

*L2 NOMINALIZATION USE: A CORPUS-BASED INVESTIGATION INTO THE INTERPLAY OF L1 INFLUENCES, L2 PROFICIENCY, AND GENRE KNOWLEDGE.*

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## Context of Study

- Flowerdew (2006): nominalizations are problematic for learners – even for advanced learners
- Mature academic prose known to be nominalized (e.g., Biber, 1988; Biber et al., 1998; Halliday & Martin, 1993)
- Nominalization use in L2 texts positively correlates with ratings of L2 texts (Ferris, 1994; Grant & Ginther, 2000; Jarvis et al. 2003)
- Nominalization use increases with level of undergraduate study in L1 and L2 writing but also varies with genre and discipline (Baratta, 2010; Byrnes, 2009)

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## Data

- L2 writers found to use *fewer or as many* nominalizations compared to L1 writers (Hinkel, 2002; Van Rooy & Terblanche, 2009; Terblanche, 2009)
- **Yet**, still unclear what exactly the frequency of nominalizations is a measure of:
  - register development?
  - language proficiency?
  - genre sensitivity?Also unclear is the degree to which *greater* nominalization use is a reliable indicator of *better* use?

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- To investigate these questions, we compare nominalization use in French and Spanish L1 learners of English as a foreign language and draw on two learner corpora:
  - the Longitudinal Database of Learner English (LONGDALE) for the French subcorpus: LONGDALE FR
  - the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE) for the Spanish subcorpus: ICLE SP

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## Truly vs. Pseudo/Quasi longitudinal learner corpora

- FR L1: LONGDALE FR: **truly longitudinal**
  - **same students** followed over a period of four years
  - data collection points selected for the present study: year 1 (argum.essays), year 3 (argum.essays), and year 4 (EAP paper in lit. or ling.=>genre difference)
- SP L1: ICLE SP: **pseudo/quasi longitudinal**
  - **different students** (but similar background and task)
  - proficiency levels: nr of years at university (// criterion for the French learners)
  - data collection points selected for the present study: year 1 (argum.essays), year 3 (argum.essays), and year 5 (argum.essays) (=> no possible genre effect for the 3rd collection point)

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## Research Questions

- How does **frequency of nominalizations** change in the students' writing from year to year?
- **How reliable is frequency of nominalizations** as an index of L2 academic writing development?
- **What does frequency of nominalizations appear to be an index of?**
  - Command of written academic register?
  - Language proficiency?
  - Genre sensitivity and genre knowledge?

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## Operational definition of nominalization

- **Within Systemic Functional Linguistics**
  - One of the main resources for **grammatical metaphor**
  - “the expression as a noun or noun phrase of what would more naturally in spoken interaction be presented in another form” (Schleppegrell, 2004, p. 72)
- **Biber**
  - surface features: all words ending in -tion, -ment, -ness, -ity plus plural forms (1988, p. 227); also -sion (1998, p. 63)
  - abstract nouns formed from verbs or adjectives through derivational morphology (Biber et al., 2002, p. 458)

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- **Here:**
  - 1) **derivation via suffixation** (Biber) : **-tion/sion, -ment, -ness, -ity, plus plural forms**
  - 2) + **abstraction** : **-ence/ance, -cy, -ism, -ship, -ure, -dom** (some suffixes excluded, such as -er as they are usually used to build concrete words – e.g. teacher, builder)
- Our definition of nominalizations: **“abstract nouns formed from verbs, adjectives, or (sometimes) concrete nouns through derivational morphology (including etymological derivatives)”**.

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## Method (1): Frequency analysis – 4 step approach

- Step 1: CLAWS 5 POS tagging (through *Wmatrix version 3*, Rayson 2003) → extraction of list of nouns
- Step 2: first selection of nouns containing the (fairly reliable) list of suffixes presented in the previous slide
- Step 3: selected nominalisations within the list of nouns obtained in 2 : e.g. treatment / cement
- Step 4: computed frequencies of NN\*, NOM, VV\*, VB\* and ratios of NN\*/Words, NN\*/VV\*, NN\*/VB\*, NOM/Words, NOM/NN\*

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## Method (2): Analysis of 'form'

- Form

CF (Correct Form)	<i>Aggressiveness, consumerism, ingenuity</i>
WF (Wrong Form)	<i>Aggressivity, consumism, ingenousness</i>

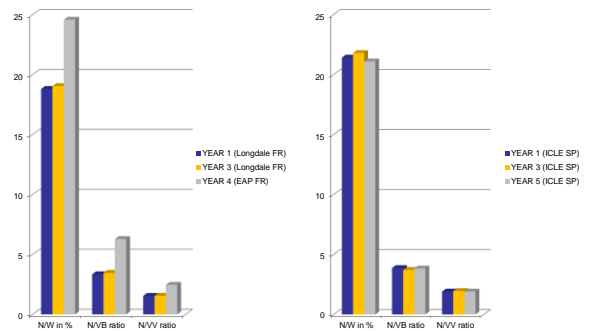
(accuracy in terms of lexical choice not taken into account here)

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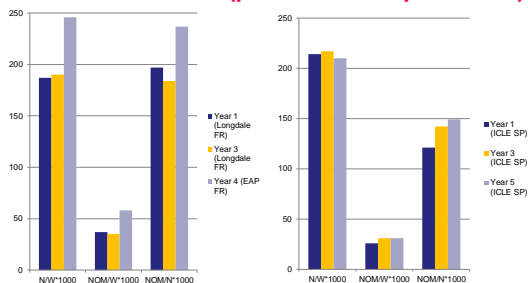
## RESULTS

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## Results: noun/word – noun/verb ratios



## Nominalizations (per Words and per Nouns)



## Nominalizations: Wrong Forms (per 100 nominalizations)

per 100 nominal.	Year 1	Year 3	Year 4/5
Wrong forms FRENCH L1	<u>5,24</u>	4,35	<u>0,08</u>
Wrong forms SPANISH L1	<u>10,4</u>	<u>4</u>	3,7

## Nominalisations per 1000 words – per suffix

	Year 1 FR	Year 1 SP	Year 3 FR	Year 3 SP	Year 4 (EAP) FR	Year 5 SP	Biber (1998)
-tion/-sion(s)	16.6	13.2	13.7	12.0	31.2	14.4	29.9
-ence/-ance(s)	6.2	3.3	6.3	3.6	6.5	2.4	
-ty(ies)	7.2	4.4	6.5	5.9	7.6	5.2	6.6 (-ity)
-ment(s)	2.0	1.9	2.3	3.6	4.3	4.0	6.6
-ness(esses)	1.5	1.7	1.5	1.0	0.9	1.4	0.9 (about 1.0)
-ism	0.5	0.82	0.3	0.8	1.7	0.7	
-ure	1.7	0.0	2.6	0.4	4.0	0.4	
-cy (-cies)	0.3	0.37	0.2	1.0	1.1	0.8	
-ship(s)	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.8	0.3	1.0	
-hood(s)	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.05	0.0	
-dom(s)	0.0	0.0	0.3	1.5	0.05	0.7	
All suffixes	36.7	25.9	35.0	30.8	58.3	31.0	

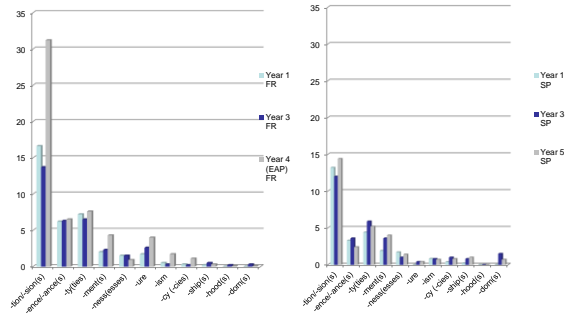
### Examples of wrong forms

- *cruality, cruauty, cruelty, crualty, poverty (poorness also found), responsibility, Humanality, Exhaustivity, inequalities, personnality, autorities*
- *Happyness, hapiness, habilities, hillnesses, lazyness, willness*
- *Advancement, advisement, changement, developpement, jugement, unemployment, fonctionnement, gouvernements*
- *Tendances, independance, survivance*
- *Mondialisation [globalization], propention [propensity]*

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### Nominalisations per 1000 words



## CONCLUDING REMARKS

- **Research question 1:**
- How does **frequency of nominalizations** change in the students' writing from year to year?
- Overall increase but not necessarily linear
- Clear differences depending on the L1

- **Research question 2:**
- **How reliable is frequency of nominalizations** as an index of L2 academic writing development?
- Relatively (but not fully) reliable – overall increase but
- Misuse (form) can be rather important (e.g.: 10% SP year 1)
- Genre (EAP paper) and task effect (ref tools or not)
- Need to test lexical choice (not done here)

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- **Research question 3:**
- **What does frequency of nominalizations appear to be an index of?**
  - Command of written academic register? **partly**
  - Language proficiency? **partly**
  - Genre sensitivity and genre knowledge? **partly** + role of explicit teaching (increase in the magnitude of frequency of nominalization – see FR corpus year 4 – EAP + writing conditions)

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### Nominalization use = a tricky indicator!

- Sensitive to the influence of register, genre, task conditions and explicit teaching
- Sensitive to the students' L1: L1 specific formation rules, L1 interdependent derivation principles and abstraction processes (probably with cultural-rhetorical preferences re. expected context of use and functions)
- Wrongly formed nominalizations might be a better indicator of second language proficiency

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### Future research

- More work on the correlation of nominalization use and other measures of language proficiency (lexical sophistication, grammatical accuracy, complexity, etc.) to tease out the genre effect from the proficiency effect more clearly
- Learner populations > individual learner approach (with a comparison between L2 and L1 proficiency levels)
- Possible transfer effects of the ability to use morphologically complex and semantically abstract concepts ('the deployment of grammatical metaphor', Liardét, 2013)

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**Thank you**

*(nice) comments and (easy) questions  
are most welcome*