



FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

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Trabajo de Fin de Grado

Analysis of Projection between
Professionals and Non-professionals in
an Academic Context

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at reporting the findings of a comparative analysis of projection between professionals and non-professionals writers in an academic context. The research focuses on how non-native English students, who are about to leave university, project information, when compared to professionals in the fields of Economics and Business. In order to analyse this, two corpora have been compiled and processed through AntConc software: novice and professional corpus. Following the projection model proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), an analysis was carried out comparing *locutions* and *ideas* and then *facts* that were subdivided into two categories to describe with greater delicacy the data: 'fact it' and 'embedding'. A second analysis was carried out in which the textual metafunction was studied. This research can be of interest to those students who seek to obtain a foothold in the academic world or to teachers of English for Academic Purposes.

KEYWORDS: Systemic Functional Grammar, projection, *locution*, *idea*, *fact*, embedded projection, academic discourse, novice writers, professional writers, Theme.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este estudio es el de informar sobre los resultados obtenidos en un análisis comparativo sobre la proyección entre los escritores profesionales y no profesionales en un contexto académico. La investigación se centra en cómo los estudiantes no nativos de inglés, que están a punto de abandonar la universidad, proyectan información en comparación con los profesionales en los campos de Economía y Negocios. Para ello, se han compilado dos corpora y se han procesado a través del software de AntConc: corpus de principiantes y de profesionales. Siguiendo el modelo de proyección de Halliday y Matthiessen (2004), se procedió a un análisis

donde se compararon, en primer lugar, las *locutions* y *ideas* y después, los *facts* que se subdividieron en dos categorías para describir los datos con mayor precisión: 'fact it' and 'embedding.' Se procedió a un segundo análisis donde se estudió la metafunción textual. Este estudio puede ser de interés para aquellos estudiantes que buscan entrar en el mundo académico o para profesores de Inglés para fines académicos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Gramática sistémico funcional, proyección, *locution*, *idea*, *fact*, embedded projection, discurso académico, escritores inexpertos, escritores profesionales

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Theoretical Framework.....	2
3. Methodology.....	6
4. Analysis.....	8
4.1 Projection analysis.....	8
4.2 Theme Analysis.....	10
5. Conclusion.....	12

1. Introduction

Writing an academic text is usually not an easy task for those students who, besides facing the creation of a text, must face the barriers that arise when having to express in a language that is not their native one. To eliminate these barriers, these students typically look at professional's texts and take them as models. Therefore, it seems necessary and useful, as Hewings and Hewings propose, "small-scale corpus investigation, comparing student writing with that of the published writing to which they are encouraged to aspire" (382) to observe which are the most common problems in novice writing and propose efficient solutions.

This small-scale research will focus on comparing how novice and professional writers express and evaluate ideas from other authors without losing objectivity. On the one hand, I have decided to apply a Systemic Functional Grammar (henceforward SFG) approach that takes into account the different options that the writer has and what s/he wants to achieve by constructing the message in one way or another. Therefore, it has been decided to use projection as a perfect method for the study of projection and evaluation of others' ideas. On the other hand, the knowledge acquired in Corpus Linguistics has allowed me to compile two corpora for my research as well as the labelling and subsequent processing through AntConc to get the necessary data for the comparison. In this way, both subjects have been combined to achieve the qualitative and quantitative approach of this research.

This study does not only seek to study the phenomenon of projection but also to help all those students who seek to improve their writing and, possibly, want to publish their works in a near future. For all this, it has been decided, first, to explain the key concepts for this study. Then, section 3 discusses the methodology that has been followed explaining the corpora used and the cases that have been taken into account. In

section 4 results have been presented and, lastly, a conclusion with some suggestions, hopefully, useful for students and teachers is presented.

2. Theoretical Framework

When analysing a text many options are presented as a unit of analysis. SFG will use the clause as a unit of analysis since in it we can see how the various metafunctions interact and make meaning. According to Thompson, a clause is "potentially any stretch of language centred around a verbal group" (17). Although this is the most comfortable unit to work with, we cannot forget other units traditionally used as the sentence. In Halliday and Matthiessen's words, it is a sequence of words that begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop (6).

[1] My car is white.

[2] I have a brother and his name is Ben.

Both examples are sentences but nevertheless, [2] is composed of two clauses which are related by coordination. This leads to the following concept of clause complex, which moves our attention above the clause.

Just as words combine into clauses, clauses can be combined to make complex units of meaning named clause complexes.

[3] I would like to go but I cannot.

[4] I do not know what to do.

Here we have two sentences composed of two clauses related through the conjunction which marks the relations of interdependence existing between them. Hence, a clause complex can be defined as "a combination of two or more clauses into a larger unit, with their interdependence normally shown by explicit signals such as conjunctions" (Thompson, 186). Within this complex unit of meaning two types of relationships can

be studied in combination to achieve a complete analysis: taxis and logico-semantic relation (Halliday and Matthiessen, 373).

Taxis, or degree of interdependency, will be the first relationship to be studied in depth. It tries to establish the relations of dependence existing between the different clauses of a clause complex, in other words, to find out if the clauses have an equal status and have meaning on their own or if one clause depends on the other to complete its meaning. There will be two different relationships called parataxis and hypotaxis which will be explained through the examples mentioned above: [3] is a clear example of parataxis since the clause complex is made up of two elements of equal status which can function independently. On the other hand, [4] is an example of hypotaxis since we find one clause that needs another clause to be understood. Therefore, one clause is dominant over the other (Halliday and Matthiessen, 384-5). Once these two relationships are clarified, it is necessary to include and explain a concept, sometimes confusing but useful to this analysis, embedding.

Embedding is a resource that is different from what has been explained before as it does not constitute clause complexes. While taxis establishes relations between clauses, embedding is a way of expanding a unit with the inclusion of a unit of equal or greater rank (Thompson, 24). As Halliday and Matthiessen point out, "embedding is a semogenic mechanism whereby a clause or phrase comes to function as a constituent within the structure of a group, which itself is a constituent of a clause" (426). Thus,

[5] The fact that you have lied worries me.

in this sentence, we see there are two clauses but it cannot be defined as a clause complex since there is no direct relation between them. The embedded clause is within the nominal group functioning as Postmodifier. Normally, these embedded clauses will

function as Postmodifier or Head of nominal groups. This structure will be significant when talking about *facts*.

Besides taxis, clauses can be united by the logico-semantic relations, in which we find two types: expansion and projection. The former means that the second clause, somehow, expands the information of the first clause (Halliday and Matthiessen, 377). Through the following examples, we will see three distinct ways of expanding information:

[6] I worked as a secretary last summer, in other words, I helped with
the paperwork.

[7] Sam likes dogs but I prefer cats.

[8] If I had money, I would go.

[6] shows expansion of information through elaboration, the second clause describes the secretarial work. The second clause of [7] extends the information that appears in the first one. Lastly, [8] shows an enhancing of the information since a condition appears in the dependent clause. On the other hand, projection, as Thompson defines it, is when “one clause projects another in the sense that it indicates that the other clause is a ‘second-order’ use of language” (193-4). An essential element of this definition is “second order of language” which means that the projected clause will reflect the thoughts or words that someone previously thought or said. In the same way that there are different modes of expansion, we can find three modes of projection that will be explained next.

Firstly, we find the projection that is realized through projecting processes, verbal or mental processes.

[9] Tom said: "We will arrive early."

[10] Sally thought she would be able to do it.

Due to these examples, we are able to observe that these projections can be formed by parataxis as [9] or hypotaxis as [10]. When parataxis is used, it will be called quote whereas when hypotaxis is used, it will be called report (Halliday and Matthiessen, 443). It is important to point out that projections of mental or verbal processes can be construed using both forms of taxis. To make a differentiation possible, a projected mental event will be called *idea* as in [10] and a projected verbal event will be called *locution* as in [9] (Thompson, 2002). Finally, we must point out that within this group we also find projection through embedding as:

[11] His decision to come surprised us.

Therefore, the projecting element will not be a verb but a noun and the projected element, the Postmodifier (Halliday and Matthiessen, 467).

These structures lead us directly to explain *facts*, the other case of projection. They can be defined as "an embedded projection where no Sayer or Senser is involved" (Thompson, 205).

[12] There is evidence that shows what I have said before.

In this way, we can say that *facts* are usually Postmodifiers of an abstract noun such as 'evidence' that has nothing to do with projecting processes. Jiang and Hyland refer to these with the name of metadiscursive nouns where he includes *embedded ideas*, *locutions* and *facts*. In addition, there is another type of *fact* easier to recognize which is construed either with the anticipatory 'it' and the inclusion of an adjective or through the impersonal passive construction. The former is called 'evaluative that constructions' by Hyland and Tse due to the appearance of an opinion (43).

[13] It is clear that you are wrong.

[14] It is said that he has failed the exam again.

Finally, to complete the previous analysis, it has been decided to use another parameter, the textual metafunction, in which the clause is analysed as a message. In the textual metafunction the clause is divided into Theme and Rheme. While Halliday and Matthiessen define Theme as "the element which serves as the point of departure of the message, which is what locates and orients the clause within its context" (64), Rheme would be everything else that conforms the clause. It seems important to mention that normally these analyses are performed considering only the clause but here the clause complex will be used as the unit of analysis. Therefore, it will be necessary to explain some special cases.

Following Thompson's model, we find several types of special thematic structures: Thematic Equatives, Predicated Themes, Thematised Comments and Preposed Themes. Of all of them, only the in-depth explanation of Thematised Comment, not included in Halliday and Matthiessen's explanation, will be needed. Thematised Comments are "another special thematic structure [that] allows speakers to start their message with their own comment on the value or validity of what they are about to say" (Thompson, 156). As we shall see shortly after, both professionals and non-professionals will use this structure moderately.

3. Methodology

For the following analysis, I have proceeded to the compilation of two corpora: novice and professional corpus. The first one is composed of a 36,000-words sample of texts from two different subjects, Economics and Business, written by non-professionals. These texts have been selected from the British Academic Written English (BAWE) corpus which contains 2761 pieces of proficient assessed student writing of four disciplinary areas (Arts and Humanities, Social Science, Life Science

and Physical Science) which are distributed across four levels of study (undergraduate and taught masters level) (Warwick). The selection has been made following two requirements, been classified as level 3-4 which corresponds to the last undergraduate year or to the master's courses and being a non-native English speaker due to the fact that this study is intended to help those non-native English students who are about to leave university and who might seek for a foothold in the academic world.

On the other hand, the second corpus, which contains 40,000 words, consists of a series of texts related to Economics or Business written by professionals and published, usually in journals. At the time of making this corpus, the decision to eliminate the abstracts was made since what is of interest to the research is how information is projected within the essay, not the author's description and summary of his own text. In addition, as it is published material the mother tongue of the writers is not taken into account due to the expected proficiency of English.

Before proceeding to the analysis, it is necessary to make some clarifications. Firstly, it has been considered as a unit of study all clause complexes that both project in some way and have a projecting element such as a verb; by doing so, it will not be analysed those that even though they have a formal element indicating projection as inverted commas, it is not preceded by a projecting element:

[15] Thereout, the employer is able to 'warn his customers . . . or left without supervision.'

In addition, it has not been examined as projection, clauses that are followed by a nominalization or similar.

On the other hand, with 'anticipatory it facts', it has been taken into account all cases that somehow include an evaluative element, either an adjective or a noun, and also those sentences that Halliday consider impersonal as "It is said. . ." Finally, I have

decided to join in a group with the name of ‘embedding’ all cases of *embedded locutions, ideas and facts* owing to the fact that despite having some greater differences, they all are constructed in a similar way.

Applying all of the above, 602 cases of projection have been found in novice corpus whereas professional corpus has 512 cases of projection.

4. Analysis

4.1 Projection analysis

Broadly speaking, with the few data we already know, it could be said that students project more in their academic texts. This could be due to the need to use others’ ideas to support their own and make a good and credible work. As Hewings and Hewings suggest, these students feel the need to convince readers that they are creating a text that contributes significantly to the academic world (381). However, this simplistic analysis does not seem sufficient and therefore the different cases of projection will be compared.

	NOVICE	PROFESSIONALS
LOCUTION	28,24%	20,31%
IDEA	33,55%	44,34%
TOTAL	61,79%	64,65%

Table 1. Projection through projecting processes

Table 1 shows a great similarity between both writings in projection through projecting processes. However, certain differences are perceived when comparing locutions and ideas. While professionals show a clear preference for *ideas*, novice writers will prefer *locutions*. Therefore, professionals move on a more mental sphere where they employ verbs which mark the attitude they take with respect to the information (Hyland, 8).

Regarding taxis, it has been proven that both novice and professional writers have decided to build their complex clause through hypotaxis. These results are surprising because, as Hyland points out, non-native students often overuse direct quotation (11), but we must not forget that these texts are from students who are about to leave university and through their learning process have improved their Academic English although it is obvious that they could improve some aspects of their writing.

	NOVICE	PROFESSIONALS
FACT IT	22,26%	16,21%
EMBEDDING	15,95%	19,14%
TOTAL	38,21%	35,35%

Table 2. Projection through *facts*

Another aspect that has been studied in depth and where I have found significant differences are *facts*. Beginning with 'fact it', as shown in Table 2, students use these structures in greater proportion. These results would be in line with the results of Hewings and Hewings who emphasized that there is not a qualitative but quantitative difference (374). In other words, both authors will have the same purpose when using this structure, that is, besides evaluating information, impersonalizing others' ideas but students will overuse this construction. Thus, at the time of the creation of the text, authors must decide whether to construct the ideas of others through projecting processes or through impersonalization. It seems that students prefer to impersonalize and give more importance to the message.

Within this group, I should highlight a structure that, remarkably, only occurs in professional economic texts. Typically, these structures are constructed by a relational process, that is, by 'to be'; however, professional economists will decide to modify it and construct the clause through a causative structure using 'to make'. Novice

economist writers should pay attention to this structure and include it in their writing to make it more similar to the professional.

	NOVICE	PROFESSIONALS
EMBEDDED LOCUTION	10,42%	9,18%
EMBEDDED IDEA	20,83%	13,27%
EMBEDDED FACT	68,75%	77,55%
TOTAL	100%	100%

Table 3. Embedding

If students employ 'fact it' in greater proportion, professionals construe their message through embedding to a greater extent. Through Table 3, it is perceived that although there are significant differences, students are on the right way to achieve a professional academic writing. While students use embedded locutions and ideas most notably, professionals use embedded facts to a greater extent. This may be because students have fully understood that their discipline is based on the projection of ideas as "explicit interpretation, speculation, and complexity [which] are more commonly accepted as legitimate routes to understanding" (Jiang and Hyland, 15); however, they have not fully understood that fact nouns are quite useful in their writings especially when it comes to establishing a framework and contextualizing (Jiang and Hyland, 13).

4.2 Theme analysis

Four recurring forms in terms of the construction of a clause as message have been studied. First, with respect to projection through projecting processes, authors usually decide between two options: Unmarked Theme or Multiple Theme.

	NOVICE	PROFESSIONALS
MULTIPLE THEME	42,35%	33,65%
UNMARKED THEME HUMAN	21,18%	20,19%
UNMARKED THEME OBJECT	20,59%	30,77%

Table 4. Theme in *locutions* and *ideas*

Hyland and Tse have been interested in the subjects who perform the different verbal processes they studied in their research. In fact, they found that it was usually preferred to use abstract rather than human subjects as writers viewed risky to select human subjects; abstract subjects enable them to create distance with the author and his ideas. This research, although it is centered in the study of Theme, has been able to corroborate these results when the Theme coincides with the subject of the clause complex. As Table 4 reflects, professionals prefer to use 'Unmarked Theme Object' while students prefer to use 'Unmarked Theme Human.' Students show a very similar percentage in the use of both Unmarked Theme so it seems that they are imitating the professionals and leaving behind their old way of writing that, surely, used in a greater proportion human subjects as it was what they had learnt and felt secure with it.

On the other hand, the use of Multiple Theme is remarkable in both corpora but most notably in the novice one. These are constructed by two elements where normally, the former belongs to the textual metafunction while the latter forms part of the experiential metafunction, either a Subject or Circumstance. Through this Theme, authors attempt to achieve a clear form of organization that will make the text coherent and cohesive. In addition, it facilitates the reading and contextualizes the information that will be the central element of the clause meaning.

Regarding 'fact it', it may seem unnecessary to analyse Theme since in all cases Theme would be 'it'. However, it might be very useful to understand why authors construct their clauses using *facts*. In these constructions, Theme is not only 'it' but also the entire clause that projects information, in other words, Theme would be the whole clause that projects the information where it is included either the verb in the impersonal passive or the adjective in the 'evaluative that constructions.' This type of Theme is what Thompson called Thematised Comment. This structure is very versatile

since it allows the inclusion of any adjective or similar structure that evaluates in some way the given information and, in addition, helps the writer to evaluate the information s/he gives and guides the reader about the position s/he should take regarding that information.

	NOVICE	PROFESSIONALS
EMBEDDED FACT AS RHEME	39,39%	43,42%
EMBEDDED FACT AS THEME	3,03%	3,95%

Table 5. 'Embedded Facts' and Theme

Finally, I will finish with 'embedded fact' which seems pointless to analyse since they can be anywhere in the clause and this would not provide us with interesting information. However, when analysing, it has turned out to be quite interesting especially when Theme coincides with the noun of fact. As we see in Table 5, this happens quite frequently in both corpora and with hardly any difference. What is interesting, however, is not the frequency but the structure that follows the construction of these *facts*. As previously mentioned, 'embedded facts' usually function as noun's Postmodifier but through analysis, only about a 3% follows this structure. Therefore, novice and professional authors will prefer that the embedded clause do not work as Postmodifier but as a participant of a relational process, thus, the noun of fact, which is the Theme, will have to be completed by the Rheme, formed by the embedded. It is outstanding that many times an evaluation element is included in the Theme, so the author comments on the packaged information and, as with 'fact it', guides the reader to take a certain position regarding the given information.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research looked at how novice writers who are about to leave university write when compared to professional writers, paying special attention to how

they project and evaluate information. After a theoretical explanation where important concepts as projection and its different types and a clarification of the methodology used have been clarified, I have proceeded to present the obtained results. Due to this, it has been acknowledged that both forms of writing are very similar although students should improve certain aspects of their writing if they want to write as professionals. As mentioned above, these students who are about to enter the professional world should get used to building their clauses through mental processes, reducing the number of times they employ 'fact it', and embedding should appear in greater proportion in their texts since it allows them to package information.

This study has intended to be of help to all students who are about to leave university and may feel a little insecure about how they write in a language that is not their native one. Therefore, I suggest that they use more *ideas* as their discipline usually moves in a mental sphere where they normally work on a situation and the hypothetical measures that could be taken. In addition, the excessive use of 'fact it' is not convenient since it makes their texts too dependent on others' ideas and leaves no space for their own ideas. As for embedding, although students already apply it in a similar way to professionals, they should apply it more as it is a perfect way to create a theoretical framework in a concise manner. Finally I would also recommend playing with language and exploring all the possibilities that are offered especially in the textual metafunction. As already shown, both writers usually play with several possibilities when choosing Theme so it is convenient to use more or less all equally to make the text varied and not heavy to read.

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