **argue** (7), *say* (7), *explain* (6), *write* (5), **suggest** (5), *define* (5), *point out* (4), *come with* (4), state (4), consider (4)	**use** (31), **find** (13), **analyze**[13] (9), *create* (9), *do* (7), *identify* (6), **show** (5), *apply* (4), develop (4)	---
L1-novice	note (26), **argue** (14), cite (11), **suggest** (10), state (10), conclude (9), focus on (7), propose (4), determine (4), support (4)	**find** (45), **show** (14), **use** (11), study (9), conduct (7), examine (7), look at (6), utilize (5), **analyze** (5)	believe (7)
L1-expert	note (13), report (11), discuss (10), **argue** (9), **suggest** (9), propose (7), present (5), document (4), consider (4)	**find** (42), **show** (31), **use** (20), provide (10), estimate (10), develop (4), **analyze** (4), study (4), take (4)	assume (4)

5.2 Stage Two

Three verb types proved to be frequent in all three corpora – *argue*, *find* and *suggest*. The characteristics of these verbs were compared across the three corpora in order to ascertain whether they also share the same patterns when used by different types of writers. The verbs *note* and *say*, are under- and over-represented, respectively, in the L2-novice theses. We explored their colligations and collocations, hoping to account for the Czech students' (dis)inclination to use these verbs.

5.2.1 *Argue*, *Find* and *Suggest*

5.2.1.1 The Semantics of the Subject

The subjects of reporting verbs *argue*, *find* and *suggest* were classified from the semantic point of view into two main classes – human (ex. 5) and non-human (ex. 6) – leaving aside the sentences with the anticipatory *it* and the formal subject *there* (eight instances). The classification of the implied subjects of subjectless non-finite clauses was based on the context of the superordinate clause (ex. 7, with an unexpressed human subject).

(5) *Further*, ***Sevilla and Smith*** *(2020) find that within couples, COVID-19 has increased the equality in time spent on childcare between men and women*. (L1-novice)

(6) ***Case studies*** *suggest that clinic staff and community health workers were providing "no-touch" treatment for dehydration and fever and engaged in social mobilization and disease surveillance (Vandi et al. 2017).* (L1-expert)

[12] The verbs frequently used in all three sub-corpora are highlighted in bold, those overused or used solely by Czech students in italics; the frequency is given in parentheses after each verb.

[13] Differences between British and American spelling (*analyse* vs. *analyze*) were disregarded, and the results were merged.

(7) ***Jovanović*** *(2002, 6) summarizes these goals,* ***suggesting*** *that perhaps most important was the maintenance of peace, as it was mentioned three times in the Preamble alone.* (L1-novice)

Table 6. The subject of the verbs *argue*, *find* and *suggest*.

Group		Human subject			Non-human subject			Total (100%)
		freq	%	CI freq.	freq.	%	CI freq.	
L1-expert	*argue*	44	96	41–46	2	4	0–5	46
	find	36	72	30–42	14	28	8–20	50
	suggest	25	50	18–32	25	50	18–32	50
	Total	105	72	94–115	41	28	31–52	**146**
L1-novice	*argue*	46	92	42–49	4	8	1–8	50
	find	37	74	31–43	13	26	7–19	50
	suggest	25	50	18–32	25	50	18–32	50
	Total	108	72	97–119	42	28	31–53	**150**
L2-novice	*argue*	42	89	37–46	5	11	1–10	47
	find	37	76	31–43	12	24	9–18	49
	suggest	29	63	23–35	17	37	11–23	46
	Total	108	76	98–118	34	24	24–44	**142**
Total		**321**	**73**	**303–339**	**117**	**27**	**99–135**	**438**

The overall analysis of the verbs *argue*, *find* and *suggest* revealed that the distribution of human and non-human subjects across the three corpora does not differ considerably. Both L1 and L2 writers clearly tend to use human subjects, the ratio of human to non-human subjects being approximately 3:1. The human subject is typically an author or a collective of authors, realized by a proper noun (e.g., *Lemieux (2006) suggested that…*) or a common noun such as *author*, *researchers*, *scholars*, *academics* (e.g., *The authors argue that…*) or a pronoun such as *they*, *some*, *many* (e.g., *Many argue that…*). The non-human subject refers either to the text itself by a common noun such as *study*, *paper*, *article*, *literature*, *review* (e.g., *Part of the literature argues that…*) or the ideas contained in the text, such as *theory*, *research* (e.g., *This theory suggest that…*). Alternatively, the non-human subject is the subject of the passive constructions (see below ex. 9).

However, when focusing on the individual verbs, the distribution of human and non-human subjects was found to be different. While the verbs *argue* and *find* show a preference for human subjects (132 human vs. 11 non-human subjects with *argue*, 110 human vs. 39 non-human subjects with *find*), in the case of *suggest* the human and non-human subjects are almost equally distributed (79 human vs. 67 non-human subjects). This may be caused by the semantics of each verb. While the semantic load of *argue* seems to be more closely related to reasoning, the meaning of *suggest* is linked more to conveying information, which may be more easily carried out by both the author and the text.

Next, we investigated each of the corpora individually. In contrast with L1 corpora, L2 novice writers are the only group of writers who prefer human subjects with all three verbs, including *suggest*, which is used equally with human and non-human subjects in L1 corpora. In other words, L2 novice writers seem to underuse *suggest* with non-human subjects.

5.2.1.2 Voice

The active is clearly the dominant voice used in reporting by all groups of writers. The group that uses the passive most is L2 novice writers (Table 7). Generally, this is in accordance with the traditional Czech academic writing instruction,[14] stressing the impersonal character of the academic text as its typical feature. Čmejrková, Daneš and Světlá (1999, 48), for instance, mention the passive as a common means whereby the ideas and findings of the researchers who constitute the discourse community can enter the academic text without the names of the researchers being mentioned explicitly (e.g. *although the properties of the biological clock have been partly described* [...], *little has been said about the daily oscillation* [...]).

Table 7. Voice (the verbs *argue*, *find* and *suggest*).

Group	Active			Passive			Total (100%)
	freq.	%	CI freq.	freq.	%	CI freq.	
L1-expert	142	95	136–147	8	5	3–14	150
L1-novice	147	98	143–150	3	2	0–7	150
L2-novice	135	92	128–141	11	8	5–18	146
Total	**424**	**95**	**415–432**	**22**	**5**	**14–31**	**446**

Even though the frequencies are low, our data show that L2 novice writers use the preposition *in* in the passive patterns "*as*-(*it*)-(*be*)-V*ed-in*" and "S-*be*-V*ed-in*", examples (8) and (9) respectively, which allows them to construe the source of knowledge as impersonal (rather than referring to the author). The preposition *in* was not attested in the passive patterns used by the L1 writers. What L2 writers fail to do, on the other hand, is use complex subject-raising infinitival constructions found in L1 writers' texts ('S-*be*-V-*ed*-inf', ex. 10). The pattern '*it-be*-V*ed*-clause', preferred by L1 expert writers, is illustrated by ex. (11).

Table 8. Passive patterns (the verbs *argue*, *find* and *suggest*).

Passive pattern	L1-expert	L1-novice	L2-novice	Total
as-(*it*)-(*be*)-V*ed-by/in*	3	0	5	8
it-be-V*ed*-clause	4	0	3	7
S-*be*-V*ed-by/in*/0	0	1	3	4
S-*be*-V*ed*-inf	1	2	0	3
Total	**8**	**3**	**11**	**22**

[14] As shown by Kozubíková Šandová (2019, 64), while there has been a shift towards the writer's increased visibility in Czech academic texts, impersonal means of expression are still the preferred option, highlighting, among others, the writer's reliance on generally accepted findings and conclusions.

(8) ***As was suggested in*** *other works the willingness to travel to job or directly to move house is low in the Czech Republic. </s><s> (Narovcova, 2015).* (L2-novice)

(9) *Same conclusion* ***can be found in*** *a work done by Barro and Redlick (2011).* (L2-novice)

(10) *Mobile homes* ***have also been found to have*** *a negative impact on single family home prices, although this research, from 1999, is somewhat outdated (Munneke et al. 113).* (L1-novice)

(11) ***It was found*** *as well,* ***that*** *44% of respondents use DS for less than a year (Harris Interactive, 2021).* (L2-novice)

5.2.1.3 Tense

The investigation of the tense of reporting verbs revealed noteworthy differences between L1 and L2 writers (see Table 9). The L1 writers (both expert and novice) show a tendency to use the reporting verb in the present simple tense (78% and 77% respectively; ex. 12), while Czech students use the present tense less frequently (66%). The past simple tense, on the other hand, is twice as frequent in L2 texts (33%; ex. 13) than in L1 corpora (15% and 17%).

Table 9. Tense (the verbs argue, find and suggest).[15]

Group	Present simple			Past simple			Present perfect			Total (100%)
	freq.	%	CI freq.	freq.	%	CI freq.	freq.	%	CI freq.	
L1-expert	108	78	98–117	21	15	13–30	10	7	4–16	**139**
L1-novice	105	77	95–114	23	17	15–32	9	7	4–15	**137**
L2-novice	89	66	78–100	45	33	34–56	1	1	0–3	**135**
Total	**302**	**73**	**284–319**	**89**	**22**	**73–105**	**20**	**5**	**12–29**	**411**

(12) *Ellieroth (2019)* ***finds*** *that married women are less likely to leave the labor force in recessions.* (L1-expert)

(13) *As Bajomi-Lazár (2014, p. 59)* ***noted****: "the state-owned National Lottery Company placed advertising worth 129 million forints in 2009 and 294 million forints in 2011 in the pro-Fidesz broadsheet* Magyar Nemzet*".* (L2-novice)

The more pronounced preference of native speakers for the use of the present simple tense and more frequent use of the past simple tense by non-native speakers was noted before by other researchers (cf. Vogel 2012; Jarkovská and Kučírková 2021). According to Jarkovská and Kučírková (2021, 137), the use of the past simple "implies a greater distancing of the writer from another author's reported message and less relevance to the writer's research". At the same time, "the use of past tenses may reflect the dating of the research, not necessarily the relationship of the writer to the cited author" (Kučírková 2021, 137). It can be argued that the differences between L1 and L2 texts described above might be due to the L2 writers being unaware of the convention of using the present simple as an unmarked tense for reporting other authors' research.

[15] Only finite verb forms were included.

The use of the present perfect is marginal in all corpora (ex. 14), but it is the L2 writers that neglect it almost completely. This is not a surprising result given that, unlike the present and past tenses, the Czech grammatical system does not have a tense equivalent to the English present perfect. The higher proportion of present perfect verbs in L1 writing compared with L2 writing was also found by Vogel (2012, 80).

(14) *First, Saez (2002)* ***has suggested*** *a positive correlation between labor productivities and savings propensities.* (L1-expert)

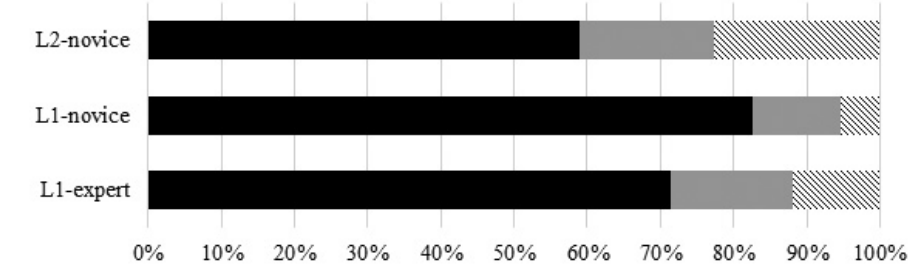
5.2.1.4 The Structural Patterns

The pattern occurring most frequently in all three corpora is '(S)-V-clause' (ex. 15a). As Figure 1 shows, the prevalence of this pattern is the weakest in L2-novice academic writing. This seems to be related to the representation of the three verbs in the pattern: compared to L1 writers, Czech students tend to use the pattern with the verb *argue* to the same extent, but underuse it with the verbs *find* and *suggest*, preferring patterns with a noun phrase complementation instead ('(S)-V-NP', ex. 15b). It is interesting that L1 novice writers use the pattern '(S)-V-clause' the most of all three groups. This could be due to its status of the prototypical reporting pattern, which L1 students seem to be aware of, and overuse the pattern as a marker of the academic register.

(15)a. *However,* ***Hitris and Posnett (1992) suggest that*** *parameters related to the financing and delivery of health care may have direct or indirect effects on national demand for health care,* [...]. (L1-novice)

b. *Blanden and Machin (2008) presented a study,* ***which found significant differences*** *between poor and rich children before they are influenced by any kind of institutional education.* (L2-novice)

The pattern '(S)-V-clause' is characterized by a clausal complementation of the reporting verb, the clause being a nominal clause in the syntactic position of an object, typically introduced by the complementizer *that* (ex. 16). *That* is occasionally omitted, i.e., the clause is linked to the verb asyndetically (ex. 17). Table 10 shows the distribution of these two subtypes.



	L1-expert	L1-novice	L2-novice
■ (S)-V-clause	107	124	86
■ (S)-V-NP	25	18	27
▨ Other	18	8	33

Figure 1. Pattern competition – the representation of the most frequent patterns '(S)-V-clause' and '(S)-V-NP' in the three corpora, compared to all the other patterns.

Table 10. '(S)-V-clause' subtypes.

Pattern	L1-expert		L1-novice		L2-novice		Total
(S)-V-***that***-clause	103	96%	113	91%	77	89%	293
(S)-V-clause **asyndetic**	4	4%	11	9%	9	11%	24
Total	**107**	**100%**	**124**	**100%**	**86**	**100%**	**317**

The analysis shows that the omission of *that* is limited to *argue* and *suggest.* Although the clauses with *that* clearly outnumber the asyndetic ones, our data reveal a greater tendency to omit *that* by novice writers, both L2 (nine instances) and L1 (11 instances), while there are only four instances of omitted *that* by L1-expert writers. Since the complementizer *that* is frequently omitted in informal speech (cf. Quirk et al. 1985, 1049), our results indicate that learners' writing is influenced by informal, spoken-like features, as pointed out by Gilquin and Paquot (2008, 45) or Hasselgård (2015, 172).

The syntactic pattern '(S)-V-clause' comprises not only finite, but also non-finite reporting verbs in the active voice complemented by a *that*-clause. In all three corpora, sentences containing a finite reporting verb with the subject (ex. 16–17) are far more frequent (293 instances) than the subjectless ones (i.e., those displaying a non-finite reporting verb; 24 instances, ex. 18).[16]

(16) ***McLaren (2002) argues that*** *voters do not necessarily perceive EU membership through the cost-benefit analysis or the utilitarian model generally but are concerned about their nationstate*. (L2-novice)

(17) ***Dinan (2007*, *1122) argues*** *a weak West Germany meant a weak Western Europe against the growing Soviet Bloc…* (L1-novice)

(18) ***Jovanović (2002*, *6)*** *summarizes these goals,* ***suggesting that*** *perhaps most important was the maintenance of peace*. (L2-novice)

In addition, L2 users also use the phrasal verb *find out* instead of the more appropriate *find* (ex. 19).

(19) *Green et al. (2015)* ***found out*** *that the Rohingya had suffered first four stages of genocide out of six, that were outlined by Daniel Feierstein* (L2-novice)

Leaving the pattern '(S)-V-clause' aside, Figure 2 shows the representation of the other patterns in our data. Being used as a threshold value, the frequencies in the L1-expert articles are depicted as a line; the vertical bars indicate over- and underuse of the patterns by novice academic writers.

The second most frequent syntactic pattern is '(S)-V-NP', attested only with the verbs *find* (in most cases) and *suggest*. Whereas the L1-expert and L2-novice corpora contain a similar number of instances of this pattern (25 and 27 instances, respectively), L1 novice writers seem to use this pattern less frequently (18 instances), preferring the pattern with

[16] In our data, no non-finite reporting verbs with an overt subject were attested in the pattern with clausal complementation.

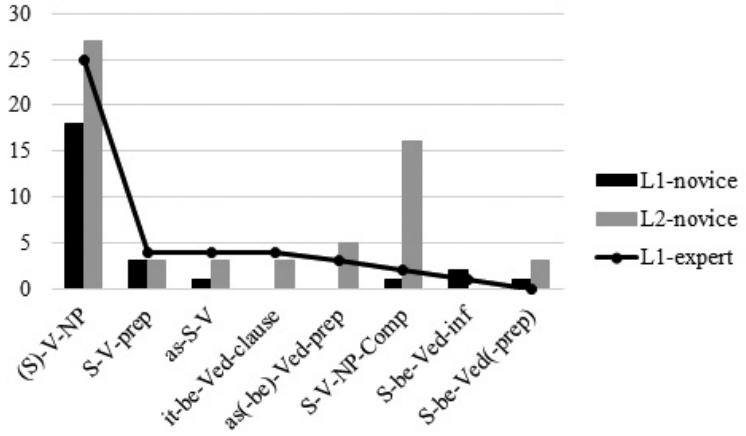


Figure 2. Over- and underuse of reporting patterns (except the '(S)-V-clause' pattern) with the verbs *argue*, *find* and *suggest* by novice academic writers (compared to L1-expert writers).

clausal complementation instead. In the L1-expert corpus, the '(S)-V-NP' pattern is strongly associated with the verb *find* (20 instances; ex. 20). Novice writers, on the other hand, especially L2 writers, use the pattern with both *find* and *suggest* (8 instances with *suggest* in L1-novice and 15 in L2-novice corpora; ex. 21).

(20) *Jha (2015) […] fails to* ***find support*** *for Tawney's secondary claims about the gentry's role in the English Civil War…* (L1-expert)

(21) *Becker* ***suggests the use*** *of alternative punishment for the non-violent criminals…* (L2-novice)

As mentioned above, L1 novice writers were found to avoid the impersonal pattern '*it-be*-V-*ed*-clause' (ex. 22). They also seem reluctant to use the *as*-patterns (ex. 23). Compared to L1 expert writers, L2 novice writers overuse two types of patterns: 'S-V-NP-Comp' and 'S-*be*-V-*ed*(-prep)'. With 16 tokens, the former pattern is the third most frequent pattern used by the Czech students (ex. 24). The Czech equivalent of the construction ("*shledávat něco nějakým*") is strongly associated with formal style,[17] which may lead L2 novice writers to employ the corresponding English pattern as an academic register marker. The 'S-V-NP-Comp' pattern only occurs with the verb *find* in both L2-novice theses and L1-expert articles. The pattern 'S-*be*-V-*ed*(-prep)' (ex. 25) is generally infrequent, and not limited to a single verb (although it does not occur with *argue*). The prepositional phrase specifies the author or source of the information reported.

(22) *In fact,* ***it has been argued that*** *worker board representatives are typically moderate actors and that minority board representation itself may have contributed to overall more cooperative labor relations in Germany (Thelen 1991).* (L1-expert)

[17] Cf. the relative frequency of the verb *shledat* in Czech academic texts (13.31 per million words), newspaper reporting (6.97 per million words) and spoken texts (0.16 per million words) in the corpora *SYN2015* and *ORAL_v1*, available from http://www.korpus.cz (accessed November 24, 2022).

(23) *Logarithmic transformation approximates the growth rate of wages* ***as is suggested by*** *Mincer (1974).* (L2-novice)

(24) *Moreover,* ***the author finds the topic and its goal adequately relevant*** *for the present and utterly crucial for the future due to the actual situation*. (L2-novice)

(25) *Same conclusion* ***can be found in*** *a work done by Barro and Redlick (2011)*. (L2-novice)

5.2.2 *Say* and *Note*

5.2.2.1 *Say*

The verb *say* is overused by L2 novice writers, which is in line with Granger and Paquot (2015, 32), who note that L2 writers "tend to resort to 'conversational verbs', […] characteristic of informal speech". If expert L1 writers use the verb at all, it is always to introduce (at least partial) direct quotation, marked by inverted commas (ex. 26). In L1-novice theses, *say* is used in the same way in five out of the eight occurrences of the verb. Czech students not only use the verb *say* more frequently (28 times), but also employ it in a wide variety of patterns, often with non-human subjects[18] (ex. 27). Direct quotes introduced by *say* are rare in L2-novice essays (3 instances).

(26) *Stigler* ***said "no"*** *to the first question because the likely result of a minimum wage would be the discharge of* ***"workers whose services are worth less than the minimum wage."*** (L1-expert)

(27) *The* ***theory says****, that once we know the costs and the demand for certain goods, the firm can then set the appropriate price (Bain 1942).* (L2-novice)[19]

As shown in Table 11, Czech students use the verb *say* both in active and in passive patterns. Example 28 illustrates the tendency of Czech students to employ the passive as a means of impersonal generalized expression. This pattern with the anticipatory *it*, a modal verb and a passive verb was found to be used frequently as a means of hedging (cf. impersonal stance bundles in Biber, Conrad and Cortes 2004, 389; Hyland 2008, 18), as these structures "largely convey a reluctance to express complete commitment to a proposition, allowing writers to present information as an opinion rather than accredited fact" (Hyland 2008, 18).

(28) *Overall,* ***it can be said that*** *there is an increasing trend to buy French products in all industries (Escadrille, 2019).* (L2-novice)

For Czech learners, the pattern '*it-be*-V-*ed*-clause', illustrated by ex. (28), appears to be the kind of pattern referred to as a "phraseological teddy bear" by Hasselgård (2019, 340), i.e., a pattern which appears to be "familiar and unobjectionable" to the learners,[20] "a multi-word unit that learners use more frequently and in more contexts than native speakers do."

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[18] Out of the 28 instances of the verb in the L2-novice data, the verb *say* is used with a non-human subject nine times (32.1%). L1 novice and expert writers were not found to use *say* with non-human subjects.

[19] The comma following the verb *say* is a frequent mistake of Czech writers; a negative transfer from Czech, where a *that*-clause has to be separated from the reporting verb by a comma.

[20] The popularity of the pattern '*it-be*-V-*ed*-clause' with Czech learners can also be influenced by the corresponding Czech impersonal pattern with a clausal subject in post-verbal position ("*dá se říci, že …*" – "*can be said that…*").

Table 11. The patterns of the verb *say*.

Pattern	L1-expert	L1-novice	L2-novice	Total
(S)-V-clause/quote/NP	4	8	22	33
it-be-V*ed*-clause			3	3
as(-*be*)-V*ed*-prep			1	1
there-be-V*ed*-inf			1	1
as-S-V			1	1
Total	**4**	**8**	**28**	**40**

5.2.2.2 *Note*

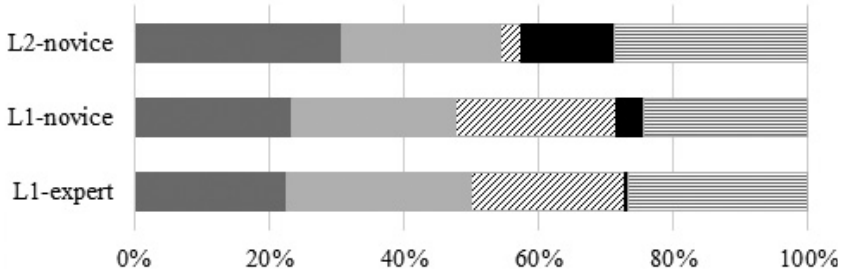
As shown by Hyland (2002, 121), the verb *note* is used to "signal a supportive role for the reported information in the writer's argument, often by attributing a high degree of confidence to the proposition by the original author." This is perhaps why *note* is often used to report facts supported by quantitative data, stressing the reliability and objectivity of the author's findings (ex. 29). The verb is underused by L2 novice writers in comparison with L1 writers. Both groups of L1 writers display the same preference for the active patterns '(S)-V-clause' and '(S)-V-NP' with the writer construed as the subject (ex. 30 and 31). The dependent clause is always introduced by *that*. While L1 novice writers generally use the verb *note* in the present tense, L1 expert writers employ the past tense to a larger extent (34% of finite *note*-clauses). This may be explained by Shaw's (1992, 316) observation that "past-tense verbs are generally associated with content which is supporting detail for a higher-level statement", which could suggest a more intricate structure of argumentation in expert articles, but the sample is too small to allow much generalization.

(29) *Housewife home production hours have fallen by about 11 percent between the 1920s and 2010 – and Ramey (2009)* ***notes*** *even larger declines among all women.* (L1-expert)

(30) *Bajpai and Dholakia (2011)* ***note that*** *ASHAs rarely performed outreach to smaller hamlets or villages, because of the higher cost of traveling to these villages.* (L1-novice)

(31) *Tawney* ***noted the emergence*** *of a class of commercialized farmers in the sixteenth and seventeenth century who rose relative to other groups in society (see Table I; Coss 2005 on the origins of the English gentry).* (L1-expert)

The underuse of the verb *note* by Czech learners seems to be related to the reporting verbs each group of writers prefers to use in the most frequent reporting patterns, '(S)-V-clause' and '(S)-V-NP'. As illustrated in Figure 3, the verbs *argue*, *find*, *note* and *suggest* are distributed evenly in these patterns in the texts written by L1 writers. Czech students, on the other hand, overuse two discourse-act verbs, representing the opposite poles of "doubt" and "assurance" (Hyland 2002, 121), namely the tentative verb *suggest*, and the verb *argue* "attributing a high degree of confidence to the proposition by the original author" (Hyland 2002, 121). L2 novice writers are also the only group to use the verb *say* extensively in these patterns.



	L1-expert	L1-novice	L2-novice
argue	23%	23%	31%
find	27%	24%	24%
note	23%	24%	3%
say	1%	4%	14%
suggest	27%	24%	29%

Figure 3. The representation of verbs in the two most frequent reporting patterns '(S)-V-clause' and '(S)-V-NP'.

6 Conclusion

When writing their first extensive academic works, Czech university students have to face several types of challenge: like all novice academic writers, they have to manifest good knowledge of the practices of the academic discourse community which they are joining. For Czech novice academic writers this is further complicated by the fact that not only is the language of the community different from their mother tongue, but they may also find the Anglophone academic epistemological and literacy conventions different from the traditional Czech ones. Since referring to the findings and ideas of others lies at the centre of the academic knowledge construction and presentation, it is likely to reflect all these factors.

Before focusing on the differences, however, let us note that similarities among the groups prevail. In their choice of reporting verbs and patterns, all academic writers represented in our dataset display to some extent awareness of the "communicative and institutional purposes" of the register (cf., for instance, the high representation of verbs referring to research acts in all three corpora, in line with the inductive research orientation of the discipline of economics, or the preference for the active pattern '(S)-V-clause'), and the "ideational interests and interpersonal practices" of their academic discourse community (Groom 2005, 258), manifested, e.g., in the avoidance of the explicit expression of stance by the reporting verb.

Novice writers, both L1 and L2, were shown to rely on patterns associated with informal, conversational rather than academic style, such as the omission of the conjunction *that* linking the reporting verb to its clausal complement. By the same token, novice writers, in comparison with L1 expert academics, tend to overuse verbs referring to discourse acts, and underuse research-act oriented verbs peculiar to the academic domain. Novice writers often employ non-evaluative verbs *state*, *focus on*, *conclude*, which allow them to refrain from interpreting the reported information.

As mentioned above, for L2 Czech students the stylistically appropriate choice of the reporting verb and a particular reporting pattern is further complicated by their not being native English speakers. Obviously, the impact of Czech can be seen in the negative lexical transfer, which may be illustrated by the reporting pattern *come with something*, a verbatim translation counterpart of the Czech pattern "*přijít s něčím*". More subtle manifestations of the EFL challenge can be sought in the preferences for particular reporting patterns with particular verbs. Czech learners, for instance, rely on nominal complementation of the verb *suggest* to a larger extent than L1 novice and expert writers, who prefer clausal complementation. Taking the individual patterns as the starting point, we can observe that L1 expert and novice writers use the pattern '(S)-V-clause' with all the verbs *argue*, *find*, *note* and *suggest*; L2 novice writers use it mostly with *argue*, but to a much lesser extent with the other verbs, preferring the non-academic reporting verb *say* instead. The verb *say* is generally overused by the L2 writers. There are also two patterns which occur predominantly in L2 novice theses, viz. 'S-*be*-V*ed*(-prep)' and 'S-V-NP-Comp', the latter being restricted to the verb *find*.

L2 novice writers were shown to stick to practices and patterns which they find familiar. This overgeneralization results in the Czech learners' using animate human subjects not only with the same verbs as L1 writers (*argue*, *find*), but extending this as a rule to other reporting verbs (*suggest*). Similarly, L2-novice writers appear to overuse the past tense of reporting verbs, perhaps applying their general knowledge of the English tense system, with the preterite used to report past events, rather than the more specific disciplinary conventions.

The last factor which influences the choice of particular reporting patterns is perhaps the most challenging not only for L2 novice writers, but also for their teachers, who should draw the students' attention to the fact that the Anglophone academic discourse community they are about to enter draws on different, more reader-oriented conventions. For Czech novice academic writers this may mean, for instance, refraining from some of the impersonal and passive reporting patterns, and generally increasing the degree of attribution to other authors in their academic texts.

Our findings complement the existing research on the use of reporting verbs by Czech writers (Dontcheva-Navratilova 2014; Jarkovská and Kučírková 2021) by comparing Czech writers to both L1 novice and L1 expert writers. In the present paper, we hope to have highlighted the importance of raising students' awareness of appropriate academic reporting as one of the skills needed for them to accommodate themselves to the conventions of English as the academic *lingua franca*. As a suggestion for further research, it would be beneficial if future studies could focus contrastively on how Czech learners use reporting verbs in English and in Czech in order to reveal the potential interference of L1.

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