Are phraseological teddy bears discipline-specific? A corpus analysis of academic phraseology used by Romanian learners of English

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Studies investigating the academic writing produced by learners of English suggest that non-native speakers use a limited number of recurrent word combinations (Ädel and Erman, 2012). At the same time, learners exhibit a tendency to over-rely on certain phraseological expressions that they feel confident to use, i.e. "phraseological teddy bears", (Hasselgård, 2019). Such linguistic behaviour could impact the quality of the texts written by L2 novice writers, since mastering the recurrent phraseological units typical of a "specific academic register and discipline" is fundamental (Ädel and Erman, 2012, p. 81). Additionally, previous research informs that lexical bundles vary significantly across disciplines (Hyland, 2008). Thus, the aim of the present study is to assess whether and how "phraseological teddy bears" differ across disciplines. We verify our hypotheses by analysing a corpus of English L2 texts written by the Romanian students. Our method involves the comparison of the most frequent 3 and 4-word lexical bundles in two different disciplines (Computer Science and Literary Studies) from two corpora that contain university student writing in English, namely the new Romanian Genre Corpus / ROGER (Bercuci & Chitez, 2019, p. 737) and the native-speaker academic writing corpus BAWE (Gardner and Nesi, 2013). We propose a double contrastive approach: first, we contrast the results from the two disciplines, Computer Science and Literary Studies, representing sub-sets of ROGER and second, the most frequent lexical bundles produced by learners are compared with the native speaker phrases extracted from the corresponding BAWE disciplinary sub-sets (e.g. Computer Science and English). We argue that this type of analysis can prove useful for identifying the restricted repertoire of L2 writers as opposed to native novice writers and it can be the starting point of a research-informed pedagogic intervention in L2 writing.