

**Thinking Out of the Box  
in English Linguistics, Language Teaching,  
Translation and Terminology**

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*STANCE AND EVALUATIVE RESOURCES IN THE CONSTRUCTION AND  
NEGOTIATION OF AN ELF IDENTITY IN ESP CONTEXTS:  
A CORPUS-BASED GENRE ANALYSIS OF EURAM CONFERENCE  
PROCEEDINGS*

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The present study investigates how identity construction and representation in ELF contexts are enacted and conveyed in specific genres representative of given communities of practice. In line with previous research on issues of identity expression in academic genres, this investigation focuses on a corpus of papers published in the proceedings of the European Academy of Management (EURAM) International Conference in order to explore the way in which language mediates between the adherence to specific rules linked to the specialised language of Academic Discourse (more specifically, Business Academic English) and the expression of the inner world of a given individual. More precisely, the following corpus-based study focuses on the tension between the specialised community's expectations for members to display proximity and adherence to given rules and conventions, and the individual scholars' desire to claim their own agency and express their unique identity.

*Business Academic English, stance, evaluation, identity, genre analysis, corpus linguistics*

### *1. Introduction*

Identity has been traditionally seen as “a public phenomenon, a performance or a construction that is interpreted by other people” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 3). Such a construction does not occur in a void or as a prefixed series of traits but “takes place in discourse and other social embodied conduct” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 3; see also Balirano and Rasulo 2019). In

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other words, following Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 9), one's identity is "whatever it is agreed to be by other people involved in the discourse at a given time and place". Given this view, doing discourse and, more broadly, genre analysis is primarily investigating the seminal role that language plays in the enactment of a specific situated identity (Scollon 1997; Carranza 2000; Ainsworth and Hardy 2004; De Fina, Schiffrin, Bamberg 2006). In ESP contexts, an important focus for debate in the literature is represented by the intersection between identity and agency (see Berger and Luckmann 1966; Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1991), that is, the issues related to the extent to which individuals in given communities of practice are actually free to construct their own identity, and to the extent to which their discursively constructed identity is actually controlled by contextual forces and social structures (Gotti 2009; Flowerdew 2011; Hyland 2012a; Flowerdew and Wang 2015; Bhatia 2017). Indeed, as Bhatia (2017: 59) maintains:

Although it is important to study how professional and organisational discourses are constrained by professional objectives and private intentions of corporate players, it is equally important to study how discursive practices in professional organisations determine and redefine professional, disciplinary and organizational identities.

In such professional contexts of practice, therefore, identity construction and representation in discourse should be seen as a negotiation process, whereby conflicting identity performances are at stake and influence one another in the complex interplay among four different forms of identity negotiation processes and expressions (Bhatia 2017: 59-60):

- i) *professional identity*, that is, the discursive identity performance that casts the individual as belonging to a specific disciplinary community;
- ii) *organisational identity*, that is, those identity traits in discourse that are indicative of the membership to a given institution or organisation;
- iii) *individual identity*, that is, all those discursive identity cues that are indicative of given forms of self-expression of the individual;
- iv) *social identity*, that is, the discursive embodiment of all those semiotic aspects that mould the individual as belonging to one or more social groups.

Given these competing forms of identity expression and performance, which are negotiated discursively in professional environments, "[i]t should be of significant interest to any genre analyst to investigate how established professionals negotiate these different and often-conflicting identities in their discourses" (Bhatia 2017: 60). Therefore, in the investigation of any discursive practice of specific disciplinary and professional communities, researchers must pay close attention to the complex web of meaningful resources that individuals adopt to construct, construe, interpret and maintain their identity

within the context of socially shared objectives.

Such an intricate network of discursive cues is undeniably subject to a series of negotiation processes, as previously highlighted, which must adhere to a set of given constraints while, at the same time, leaving enough space for the individual to express their identity. As Hyland (2010: 160) argues:

Negotiating a representation of self from the standardizing conventions of disciplinary discourses is clearly a skilled accomplishment for individuals involving both recognizing and exploiting community constraints. However, it is also a challenge for analysts. To take seriously the idea that identity is formed through discourse, we need a means of getting at the ways individuals routinely assemble markers of 'who they are' through interaction.

In line with previous research on issues of identity expression in academic genres (Bondi 1999; Matsuda 2002; De Montes et al. 2002; Garzone 2004; Biber 2006; Crawford Camiciottoli 2007; Tessuto 2008; Englander 2009; Kirkup 2010; Hyland 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Olinger 2011; Zareva 2013), this study thus focuses on a corpus of papers published as part of the proceedings of the European Academy of Management (EURAM) International Conference in order to explore the ways in which specific linguistic resources allow the mediation between the adherence to specific rules linked to the specialised language of Academic Discourse (more specifically, Business Academic English) and the discursive identity cues that are indicative of given forms of self-expression of the individual. In other words, the present corpus-based investigation focuses on tensions between the specialised community's expectations for members to display proximity and adherence to given rules and conventions, and the individual scholars' desire to claim their own agency and express their unique identity.

## *2. Methodological and theoretical framework*

In order to study the complex relationship between individuals' discursive cues of identity expressions and the linguistic constraints of given professional contexts of practice, this investigation places a particular focus on the strategic role played by expressions of evaluation and stance in the corpus under investigation. Indeed, evaluation plays a critical role in academic writing as it embodies how individual scholars situate themselves and their work to reflect and shape their value system and those of the discipline they belong to. In particular, as Hyland (2005b: 175) argues, "[a]cademic writers' use of evaluative resources is influenced by different epistemological assumptions and permissible criteria of justification, and this points to and reinforces specific cultural and institutional contexts". Therefore, the analysis of such



elements in the context of academic discourse enables the exploration of the delicate negotiation process that has been previously introduced between the different identities that individuals want to express and construe discursively (i.e., professional, organisational, individual and social forms of identity expression; see Section 1).

While evaluation, following Hyland (2005b), can be studied by focusing on expressions of stance and engagement, in the context of the present study, particular attention will be placed only on expressions of stance, which refer to “the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgements, opinions, and commitments” (Hyland 2005b: 176). This is due to the fact that the interest of this study is primarily on the linguistic patterns that can be highlighted in the papers published as proceedings of the EURAM International Conference. The case study under investigation can be regarded as a perfect exemplification of the discursive negotiation process between the discursive disciplinary conventions that govern and dictate the use of language in such academic settings and the individuals’ identity representation in discourse. In this way, the study approaches the analysis of genre as being able to highlight “the nexus between an individual’s actions and a socially defined context” (Devitt 2004: 31).

In order to explore the way the community of practice represented by the scholars participating in the EURAM International Conference constructs its identity discursively, corpus linguistic methodologies (Baker 2006; McEnery, Xiao, Tono 2006; McEnery and Hardie 2012) have been applied to the analysis of stance in the data collected. Therefore, articles published as proceedings of the conference from the year 2016 and 2017 have been collated. The EURAM Proceedings Corpus (from now on referred to as EPC) was collected by accessing the online database of the EURAM association, which has enabled the collection of a total number of 1,500 papers (18 million word tokens) published in the timespan taken into consideration<sup>2</sup>. The corpus was cleaned of all the unnecessary information, and metadata were introduced by using XML encoding<sup>3</sup>. The corpus was then uploaded to the online corpus analysis platform Sketch Engine (Kilgarrieff et al. 2004; Kilgarrieff et al. 2014).

<sup>2</sup> The number of articles downloaded from the online database of the EURAM association has been extended so as to include also data coming from the years 2018 and 2019. At the time of writing (i.e., October 9, 2020), however, these sections of the EPC have not been added yet as they are still being semi-automatically ‘cleaned’ and tagged. A more comprehensive account on the EPC can be found in Fruttaldo (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> The following information has been preserved and included as metadata in the corpus to allow more detailed analyses: (1) author(s); (2) affiliation; and (3) Strategic Interest Groups (SIG) (i.e., research themes). At the time of writing, other information is being semi-automatically annotated in the corpus related to broad section categories of scientific papers (i.e., Abstract, Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion, following Farrokhi and Emami’s [2008] general categories) so as to enable the investigation of the use of stance devices across rhetorical sections of research articles.

Once the corpus was uploaded, a wordlist of the most frequently used words in the EPC was compiled. This was done because, as previously said, the focus of this investigation is on how stance is discursively conveyed in the data under scrutiny. Particular attention has been paid to the following categories conveying stance in accordance with the work done by Hyland (1998, 2005a, 2005b): attitude markers, boosters, hedges, and self-mentions. Therefore, four different lists were created, consisting of a series of items conveying stance. The lists were created both on the basis of a literature review on the topic (Quirk et al. 1985; Holmes 1988; Biber and Finegan 1989; Halliday 1994; Hyland and Milton 1997; Bondi 1999; Hyland 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2005a, 2005b; Biber et al. 1999; Varttala 2001; Garzone 2004; Farrokhi and Emami 2008; Friginal et al. 2017) and the most frequently occurring items in the articles themselves by closely reading the corpus wordlist. The four lists include the following number of items per category:

i) *attitude markers* (i.e., words conveying individuals' attitude towards the propositional material they are presenting [e.g., 'surprisingly', 'fortunately', etc.]): no. of items: 75;

ii) *boosters* (i.e., words that allow individuals to express their certainty in what they argue [e.g., 'clearly', 'obviously', 'demonstrate', etc.]): no. of items: 136;

iii) *hedges* (i.e., words that indicate the individuals' decision to withhold complete commitment to a proposition [e.g., 'possible', 'might', 'perhaps', etc.]): no. of items: 303;

iv) *self-mention* (i.e., words that acknowledge the individuals' presence explicitly in the text [e.g., 'I', 'me', 'mine', 'our', etc.]): no. of items: 11.

Whitelists were then created and uploaded on Sketch Engine in order to search the frequency of only the items included in the lists of attitude markers, boosters, hedges and self-mentions in the EPC<sup>4</sup>. This revealed that, out of the 75 attitude markers included in the list, only 65 of them actually occur in the EPC, while as for the 136 boosters, only 106 of them occur in the corpus. As for the 303 hedges included in the list, only 226 of them occur in the EPC, while out of the 11 self-mention items, only 7 of them occur in the corpus under investigation (see Figure 3.1 in Section 3).

In order to further explore the peculiarities of given stance markers in the corpus, a keyword analysis (Scott and Tribble 2006; Bondi and Scott 2010) was also performed. Such a corpus linguistic technique was adopted so as to find

<sup>4</sup> Whitelists and blacklists must be plain texts (.txt), encoded in UTF-8, with one item per line. Once uploaded to the Wordlist tool of Sketch Engine, they enable users to include (in the case of whitelists) and exclude (in the case of blacklists) words from the wordlist. In this way, more detailed frequency lists are computed, thus enabling users to focus, for instance, their analysis only on specific items in the corpus they are investigating.

out which of the attitude markers, boosters, hedges and self-mention expressions found in the EPC are more frequently used and peculiar if compared to a reference corpus. Therefore, the Open Access Journals (OAJ) corpus, a 2.6 billion word corpus available on Sketch Engine comprised of academic articles covering different areas of science, technology, medicine, social science, and humanities, was elected as reference corpus and single- and multi-word keywords were thus computed.

### 3. Findings

The following diagram (Figure 1) shows the normalised frequencies per million words of the occurrences of the items in the four categories using the whitelists previously described in Section 2<sup>5</sup>.

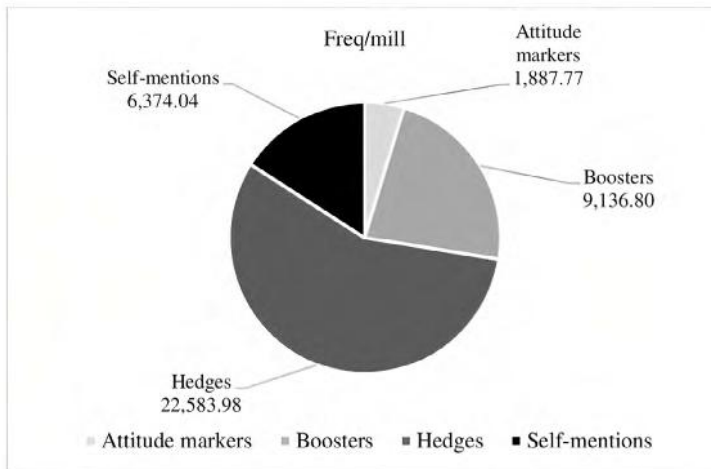


FIGURE 1. Normalised frequencies (per million words) of the occurrence of attitude markers, boosters, hedges and self-mentions in the EPC.

<sup>5</sup> Normalised frequencies have been preferred to absolute frequencies in the comparison between the four categories conveying stance since, following the recommendations offered by Gries (2010: 271), it is important to “only compare corpus frequencies or use them to make statements about what is more frequent when the frequencies have been normalized”. This is particularly true not only when the frequencies of specific items occurring in corpora or subcorpora of different sizes are being compared but also when different phenomena within the same corpus are contrasted so as to take into account their relative frequency, that is, the distribution of the individual items among the other items occurring in the corpus. Furthermore, by employing normalised frequencies, it becomes possible to compare different phenomena such as attitude markers, boosters, hedges, and self-mentions, despite the varying number of items included in their respective lists. This normalisation process disregards this variation in numbers, enabling a clear and meaningful comparison.

As can be seen from Figure 1, the class of hedges is the one that is most frequently featured in the articles collected in the EPC. This might simply be due to the fact that, in Academic Discourse, statements are typically assessed and construed through “a prism of disciplinary assumptions” (Hyland 2005b: 178-179). Therefore, scholars must carefully reflect on the weight they want to place upon given assertions, in line with the degree of precision, certainty or, more broadly, reliability that they want such statements to convey, maybe establishing some leeway as to claim protection in the event of their contradiction (Hyland 1998).

Furthermore, the high frequency of hedges in papers representative of the discipline of Economics does not come as a surprise. Indeed, Varttala (2001), in comparing the hedging strategies in three different disciplines, found that the relative frequency of hedges was higher in the field of Economics. However, it must also be underlined that the full papers collated in the EPC are submitted to the EURAM International Conference in order to be evaluated and deemed appropriate for presentation as part of the conference itself (and afterwards, they will be published in the proceedings of the conference). In other words, in order to present their research to this series of key conferences for scholars working within the field of Business and Management, researchers must submit a full paper which, once anonymous reviewers have positively evaluated it, is then accepted for presentation, thus automatically becoming part of the proceedings of the conference. Therefore, the high frequency of hedges may be due to the fact that the papers are more similar to extended Abstract or Discussion sections in the generic purposes (i.e., the Abstract and Discussion section’s genre constraints) that they want to serve<sup>6</sup>. In trying to gain their academic credibility by going beyond the data to offer more general interpretations, scholars may thus feel the need to mitigate (and, in the case of boosters, highlight the importance and worthiness of) the claims presented in their work. Such a high frequency of hedges may hence be indicative of what Bhatia (2007, 2008, 2012, 2017), within the framework of Critical Genre Analysis, defines as the private intentions (Bhatia 1995) that individuals want to achieve and tend to incorporate “[...] within the scope of professionally shared values, genre conventions and professional cultures” (Bhatia 2017: ix). This means that scholars seem to understand that, by bending the scientific papers’ genre conventions by way of enhancing specific linguistic patterns that are peculiar of other genres that are “replete[d] with subjective material, expressed by interactional elements” (Gillaerts and Van de Velde 2010: 130), as abstracts and discussion sections are, they might subconsciously presume

<sup>6</sup> On the use and distribution of boosters and hedges in the different sections of academic papers, see Hyland (1996), Lindeberg (2004), Martín-Martín and Burgess (2004), Farrokhi and Emami (2008), Gillaerts and Van de Velde (2010), Yang, Xu, Liu (2010), Hu and Cao (2011), and Ahmad and Mehrjooseresht (2012).

that this might increase the chance of their research papers being accepted as part of the conference itself (and then, as part of the proceedings)<sup>7</sup>.

In order to further explore the peculiarities of given stance markers in the corpus, as previously described in Section 2, a keyword analysis (Scott and Tribble 2006; Bondi and Scott 2010) was also performed. Single- and multi-word keywords were thus computed, and the following tables show the first five keywords for each category. Unfortunately, due to space limitations, only general comments on some of the salient features shown by the keyword analysis will be provided.

<i>EURAM Proceedings Corpus</i>				<i>Open Access Journals Corpus</i>		
#	<b>single word (lc)</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>Freq/mill</b>	<b>Freq_ref</b>	<b>Freq_ref/mill</b>	<b>Score</b>
1	<i>disagree</i>	223.60	12.80	6,623.10	2.00	4.60
2	<i>prefer</i>	276.50	15.80	20,929.00	6.20	2.30
3	<i>disappointed</i>	26.40	1.50	845.30	0.30	2.00
4	<i>agree</i>	425.50	24.30	39,169.70	11.70	2.00
5	<i>surprised</i>	39.90	2.30	2,868.70	0.90	1.80
#	<b>multi-words (lc)</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>Freq/mill</b>	<b>Freq_ref</b>	<b>Freq_ref/mill</b>	<b>Score</b>
1	<i>as an important</i>	304	17.3	8,679	2.6	5.1
2	<i>be interesting to</i>	193	11.0	4,698	1.4	5.0
3	<i>are expected to</i>	369	21.0	12,004	3.6	4.8
4	<i>even if they</i>	122	7.0	2,615	0.8	4.5
5	<i>would be interesting</i>	124	7.1	2,716	0.8	4.5

TABLE 1. Keyword analysis (single and multi-words): Attitude markers in the EPC compared to the Open Access Journal Corpus.

<sup>7</sup> This claim is primarily based on Farrokhi and Emami's (2008: 93) study according to which, in the analysis of the frequency and distribution of hedges and boosters in academic papers, "the Discussion and Abstract sections [...] contained the highest occurrence of hedges" if compared to other sections. However, it must be underlined that, since the EPC at the time of writing does not allow a thorough comparison between the different sections of the academic papers collated in it, this observation is simply based on the overall tendency highlighted in the literature.

Focusing on attitude markers (Table 1), the verb ‘disagree’ (found in phrases such as ‘strongly disagree’<sup>8</sup>) seems to be particularly key in the EPC. However, this is simply due to the fact that the corpus contains various sections devoted to surveys and, therefore, the verb refers to interviewees’ responses. The same can be said about the verbs ‘prefer’ and ‘agree’, and the past participle ‘disappointed’, which are however typically used by scholars to describe the responses by specific employees in given firms in the surveys collected. The only item that more specifically conveys individual scholars’ attitude is represented by the verb ‘surprised’ (‘we were surprised’). Typically, this is used to achieve two main strategies, that is, i) highlighting the unexpectedness of given results:

1. The IEVI is our result. We were surprised by its operability: with 50 qualification items and 5 value dimensions, we were afraid not to create a useful tool for scholars and practitioners.

Or 2) downplaying the likely consequences of specific actions, thus, construing them as something that does not come as a ‘surprise’:

2. However, from this perspective, because of the evolution of the service providers and a company’s expertise in offshoring (processes 2 and 3), we should not be surprised to see a “drift” back to the bottom left square, returning to offshore-outsourcing.

As for the multi-word expressions, as can be seen from Table 1, typically, the ones that are most frequently used in the ECP if compared to the reference corpus describe future developments of the investigation, thus, highlighting possible solutions to the limitations of the studies conducted. This is particularly the case of ‘(would) be interesting to’, as can be seen in the following example taken from the corpus:

3. [...] it would be interesting to compare this study to findings in local Chinese companies in a cross-organizational or to findings in other countries in a cross-cultural setting.

The multi-word expression ‘as an important’, on the other hand, while usually found in contexts where authors want to foreground specific aspects

<sup>8</sup> In order to further investigate the linguistic behaviour of specific patterns retrieved from the keyword analysis performed on the EPC, also concordance and collocation analyses have been carried out. In the specific case of the collocation analysis, a span of three words to the right and three words to the left has been taken into consideration, and the LogDice has been used as a statistical measure for the computation of collocates. The LogDice was chosen since it enables users to extract exclusive but not necessarily rare combinations of words (Gablasova, Brezina, McEnery 2017: 164), thus being quite useful in the exploration of the phraseological status of given linguistic items (Rychlý [2008: 6] in fact defines it as “a lexicographer-friendly association score”; see also Gablasova, Brezina, McEnery [2017] on choosing the right statistical measures in collocation analysis).

of their research, also occurs in contexts where it can be regarded as an ‘anaphoric’ attitude marker, that is, an expression that seems to underscore the importance of specific aspects or insights that the authors have previously provided in their paper. Indeed, from a concordance analysis of the occurrences of this expression in the EPC, it seems to occur in the Conclusion sections of the papers, thus, fulfilling the cohesive function of positively evaluating the study carried out by the scholars:

4. In addition to the number of obstacles this research reveals, we regard the theme of environmental receptiveness as an important context factor that should be considered in future research.

<i>EURAM Proceedings Corpus</i>				<i>Open Access Journals Corpus</i>		
#	<b>single word (lc)</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>Freq/mill</b>	<b>Freq_ref</b>	<b>Freq_ref/mill</b>	<b>Score</b>
1	<i>really</i>	668.10	38.10	25,475.20	7.60	4.50
2	<i>think</i>	805.50	45.90	35,805.70	10.70	4.00
3	<i>reinforce</i>	217.40	12.40	8,808.50	2.60	3.70
4	<i>know</i>	1,152.80	65.70	81,409.50	24.30	2.60
5	<i>realize</i>	260.20	14.80	17,233.30	5.10	2.60
#	<b>multi-words (lc)</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>Freq/mill</b>	<b>Freq_ref</b>	<b>Freq_ref/mill</b>	<b>Score</b>
1	<i>empirical evidence from</i>	164	9.4	136	0.0	9.9
2	<i>findings show that</i>	200	11.4	1,841	0.5	8.0
3	<i>will be more</i>	233	13.3	3,731	1.1	6.8
4	<i>research has shown</i>	181	10.3	2,459	0.7	6.5
5	<i>we find that</i>	524	29.9	13,240	4.0	6.2

TABLE 2. Keyword analysis (single and multi-words): Boosters in the EPC compared to the Open Access Journal Corpus.

As for boosters (Table 2), the most frequently used in the EPC is the adverb ‘really’, which is typically used to underline, for instance, the urgency of solving specific issues or their importance in the development of certain strategies<sup>9</sup>:

<sup>9</sup> The booster expressions introduced by the word ‘really’ are also usually found in the EPC

5. The will of formalization leads SMEs to launch the collaboration with a public supervisor. But CSRs' integration will only really happen through private support within the company.

An interesting keyword among the booster expressions occurring most predominantly in the EPC is represented by the term 'reinforce', which is used in the corpus to construe given items as further contributing to specific (positive or negative) consequences:

6. The consideration of contrasts and the emphasis of 14 differences and oppositions, at the same time, reinforce the borderline between the dominant culture and the token culture, making it almost impossible to cross.

The verb is also generally used to underline the importance of the study conducted by the scholar(s) on the basis of previous research:

7. The results of the study also reinforce the importance of using management competency framework to assess [...].

Regarding the keyword analysis of multi-word expressions where boosters are prominent, it can be noticed that they collectively refer to the innovative results that the scholars have provided in their investigation. It is interesting to notice that the multi-word booster expression 'empirical evidence from' is typically found in the title of the papers collected in the EPC, thus pointing to one of the community of practice's professional values that they want to preserve and reproduce in presenting their research: the importance of studying given phenomena from an empirical perspective rather than merely from a theoretical one. And the textual position that this expression typically occupies (i.e., the title of articles) further underlines the relevant role that empirical data play in the field of Business and Management. In order to test whether the expression 'empirical evidence from' was indeed representative of the field of Business and Management, the Open Access Journals (OAJ) corpus was also investigated. The multi-word expression occurs in the corpus 452 times (norm. freq.: 0.13 per million words), with the following distribution per subject areas of the various journals collated in the OAJ: Business and Management: 80 occurrences (relative freq.: 568.8)<sup>10</sup>; Business and Economics: 90 occurrences (relative freq.: 484.7);

in interviews' extracts provided by the scholars, where interviewees tend to use this adverb to strengthen their claims and, therefore, convey their personal opinions concerning specific issues they are discussing.

<sup>10</sup> The relative frequency on Sketch Engine is a statistical measure that enables the comparison between the frequency of a given word or expression in a specific section of a corpus and its frequency in the whole corpus. Therefore, it shows how much more (or less) frequent a word or expression is in a specific section if compared to the whole corpus. The result is expressed as a percentage. If the relative frequency is less than 100%, it means that the word or expression is less



Political Science: 12 occurrences (relative freq.: 434.1); Economics: 21 occurrences (relative freq.: 383.1); Law and Political Science: 12 occurrences (relative freq.: 347.5). The analysis of the distribution in the OAJ thus confirms the claim that the expression indeed seems to be particularly key in the academic field of Business and Management.

<i>EURAM Proceedings Corpus</i>				<i>Open Access Journals Corpus</i>		
#	<b>single word (lc)</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>Freq/mill</b>	<b>Freq_ref</b>	<b>Freq_ref/mill</b>	<b>Score</b>
1	<i>Perceived</i>	1,911.10	109.00	42,222.40	12.60	8.10
2	<i>Argue</i>	1,173.80	66.90	25,854.10	7.70	7.80
3	<i>Perceive</i>	504.30	28.80	12,386.70	3.70	6.30
4	<i>Theoretical</i>	2,912.00	166.10	88,080.30	26.30	6.10
5	<i>Thinking</i>	682.70	38.90	21,470.20	6.40	5.40
#	<b>multi-word (lc)</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>Freq/mill</b>	<b>Freq_ref</b>	<b>Freq_ref/mill</b>	<b>Score</b>
1	<i>we argue that</i>	894	51.0	2,850	0.9	28.1
2	<i>common method bias</i>	277	15.8	29	0.0	16.7
3	<i>are more likely</i>	953	54.4	11,092	3.3	12.8
4	<i>future research could</i>	187	10.7	346	0.1	10.6
5	<i>future research should</i>	218	12.4	1,628	0.5	9.0

TABLE 3. Keyword analysis (single and multi-words): Hedges in the EPC compared to the Open Access Journal Corpus.

The most frequently used single-word hedges seem to convey overall tentativeness regarding the analysis of the results. As can be noticed (see Table 3), the adjective ‘theoretical’ has been included among the keywords indicating particular hedging strategies. This is due to the fact that, in the compilation of the whitelist of hedges, this word has been included given the linguistic context it was usually found in, on the basis of the observation that was previously provided related to the booster expression ‘empirical

frequent in a specific section if compared to the whole corpus, and thus, it can be regarded as not typically used or peculiar of that section; if the relative frequency is higher than 100%, the word or expression is as frequent in a specific section as it is in the entire corpus.

evidence from'. Indeed, in the EPC, theory and practice seem to entail and reproduce two different community values: in the case of the former, it is found in the company of expressions indicating the basis on which a study is carried out (e.g., 'framework', 'background', 'argument'); in the case of the latter, expressions conveying an empirical nature of the research carried out are found typically in the immediate linguistic context of the expression featuring the adjective 'theoretical', as can be seen in example (8), where the 'theoretical implications' are discursively constructed as being linked to the results of the study. Therefore, the theoretical framework is revised and enriched by the evidence that the study has provided, thus creating the previously underlined connection between theory and empirical data that must always be preserved in the community of practice that is being investigated:

8. These results generate several valuable insights with interesting theoretical and managerial implications.

As for the multi-word expressions in the EPC featuring hedges, they seem to be generally used by scholars to downplay the limitations of the studies presented by relegating to future research the possible drawbacks that their investigations might display. The fact that such expressions are more frequently used in the EPC if compared to a reference corpus of academic papers representative of various disciplines is particularly noteworthy. Indeed, it underlines one of the peculiar aspects that has been previously highlighted regarding the community of practice that is being investigated. This discursive pattern of relegating to future research the limitations of the studies presented seems to indicate once more the importance authors attribute to mitigating the possible drawbacks of their research since their work needs to be accepted for presentation at the EURAM International Conference first. Therefore, by dulling in a sort of way what can be regarded as something that might negatively impact on their chances to be accepted, scholars seem to be bending once more the genre constraints of academic papers to achieve specific private intentions.

<i>EURAM Proceedings Corpus</i>				<i>Open Access Journals Corpus</i>		
#	single word (lc)	Freq	Freq/mill	Freq_ref	Freq_ref/mill	Score
1	<i>my</i>	838.50	47.80	30,495.50	9.10	4.80
2	<i>me</i>	548.80	31.30	29,899.30	8.90	3.30
3	<i>us</i>	2,372.20	135.30	264,317.80	78.90	1.70
4	<i>our</i>	8,966.80	511.40	1,321,870.60	394.60	1.30

<i>EURAM Proceedings Corpus</i>				<i>Open Access Journals Corpus</i>		
#	<b>multi-word (lc)</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>Freq/mill</b>	<b>Freq_ref</b>	<b>Freq_ref/mill</b>	<b>Score</b>
5	<i>we</i>	21,717.00	1,238.60	3,774,976.50	1,126.90	1.10
1	<i>we argue that</i>	894	51.0	2,850	0.9	28.1
2	<i>we contribute to</i>	250	14.3	84	0.0	14.9
3	<i>in our sample</i>	407	23.2	2,879	0.9	13.0
4	<i>we controlled for</i>	203	11.6	458	0.1	11.1
5	<i>test our hypotheses</i>	166	9.5	109	0.0	10.1

TABLE 4. Keyword analysis (single and multi-words): Self-mentions in the EPC compared to the Open Access Journal Corpus.

Finally, the keyword analysis of the self-mention expressions found in the EPC appears to show an interesting result related to the possessive pronoun ‘my’. However, as was the case with attitude markers, the word is typically found in surveys and interviews conducted by the scholars and, thus, their occurrences are not linked to the authorial voice. Indeed, scholars tend to refer to themselves by using the pronoun ‘we’, as can be seen in the keyword analysis of multi-words. An interesting pattern is represented by the multi-word expression ‘we contribute to’. Usually, the phrase is used to indicate and highlight the degree of confidence the individuals have in their research as significantly leaving a mark in the literature, thus gaining credit for their individual perspective.

#### 4. Conclusions

The objective of this study was to reflect on the way stance is conveyed in a specialised corpus by adopting an approach mainly inspired by Hyland (1998, 2000, 2002), not only by following his footsteps but by further pondering on the role played by hedging and boosting devices in academic writing. Indeed, a closer look at their functioning in a corpus of conference proceedings belonging to the field of Business and Management in comparison with a more general corpus of academic journals has highlighted different emphases on devices expressing stance. The findings have provided further insights into

the relevance that hedges and boosters still play in the construction of specific academic identities representative of given communities of practice. As the analysis of the corpus has demonstrated, scholars still make considerable use of hedging and boosting devices, therefore confirming the subtle awareness that scholars have towards (i) reception of their writing, (ii) perception of the audience and (iii) reliability towards facts and towards the academic context of practice they address. In this way, the expression of certainty and doubt was confirmed as central to the genre under investigation as underlined in the strategic choices made by the writers of the research articles that were investigated from a corpus-based perspective.

Of course, being a preliminary investigation, further analysis should be carried out on the EPC. In particular, while the focus of this research was on expressions of stance, research should also be devoted to linguistic devices conveying engagement, thus to linguistic forms that writers adopt to discursively acknowledge and connect to others, recognising the presence of their readers. Another limitation of this study that has already been underlined in Section 3 is linked to a more detailed analysis of the distribution and dispersion of given patterns in the different sections of the academic papers collated in the EPC (see Fruttaldo [forthcoming]).

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