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Questions in English and French research articles in linguistics: a corpus-based contrastive analysis¹

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Abstract

Although research on evaluation in academic writing has profited from developments in contrastive linguistics since the late 1980s, very little empirical research has been conducted with respect to questions in contrastive studies. The aim of this study is to investigate the functions of questions as a means of reader engagement in academic research articles in English and French in the discipline of linguistics. To do this, a corpus-based contrastive analysis of two subcorpora of KIAP (Fløttum *et al.* 2006) is conducted. The English and French subcorpora are assessed using Hyland's model of stance and reader engagement in terms of questions and their seven functions as evaluative markers of reader engagement (2002; 2005b), including their form and distribution within the text. This analysis focuses on two particular functions of questions, namely 'framing the discourse' and 'organising the text'. The results suggest that, although there is some degree of homogeneity in the use of questions in terms of function, form and distribution, there is also evidence of important differences between the two languages. These findings illustrate some distinctions in writing in these two discourse communities and their potential for informing language pedagogy in both English for academic purposes and *Français langue académique*.

Key words: contrastive linguistics; comparable corpora; English academic writing; French academic writing; reader engagement; questions.

1 Introduction

Following the growth of research in the area of corpus linguistics since the 1980s and the increasing role of English as the language of academic publication, there has been a notable resurgence in interest in corpus-based contrastive analysis (CBCA) of academic writing (McEnery and Xiao 2008, p. 18), involving English and one other language. This however does not come without issues, where comparability across languages can be challenging, as we shall

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see in Section 2.1. Generally, CBCA on academic writing, though representing a relatively small canon of research (Carter-Thomas and Chambers 2012, p. 17), can be seen to occupy the three streams of study on academic writing identified by Biber (2006b, p. 6), with researchers in the area largely focusing on the study of context and text, interpersonal communication and lexico-grammatical items. Of these, interpersonal communication has become important as writers from different language backgrounds are struggling to maintain presence in the academic writing community (Pérez-Llantada 2010, p. 45). Researchers such as Bocanegra-Valle (2014, p. 1) have noted that without a competent knowledge of academic linguistic items, non-native academic writers can have difficulty publishing. Some such gaps in knowledge, identified by Hyland, are evaluative markers present in disciplinary discourse communities, which, if misused by novice writers, can lead readers to infer overconfidence, a lack of confidence or directness from writers' claims (2005a, p. 152). Evaluation here refers to the ways in which writers place themselves and their readers interactively in an academic text (Hunston and Thompson 2000). It is seen to be discipline specific (Hyland 2005b, p. 175) and to vary across languages (Biber and Conrad 2001, p. 192) which renders it a valuable item of study for learners of academic writing (Shaw 2004, p. 13). Hyland views evaluation as both writer stance and reader engagement where stance refers to 'writer orientated features of interaction' (2005b, p.178) and allows writers to demonstrate attitude and realise themselves within the text. Overall, stance has received much attention (Gray and Biber 2012, p. 12). However, interestingly, reader engagement, which considers the positioning and exploitation of readers in a text, has 'been relatively neglected in the literature' (Hyland 2005b, p. 182). This is a gap that this research aims to address, contrastively.

In this article, we consider the pragmatic functions of questions in linguistics research articles in English and French and in so doing, aim to analyse their varying roles in the research article as engagement markers. Two of the roles identified, namely 'framing the discourse' and 'organising the text', will be analysed in detail through the application of Hyland's model of questions (2002; 2005b) which forms part of arguably the most comprehensive model of evaluation according to researchers such as Orta (2010, p. 81) and McGrath and Kuteeva (2012, p. 163). Moreover, Hyland's model has been applied to research on languages other than English by researchers such as Lafuente-Millán (2014). This research similarly applies his framework to linguistic research articles in English and French, taken from the KIAP comparable corpus (Fløttum *et al.* 2006) which was designed for the study of cultural identity in academic writingⁱ. The articles are searched for questions which are categorised according to function and analysed in terms of their form and distribution within the text in order to identify similarities and differences in academic writing in English and French within these data. Focusing, initially, on the pragmatic function of questions allows for the use of corpus linguistics in a function to form approach to

pragmatic analysis of texts (Flöck and Geluykens 2015); something which is less common among corpus studies of pragmatics which typically focus on form in order to deduce functions (Flöck and Geluykens 2015, p. 7). The results of this study, although somewhat limited due to the small data-set analysed herein, reveal some similarities and differences at the level of functions, and more particularly, form and distribution. This article will first, in Section 2, consider research on CBCA and questions in academic writing. Following this, the data and methodology will be outlined in Section 3. The results are presented in Section 4 and discussed in Section 5 in terms of their significance to an enhanced understanding of academic writing and the potential for influencing language pedagogy. Section 6 offers some concluding remarks, looking forward to the potential for future studies.

2 Corpus-based contrastive analysis of questions in academic writing

2.1 Corpus-based contrastive analysis: issues of comparability

Issues surrounding comparability are characteristic in corpus linguistics with concepts like representativeness and sampling playing important roles in corpus construction and comparison (Biber 2012, p. 30). As McEnery and Wilson note (2001, p. 30), a representative corpus is categorised and delimited according to various strata such as genre (Tavakoli 2013, p. 634). This becomes increasingly important in comparable corpora, such as KIAP, which do not contain translations but contain texts, in more than one language, ‘collected using the same sampling frame’ (McEnery and Xiao 2008, p. 20). Within a comparable corpus, the texts must be equal according to both the languages studied and the genre present and must be collected within ‘the same sampling period’ (McEnery and Xiao 2008, p. 20). These corpora require precise and detailed construction and may be seen as representative of the varieties of languages and genres they contain (McEnery and Xiao 2008, p. 21). Moreover, KIAP, like many comparable corpora (Eckart and Quasthoff 2013, p. 152), is a small specialised corpus. Its smaller size is not problematic for, as Aston notes (2001, p. 30), small, specialised corpora tend to be heavily patterned and therefore can produce valuable insights into, in the case of KIAP, academic language.

In the case of this research, comparability is assured by analysing the English and French linguistics subcorpora from the KIAP comparable corpus, henceforth KIAP-LFE (Fløttum *et al.* 2006). KIAP-LFE, like other comparable corpora, shows a strong focus on the comparable common ground or *tertium comparationis* (Connor and Moreno 2005, p. 156) to assure that the quality of data is not encumbered and weakened. In this way, the comparability of texts at every level has been considered *i.e.* genre, register, quantity of texts, time frame, writer profiles *etc.* (For more on these strata see Connor and Moreno 2005, p. 161). Another issue also deserves mention

here: Swales (2004, pp. 52-53) identifies, quite appropriately, that comparing languages other than English with English can be intrinsically problematic due to the sheer vastness of speakers and users of English that is incomparable to other languages. However, this is surmountable through the study of academic language in disciplines, as disciplinary discourse communities (Bhatia 2004, p. 23). This study, like many other CBCA of academic writing, such as Mauranen (1992), Vassileva (2001) and Sultan (2011), focuses on the linguistics disciplinary discourse community, and within this, on the research article (RA) which has long been ‘the main channel of [...] scholarly communication’ (Holmes 1997, p. 322). Interestingly, how writers from different language backgrounds within this linguistics disciplinary discourse community engage readers can be largely influenced by the cultural parameters within which a text is written, as discussed in the following section.

2.2 Reader- and writer-responsible languages: academic writing in English and French

The value of considering evaluative markers, such as questions, across languages becomes clear when we consider the impressive research conducted by researchers such as Clyne (1987) on culture-bound discourse norms in English and German and Hinds (1987), Fløttum *et al.* (2006) and Salager-Meyer (2011) on the different nature of languages identified as either reader-responsible or writer-responsible. Hinds (1987) uses the terms in his typological analysis of Japanese and English where he categorises Japanese as reader-responsible and English as writer-responsible, owing to differences in clarity and coherence on the part of the writer. In his view, reader-responsible languages place the onus on readers to navigate and understand texts while writer-responsible languages place more importance on the writer to ensure that readers understand texts. Salager-Meyer (2011, p. 71) outlines the nature of reader- and writer- responsible languages as follows:

Contrastive rhetoric analyses of scientific discourse have drawn attention to the existence of differences in the level of explicitness between languages. English is usually said to lie at the higher end of the scale of explicitness of text organisation, clarity, and coherence: English readers indeed expect and require landmarks of coherence and unity as they read, and writers need to provide these transitional statements. Texts written in English thus reflect a more reader-oriented attitude: explicit statements are regarded as polite to readers and implicitness as impolite. When compared with the scientific rhetoric of Anglo-American writers, writers in other languages are much less inclined to regard explicitness as their responsibility. [...] Research articles written in Spanish and texts written in Portuguese are also negatively marked as to the presence of cohesive order to indicate the discursive logic of texts. A much lower density of periphrastic links, previews, and reviews has also been noted in scientific papers written in French and in Slovene and German academic writing.ⁱⁱ

Of particular reference to this study is the fact that Fløttum *et al.* (2006) see French as reader-responsible. This is corroborated by Salager-Meyer *et al.* (2003) whose diachronic study of writer/reader presence and criticisms in medical RAs in English, French and Spanish sees French academic writing as less reader-friendly and as authoritative and inattentive to reader needs. In English academic writing, for example, cohesion, signposting and coherence are more evident than in French, according to Salager-Meyer (2011). Salager-Meyer *et al.* (2003) note

the overall readability and reader-friendliness of English in contrast to French which they describe as more authoritative than English.

2.3 Reader engagement in academic writing

Research on evaluation in academic writing in general, and on reader engagement in particular, can come from a number of backgrounds. As discussed in Section 2.2 some studies situate the text within cultural parameters relating not to the discourse community but to wider cultural influences within the society or societies in which the language is spoken. On the other hand, Hyland and others discussed later in this section tend to focus on the characteristics of specific texts and genres, such as engagement markers in the RA, within the cultures of different disciplinary discourse communities (Hyland 2005; Gray and Biber 2012; Lafuente-Millán 2014). As a rhetorical tool, engagement markers are crucial for writers to exploit in the effort to anticipate reader reactions (Lafuente-Millán 2014, p. 202). This is because engaging a reader through engagement markers allows writers to do a number of different things. For example, they can show familiarity and politeness and they can help guide and encourage the reader to agree with the writer's interpretation (Hyland 2005a, p. 54). These engagement markers can be categorised as directives, personal asides, shared knowledge, reader pronouns, and questions (Hyland 2005b, p. 117). Research applying Hyland's model on stance and engagement has largely been confined to research on English academic writing, with fewer, yet nonetheless important, studies analysing academic writing in languages other than English, and in English and French contrastively. In English, researchers such as Biber (2006a) have undertaken research on directives in university registers, and Lafuente-Millán (2014) applies Hyland's framework to the study of personal asides and shared knowledge in business RAs in Spanish and English. Further researchers such as Fløttum *et al.* (2006, p. 160) have analysed directives contrastively in 'let us' imperatives in English, French and Norwegian. This research makes a further contribution to the application of Hyland's model (2005b) to languages other than English in the analysis of questions in the linguistics RA.

2.4 Questions as reader engagement

Questions as devices of reader engagement in academic writing have been analysed in a number of ways. They have been seen as a way to 'hook' (Ruegg and Sugiyama 2013, p. 13) readers by overtly interacting with the reader and as a means to question certainty in scientific and popular science research articles (Pic and Furmaniak 2014). Their use, however, seems to vary largely across disciplines (Hyland 2002, p. 537) and has been criticised by some as an introduction of 'click-bait' (Hamby 2015, p. 107) to academic writing. For others, question marks protect writers by expressing 'the dubious nature of results' (Ball 2009, p. 677). Formally, questions can be categorised in a number of ways. Here we are concerned with 'wh-' or 'content questions',

‘yes/no questions’ and ‘other questions’ where ‘other questions’ can be subcategorised as ‘alternative questions’ ‘declarative questions’ ‘two-step questions’ (Batchelor and Chebli-Saadi 2011; Carter and McCarthy 2013) and, in the case of this research, as ‘compound questions’. In the account of the question types in the following paragraph, examples are taken from KIAP (Fløttum *et al.* 2006).

‘Content question’ forms require specific information as an answer and often take the form of ‘wh- questions’ such as ‘where’, ‘what’ and ‘when’.

Example 1 Content Question

How far do we extend the analysis? (engling45.txt)

‘Yes/no questions’ necessitate a yes or no answer only.

Example 2 Yes/No Question

Is there a-movement reconstruction? (engling49.txt)

‘Alternative questions’ offer the reader an option in the question.

Example 3 Alternative Question

Are they group oriented [...] or a mixture of the two? (engling23.txt)

‘Declarative questions’ do not invert questions, but use affirmative or negative statements as questions.

Example 4 Declarative Question

Une voix imperceptible qui s'entend ? (frling22.txt)

[An imperceptible voice that can be heard?]

‘Two-step questions’ presented here involve two content or yes/no question elements to the question.

Example 5 Two-Step Question

En quoi, par exemple, le de, introducteur de l'infinitif sujet dans [...] relie-t-il et subordonne-t-il?
(frling04.txt)

[For example, the ‘of’ which introduces the infinitive, what does it rely on and what does it depend on?]

Finally, ‘compound questions’ here contain both ‘content’ and ‘yes/no’ question elements.

Example 6 Compound Question

If John leaves, will he return [...] what will he find there? (engling02.txt)

Researchers such as Beun (2000, p. 311) have indicated that different question types are more likely to occur within different registers such as spoken and written registers. For example, according to Beun (2000), declarative questions are associated with spoken discourse. This can shed some light on our expectations for questions types that occur within academic writing in English and French, which is largely constituted by registers considered to be ‘formal’ (Swales and Feak 1994), or in French ‘soutenu’ (Salager-Meyer and Ariza 2004). However, these works on questions do not explicitly focus on analysing questions functionally or formally as devices of reader engagement.

When we consider research on questions as reader engagement in academic writing, Hyland argues that his model of stance and engagement is more appropriate for the study of academic writing than other models of evaluation research such as appraisal theory (Martin and White 2005) due to Hyland’s model’s explicit focus on and derivation from academic discourse (2005b). Questions, under Hyland’s model of stance and engagement, have been distinguished functionally as serving seven functions, outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 Hyland’s seven functions of questions as reader engagement adapted from Hyland (2002)

Question type	Function
Getting Attention	These questions refer only to those used in titles of RAs to attract a reader's attention
Framing the Discourse	Questions are used to inform the reader of the questions that are guiding the research; questions that the research intends to (try to) answer
Organising the Text	Questions are used as in-text signposts to guide the reader; questions are used in subheadings as a structuring strategy
Creating a Niche	Questions are used to create a niche and identify a gap
Expressing an Attitude and Counter Claiming	Questions are used to critically evaluate works by other researchers with which a writer does not necessarily agree
Setting up Claims	Questions are used to create an element of doubt which allows the writer to immediately attenuate that doubt with a claim

Asking Real Questions	Open questions that have no anticipated response; questions that maintain a rhetorical function of self-promotion as an identifier of problems; questions that look beyond the text to future problems and considerations.
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We focus here on questions used in ‘framing the discourse’ and ‘organising the text’ for a number of reasons. For example, in Hyland’s research such functions saw proportionately greater usage (2002) and secondly, it could be argued that these two functions are rhetorically connected. However, in the case of Hyland’s model, there are substantial differences. Hyland (2002, pp. 540-541) defines questions that frame the discourse as follows:

In a traditional sense, academic writing is governed by questioning. It is written with a question in mind, a problem to solve, and seeks to explore that question using the theories and procedures of the discipline. It is perhaps not surprising that these questions often surface in introductions to provide an initial framework for the discourse [with] writers posing the questions to be addressed [...] through the text to hold the reader’s interest and structure their responses to them.

For example, ‘framing the discourse’ largely refers to questions that are posed in order to fill a gap in the literature. They are the questions that the RA, systematically, intends to answer and, in this way, questions that frame this discourse often serve to deal with the research question and subquestions that guide the RA. Moreover, they are questions that cannot be answered right away. This is quite distinct from questions that organise the text which fulfil a more structural role.

In ‘organising the text’, according to Hyland (2002, p. 544), we often see questions occur in subheadings which indicate the content of the following section to the reader. As a signalling tool, they direct the reader to an argument in the upcoming section that is focused on answering the question posed in the subheading; however, these questions are not necessarily research questions or subquestions, but are questions that allow the writer to move the argument in a certain direction, serving a signposting and signalling function. Questions that organise the text can occur within the text and are not constrained to usage within structural subheadings. Within the text, questions that serve to identify the end of one discussion and the start of another are considered text organising. They guide the reader’s thinking and questioning in the same direction as that of the author. This allows the readers to navigate the text more easily and encourages less rejection or objection on the part of the reader. Hyland’s (2002, p. 544) examples illustrate both explicit use of the metalanguage of text organisation and also ‘the use of in-text signals to navigate the reader through an argument’. The following examples taken from Hyland (2002, p. 544) illustrate these uses respectively:

Example 7

What are we to conclude from these data?

How should one express gratitude for a meal in another culture? Is it possible to refuse an invitation politely? How should one greet people in different speech communities?

As we shall see, our data also contain examples of both of these uses, both in English and French. Seeing this distinction, both ‘framing the discourse’ and ‘organising the text’, although rhetorically linked, can be seen to serve important and different functions.

3 Data and methodology

The data in this research are taken from KIAP (Fløttum *et al.* 2006), a multilingual comparable corpus composed of 450 RAs, with 150 in English, French and Norwegian. These RAs are sub-categorised according to discipline with 50 in linguistics, economics and medicine in each language. The RAs are tagged to organise the language within them as pertaining to: supplementary information *e.g.* biographical information; different sections *e.g.* introduction; and as language within subtitles, quotations, tables and examples. (For more detail on the corpus composition and construction see Fløttum *et al.* 2006, pp. 7-16). This study is based on a subcorpus of RAs from linguistics in English and French, KIAP-LFE. Table 2 illustrates the number of tokens in KIAP-LFE in both English and French.

Table 2 Tokens in KIAP-LFE

Language	Tokens in KIAP-LFE
English	620,617
French	441, 757
Total	1,062,374

Within KIAP-LFE, a search for question marks was undertaken using AntConc (Anthony 2014). However, only those questions that form part of the authorial texts were counted, as any others that existed within references, tables, quotations or examples were not seen to be dialogic. This revealed the number of questions to be analysed, represented in Table 3 and normalised to words per million (WPM).

Table 3 Number of question marks per language in words per million

Language	Number of question marks	Number of question marks WPM
English	195	314
French	221	500

The distribution of questions across the texts was checked to ensure that question frequency was not skewed by outliers. The questions have been analysed using Hyland’s question framework (2002) and following Fløttum *et al*’s. (2006, p. 160) contrastive framework who similarly use function as *tertium comparationis* in their contrastive study of ‘let us’ imperatives. Functionally, questions are categorised according to Hyland’s seven functions of questions as reader engagement (2002) and their forms are categorised as ‘content questions’, ‘yes/no questions’ and ‘other questions’ where ‘other questions’ are sub-categorised as ‘alternative’, ‘declarative’, ‘two-step’ and ‘compound’ questions. The questions are also analysed in terms of their distribution within the text. Following this categorisation, the results have been compared and contrasted. It is important to note that although this CBCA is based on quantitative results, the evidence is largely qualitative for, as we shall see in Section 4, it is often necessary to look at context to understand the functions when taking a function to form approach to corpus pragmatics.

4 Results

This section presents the CBCA conducted herein. Firstly, in Section 4.1, we present an overview of our findings in terms of the functions, forms and distribution of questions in KIAP-LFE. Following that in Sections 4.2 and 4.3, we take an in-depth look at questions that serve to frame the discourse and organise the text, respectively, in terms of function, form and distribution. Finally, a summary of results is presented in Section 4.4.

4.1 An overview of findings: function, form and distribution

Quantitatively, the frequency of questions per function in English and French reveals some interesting results as outlined in Table 4.

Table 4 Frequency (WPM) and percentage use of questions per function in English and French

Function	English occurrences (WPM)	English percentage use	French occurrences (WPM)	French percentage use

Getting attention	9.67	3.08	9.05	1.81
Framing the discourse	40.28	12.82	97.34	19.46
Organising the text	116.01	36.92	169.78	33.94
Creating a niche	24.17	7.69	18.11	3.62
Expressing an attitude and counter-claiming	25.78	8.21	31.69	6.33
Setting up claims	80.56	25.64	119.98	23.98
Asking real questions	17.72	5.64	54.33	10.86

What we can see here is that ‘framing the discourse’, ‘organising the text’ and ‘setting up claims’ are evidently the three most popular functions in both subcorpora as they account for 75 percent of questions in English and 77 percent of questions in French. The two functions investigated in detail here are ‘framing the discourse’ and ‘organising the text’. ‘Organising the text’ is chosen as it is the most frequent question function in both English and French. Similarly, ‘framing the discourse’ is chosen because, as a function, it is rhetorically linked to organising the text, and secondly, ‘framing the discourse’ also presents the greatest difference in terms of occurrences in English and French.

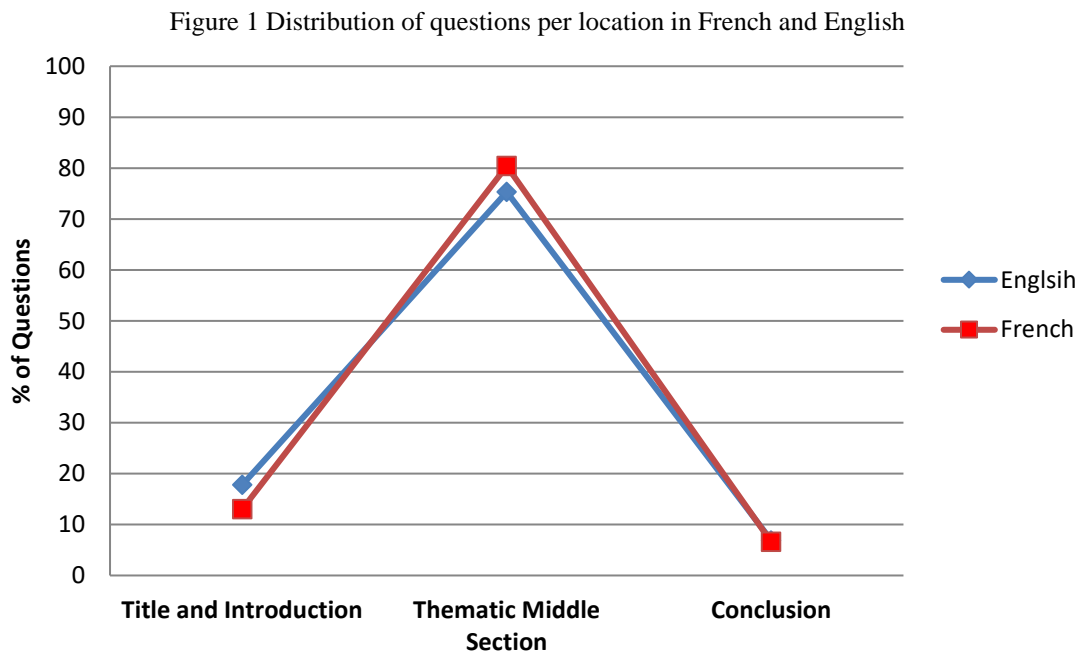
Looking more generally at question form, both English and French use ‘content questions’ the most, with ‘yes/no’ and ‘other’ questions following suit as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5 Frequency (WPM) and percentage use of question types in English and French

Question type	English (WPM)	English percentage use	French (WPM)	French percentage use
Content questions	215.91	68.72	262.59	52.49
Yes/no questions	77.34	24.62	129.03	25.79
Other questions: Alternative	17.72	5.64	43.01	8.6
Other questions: Declarative	1.61	0.51	54.33	10.86
Other questions: Two-step	0	0	11.32	2.26
Other questions: Compound	1.61	0.51	0	0

The ‘other questions’, sub-categorised in Table 5 as ‘alternative’, ‘declarative’, ‘two-step’ and ‘compound’, are interesting as the contrast between French and English is most noticeable here. Only 6.67 percent of the questions analysed in the English RAs are not ‘content’ or ‘yes/no’ questions as opposed to 21.72 percent in French. 10.86 percent of the questions in French are ‘declarative’ as opposed to 0.51 percent in English where English has few ‘other questions’ in general. Similarly, 5.64 percent of the questions in English are ‘alternative’ as opposed to 8.6 percent in French. Furthermore, the difference in the occurrences of both ‘two-step questions’ in English and ‘compound questions’ in French is intriguing; however as they occur so infrequently there is no discernible pattern forming.

Finally, the distribution of questions within RAs presents a generally homogenous view, with some slight differences, indicated in Figure 1.



Here we can see a strikingly similar pattern in the occurrences and distribution of questions in all seven categories. There are, however, differences in that questions occur more often in the title and introduction sections in English than French while they occur more often in the thematic middle sections in French than in English. Moreover, despite these apparent similarities there are some differences in individual question categories, which are discussed in Sections 4.2 and 4.3.

4.2 Framing the discourse: function

Looking deeper into the corpus, questions used in ‘framing the discourse’ often, but not always, appear in the introduction. According to Hyland’s model, these questions lend the framework to the article and highlight the questions being posed that guide the research. In English, Example 8 illustrates questions fulfilling this function.

Example 8

1. To what extent are the types of linguistic metaphor used in English financial reports different from or similar to their Spanish equivalents? 2. To what extent are the types of conceptual metaphors used in English financial reports different from or similar to their Spanish equivalents? 3. What are the implications for Spanish learners of ESP economics and Spanish financial experts who need to write in English? (engling27.txt)

Here we can see three questions clustered together. These questions are interpreted as discourse framers as through clustering they can outline the issues to be addressed in the RA and introduce the reader into the debate. The same can be said for French which, as can be seen in Example 9, can frame the discourse through questions in a similar manner.

Example 9

1. Comment rendre compte de la complicité jalouse des déterminants avec les génitifs? 2. Comment répondre aux objections qui ont justifié le regard du deuxième type? (frling05.txt)

[1. How can we account for the jealous complicity of the determinants with the genitive? 2. How can we respond to the objections that account for the representation of the second type?]

4.2.1 Framing the discourse: form

Figure 2, Figure 3 and Table 6 reveal considerable differences in the form and distribution of questions that function as discourse framers.

Figure 2 Content questions as 'framing the discourse' in KIAP-LFE

Figure 3 Yes/no questions as 'framing the discourse' in KIAP-LFE

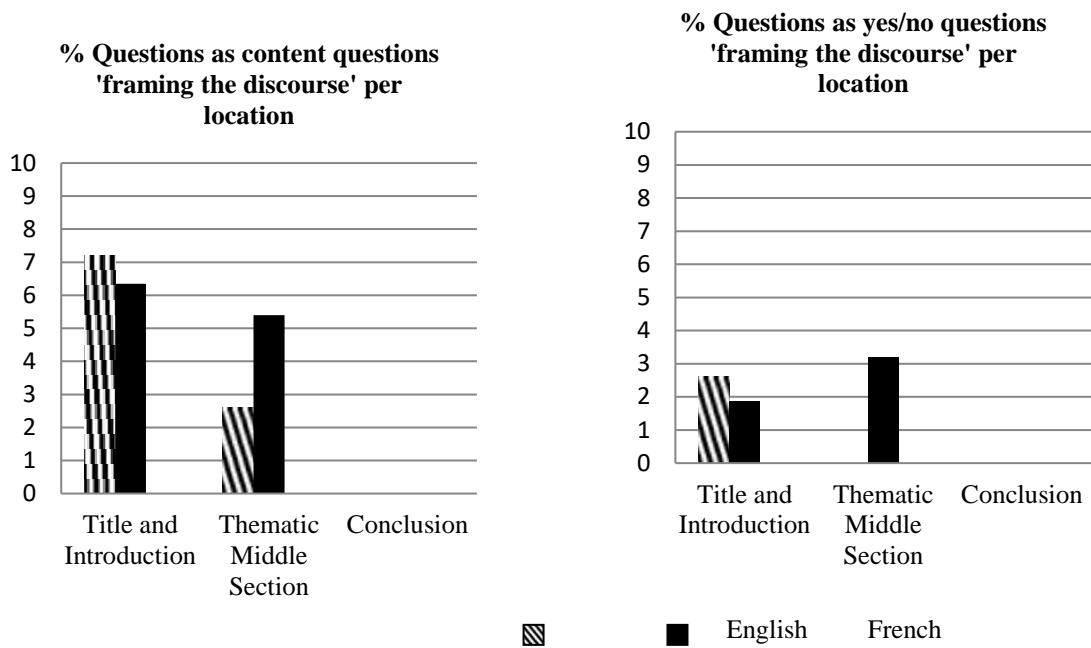


Table 6 Percentage Other Questions as 'framing the discourse' in KIAP-LFE

	Title and Introduction		Thematic Middle Section		Conclusion	
	English	French	English	French	English	French
Alternative	0.5	1.35	0	0.45	0	0
Two-step	0	0	0	0.9	0	0

In Figure 2 and Figure 3, we see that both French and English use more 'content questions' than 'yes/no questions' to frame the discourse, and French uses considerably more 'yes/no questions' than English to frame the discourse. Example 10 presents sample 'content' and 'yes/no' questions.

Example 10

How does scope ambiguity arise? (Content question; Framing the discourse; engling48.txt)

Mais de quoi peut bien s'occuper un pragmaticien? (Content question; Framing the discourse; frling38.txt)

[But on what can an expert in pragmatics focus?]

Does the relationship a theorist discerns correspond to any aspect of the ordinary user's lexical competence? (Yes/no question; Framing the discourse; engling37.txt)

Faut-il d'abord unifier tout ce qui est fiction ? (Yes/no question; Framing the discourse; frling12.txt)

[Must we first merge all that is fiction?]

Furthermore, Table 6 reveals greater diversity in question form in French, although alternative and two-step questions are rarely used in both subcorpora. Firstly, we see that with regard to ‘alternative’ and ‘two-step’ questions, only 0.5 percent of questions in the English subcorpus were used to frame the discourse when taking an ‘alternative’ form and no occurrences of ‘two-step’ questions were found. In French, on the other hand, 2.7 percent of questions in the French subcorpus were used to frame the discourse as ‘alternative’ and ‘two-step’ questions, showing greater diversity, particularly with regard to ‘alternative questions’ which occurred much more frequently than ‘two-step questions’. Example 11 presents some examples of the more common ‘alternative questions’ that frame the discourse where the reader is given an option or choice as an answer.

Example 11

Are financial reports different from or similar to their Spanish equivalents? (Alternative question; Framing the discourse; engling27.txt)

Mais alors, si on en retire une partie, c'est que le mot relève bien de cette classe, qu'il s'agisse d'une préposition de (extraction logique) ou de l'article de (partition) ? (Alternative question; Framing the discourse ; frling20.txt)

[However, if we remove a part, is the removed word ‘of’ acting as a preposition (logical extraction) or an article (splitting)?]

4.2.2 Framing the discourse: distribution

When we consider the distribution of questions that frame the discourse, English largely corroborates Hyland’s findings that such questions occur in the introduction sections with only 2.6 percent of questions in the English subcorpus being used to frame the discourse outside of the introduction. In contrast, 9.95 percent of questions in the French subcorpus were used to frame the discourse in the thematic middle section. In fact, slightly fewer questions, at 9.55 percent, were used to frame the discourse within the introduction. Considering that the French texts contain many more questions than their English counterparts overall, this is a noteworthy difference. This shows that while Hyland’s categorisation of question functions works for French, the expectation of question functions per location can differ.

4.3 Organising the text: function

The second function extrapolated here is ‘organising the text’ which, as we now know, is the most popular question type for questions as reader engagement in both subcorpora. Such questions can incorporate the use of questions in subheadings. This is illustrated in Example 12.

Example 12

7. How far do we extend the analysis? (engling45.txt)

5.2. Quel rôle joue le contexte dans la communication? (frling11.txt)

[What role does context play in communication?]

This same function is not confined solely to a feature in subheadings; in both subcorpora they also appear within the text as in Example 13.

Example 13

The development of networked computer systems has heightened interest in group writing (Batson, 1988). What impact have subjective, process-oriented, group participatory models of composition instruction had on students' conception of the written word? Writers (and writing teachers) increasingly see composition as a monologue or dialogue, not a distinct medium of communication. (engling30.txt)

Through an investigation of Example 13 in context, we can see that the question serves to move the discourse in the direction the writer wishes to move whilst also engaging the reader by posing a question the reader may wish to pose or answer.

Example 14

Quel rapport le langage entretient-il avec la communication ? A-t-il une fonction communicative ? Est-il un bon outil pour la communication? (frling11.txt)

[What relationship does language have with communication? Does it have a communicative function? Is it a good tool for communicating?]

In French, these three questions in Example 14 occur at the end of the thematic middle section and are organising the text by moving the discourse toward the conclusion section. They differ from framing the discourse as they do not represent the framework of the RA or the particular questions it set out to answer, rather they help to organise the text by moving the discussion along.

4.3.1 Organising the text: form

When we consider their form, there is evidence of some interesting equivalence and difference. Figure 4, Figure 5 and Table 7 illustrate the form and distribution of questions functioning as 'organising the text'.

Figure 4 Content questions as 'Organising

Figure 5 Yes/no questions as 'Organising

the Text' in KIAP-LFE

the Text' in KIAP-LFE

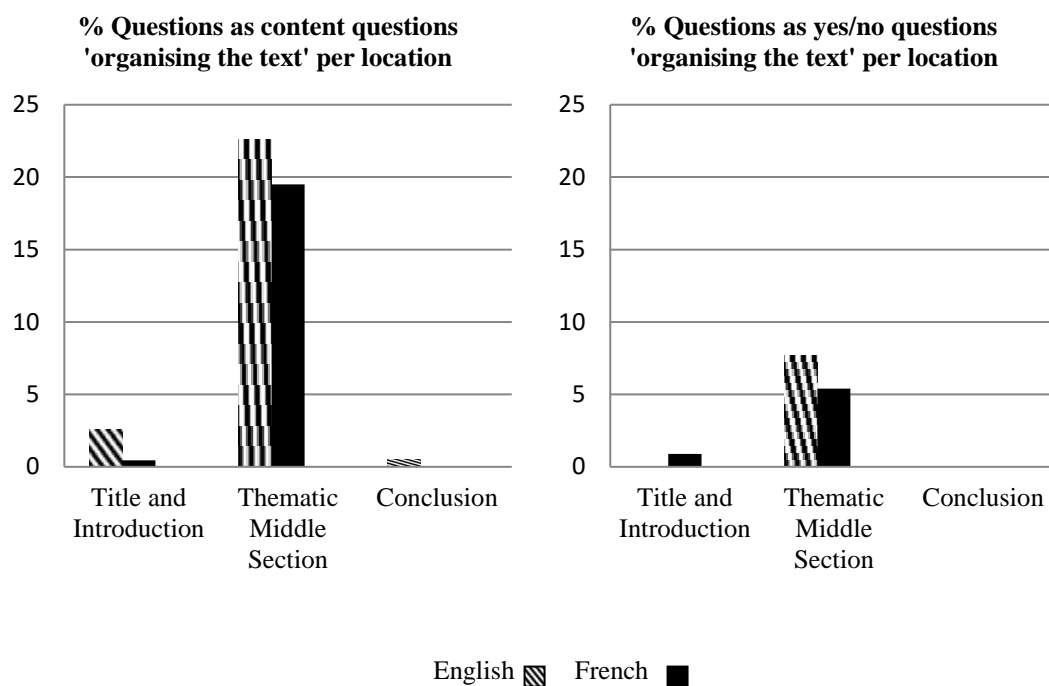


Table 7 Percent Other Questions as 'organising the text' in KIAP-LFE

	Title and Introduction		Thematic Middle Section		Conclusion	
	English	French	English	French	English	French
Alternative	0	0	3.1	1.8	0	0
Declarative	0	0	0	5	0	0.45
Compound	0	0	0.5	0	0	0
Two Step	0	0	0	0.45	0	0

In analysing the use of questions that frame the discourse earlier, we saw important differences arise. In the case of 'organising the text', we see important equivalence. In both subcorpora, there is a notable use of 'content questions', as we can see in Figure 4, which far exceeds any other form. Example 15 illustrates such questions.

Example 15

But what can these functions actually be? (Content questions; Organising the text; engling46.txt)

Quels sont alors les mots qui doivent être inclus dans cette classe? (Content questions; Organising the text; frling04.txt)

[Which are the words, therefore, that must be included in this class?]

In Figure 5, we also see that very few ‘yes/no questions’, such as those presented in Example 16, are used in both English and French.

Example 16

If students cannot question their teachers without seeming to challenge the teacher's authority, can a student ever develop critical skills? (Yes/no questions ; Organising the text; engling34.txt)

Serait-elle plus abstraite que l'autre et donc moins compositionnelle ? (Yes/no questions; Organising the text; frling10.txt)

[Would it, be more abstract and therefore less compositional than the other?]

In terms of differences, what we can see in Table 7 is a notable difference in the form of ‘other questions’ used in the text. We can see that overall, in comparison to ‘framing the discourse’, ‘organising the text’ exhibits a greater use of ‘other questions’ with 3.6 percent of questions in the English subcorpus being used to organise the text as ‘alternative’ and ‘compound’ questions. This however, remains quite a small figure considering that there are fewer questions in English overall. Conversely, in French 7.7 percent of questions in the subcorpus are being used to organise the text as ‘alternative’, ‘declarative’ and ‘two-step’ questions, with 5.45 percent pertaining to ‘declarative questions’ such as:

Example 17

Une voix imperceptible qui s'entend ? (Declarative questions; Organising the text; frling22.txt)

[An imperceptible voice that can be heard?]

This is not something we see very often in written English and not at all for the two functions analysed here. Thus, we can see that the function ‘organising the text’ allows for greater variation of question types, especially in French.

4.3.2 Organising the text: distribution

The use of questions that organise the text in both English and French in the introduction, thematic middle section and conclusion as both ‘content’ and ‘yes/no’ questions is quite consistently equivalent. This is also the case for ‘other questions’ which do not exhibit any noteworthy difference in their distribution in terms of location in text, as seen in Table 7.

4.4 Results: summary

It has been found that, in terms of functions, English and French use questions similarly; to the extent to which specific question functions are used however, they differ considerably. This is especially true for questions functioning as discourse framers and text organisers which represent the most diverse and most used question

types respectively. When we consider the form of these two functions we have highlighted a tendency towards more ‘yes/no questions’ in French than in English and a much larger use of ‘other questions’ in French than in English. Moreover, where ‘other questions’ occur, there seems to be a greater use of ‘alternative questions’ in English and a lack of ‘declarative questions’ which are most common in French. Overall, however, there are also strong similarities in the high occurrence of ‘content questions’ in both English and French for both functions. In terms of location, we have also seen that the English findings largely corroborate Hyland’s research (2002) in terms of framing the discourse in the introduction, while in French questions that frame the discourse are quite often used in the thematic middle section. This is much less common in English. Moreover, we have seen the use of questions to organise the text distributed relatively equivalently across both English and French.

5 Discussion and pedagogical implications

We have seen in the previous section that the use of questions in English and French corresponds in many ways to Hyland’s framework on question functions. At the level of form and distribution however, important differences have been noted. This section will firstly discuss how the differences in form and distribution relate to existing research, notably in relation to reader- and writer-responsible languages. Following this, the limitations and pedagogical implications of the study will also be briefly discussed.

In relation to differences in form, we have seen that English and French made use, primarily, of ‘content’ and ‘yes/no’ questions whereas French revealed more occurrences of ‘alternative’ and ‘declarative’ questions than English. We might wonder why such differences occur. A likely explanation of this variation lies in the accepted register of academic writing in English and French where, although both English and French academic writing can be seen as formal registers (Swales and Feak 1994; Salager-Meyer and Ariza 2004), the ways in which these registers are constructed formally and lexico-grammatically can vary across languages (Biber and Conrad 2001, p. 192). Due to the minimal usage of ‘other’ questions in English (6.67 percent of all questions in the English subcorpus), we can see that questions such as ‘declarative questions’ do not generally form part of the register of academic writing in this English subcorpus. In fact ‘alternative questions’, which were the most used ‘other question’ in English, only accounted for 5.64 percent of the total number of questions in the subcorpus, rendering them somewhat negligible in overall usage. In contrast to the English articles, French contains many ‘other questions’ and of these, uses primarily ‘declarative questions’, with some, albeit fewer ‘alternative questions’. According to Carter and McCarthy (2013, p. 181) ‘declarative questions’ in terms of English register, are more often used in spoken discourse. However, it is clear that the authors of these French articles here do not view such

a question form as pertaining solely to informal or spoken discourse. Interestingly, research on ‘declarative questions’ in English, outside the context of academic writing, has found that in more than half of the instances of their occurrence, they are undecipherable without some degree of context (Beun 2000, p. 311); such a question may seem out of place in English academic writing which we know requires a certain explicitness and reader friendliness. However, this more ambiguous question type may seem more than fitting in the French language which is seen as a reader-responsible language.

In terms of differences in the distribution of questions, a considerable difference occurs within the category of ‘framing the discourse’ in that questions tend to occur primarily within the introduction section in the English subcorpus whereas they occur more often in the thematic middle section in the French RAs. Biber and Conrad (2009, p. 71) have noted that generic conventions for genres that seem the same, in the case of our research, the academic RA in linguistics in English and French, can differ across languages and this may possibly explain the difference between English and French here. Questions that frame the discourse are often used to outline research questions and subquestions, which typically occur at the beginning of linguistic RAs in English according to these data. This, we can infer, can be somewhat different in French where research questions and subquestions can also be evoked later in the text. Seeing the consistency in our French subcorpus, it seems a contrasting generic convention and one that may be important to recognise when writing RAs in English and French. Such variance in generic conventions has also been seen to occur across disciplines, and although it is beyond the scope of this research to compare across disciplines, this is addressed by researchers such as Fløttum *et al.* (2006). For example, in their analysis of research articles in linguistics, economics and medicine, they demonstrate that the generic structure of research articles in medicine would typically follow the introduction, methods, results and discussion (IMRD) format while, in the case of linguistics, this was not always the case.

Another important issue which requires discussion relates to reader- and writer-responsible languages. When we consider the results of this research in terms of the literature on this topic, we begin to see some interesting patterns emerge. For example, we saw that questions were used more frequently in French. Moreover, we saw that the use of questions in the particular functions of framing the discourse and organising the text was more common in French than in English. These questions can be seen as features of writer-responsible languages. However, researchers such as Hinds (1987) and Salager-Meyer (2011) see English, not French, as writer-responsible and Hyland (2005a, p. 111) points out that in writer-responsible languages, interaction and engagement of the reader are quite explicit. Conversely, the language of French academic writing is seen to be reader-responsible (Fløttum

et al. 2006, p. 169) where the reader is arguably less important. Our results, initially, do not corroborate this, as French creates a more reader-friendly text in terms of question use. Thus, we could begin to see French, at least in the case of these data, as more writer-responsible than previously imagined. However, it is arguable that such distinctions are explicable in a context where academic writing is seeing increasing influence from the English language. Although French is quite resistant to anglicisation, a slow convergence towards English language norms in French academic writing has been noted (Salager-Meyer *et al.* 2003). Thus, the exhibited reader-friendliness could be a result of such an influence. Moreover, the explicit focus on questions here only deals with one aspect of reader- and writer-responsible texts, whereas researchers such as Salager-Meyer *et al.* (2003) have not explicitly focused on questions.

In terms of limitations, it is important to note that, owing to the small data set on which this research is based, it is difficult to make any general claims about the nature of academic writing in English and French. A preliminary analysis of questions in the economics subcorpora of KIAP in French and English, for example, reveals much fewer occurrences of questions in French than in English. Indeed, researchers in academic writing have noted differences between disciplines (Samraj 2002) as well as within a single discipline (Ozturk 2007). Nonetheless, these findings are noteworthy as they do indicate a certain consistency in functions and some similarities and differences in terms of the form and distribution of these functions across languages.

When we consider the value of the results from a pedagogical perspective, they can contribute to the teaching of English for academic purposes and *Français langue académique* in a number of ways. Firstly, at a basic level, attested examples of natural language use in the context of academic writing in English and French can prove useful in illustrating grammatical structures which published researchers use to pose questions in their research. In addition, they show how a small, specialised corpus can inform the writing of novice researchers, particularly, but not exclusively, non-native speakers. Lee and Swales (2006), for example, report on a project where novice writers (non-native speaker postgraduate researchers) were asked to create a small corpus of articles in their discipline and analyse them with the aim of the novice writers improving their writing. This produced generally positive results. Such a corpus could also be examined by the novice researchers to study how the published authors express aspects of stance and engagement, such as questions, in their writing. Alternatively, a teacher of academic writing could use such a corpus as a source of examples to illustrate the aspects of academic writing covered in the course. These applications could employ the use of a monolingual specialised corpus of expert writing or a comparable corpus of expert and novice writing, as in the case of Lee and Swales (2006). However,

the use of bilingual and multilingual comparable corpora in language learning and teaching has received relatively little attention to date outside the context of translation studies (Laviosa 2002). In 1999, Aston called for the application of comparable corpora to informing language pedagogy (p. 314). Ten years later Granger (2009, p. 9) continued to make this call, noting that the application of multilingual comparable corpora to language teaching warrants further investigation. While classroom applications in this area are clearly limited to individual researchers or groups of learners with the same first language, they nonetheless represent a considerable proportion of language learners.

6 Conclusion and future directions

Our study of questions as devices of reader engagement in English and French academic writing in linguistics RAs has revealed some valuable and pertinent findings. First, in this context, French uses more questions than English which is surprising as, typically, English is seen as more reader-friendly than French. Second, we see that French uses certain functions such as ‘framing the discourse’ and ‘organising the text’ more than English and, importantly, the forms of these questions differ substantially, where French has more varied forms, and forms that do not seem to be part of the English academic writing register, at least in the case of these data. Moreover, the distribution of questions produces interesting variances, highlighting further pertinent differences between English and French academic writing and the generic conventions within the English and French linguistics RA. These findings have particular implications for the teaching of academic writing to language learners and novice academic writers through the application of small, specialised corpora and the potential for the use of comparable corpora in the language classroom. Furthermore, in terms of its contribution to the study of pragmatics, this research exemplifies the ways in which corpus studies can take a function to form approach where the focus on the question function is at the centre of the research. Questions are easily identifiable by the use of question marks as ‘illocutionary force indicating devices’ (Flöck and Geluykens 2015, p. 7) which allow for the identification of all instances of questions. In this way, questions can serve as an accessible ‘starting point for electronic searches in language corpora’ (Flöck and Geluykens 2015, p. 7), moving away from the more traditional form to function corpus approach.

Finally, this study also suggests the need for further research in a number of areas. Firstly, much more work must be done on reader engagement across languages and in different disciplines in order to paint a clearer and fuller image of questions and other evaluative markers as reader engagement in academic writing across languages. Like Fløttum *et al.* (2006), variation across languages and disciplines could be analysed, focusing on specific functions

and forms of questions and indeed other pragmatic features, such as hedging and boosting. Secondly, as Ozturk (2007) and Samraj (2002) identify, variation within and across disciplines deserves more attention. Finally, diachronic analyses such as those conducted by Salager-Meyer *et al.* (2003), focusing on reader engagement would be an interesting route to reveal any changing patterns in the use of questions and other evaluative markers in academic writing over time across languages and/or disciplines. In other words, although academic writing is a much researched area, a small study such as this suggests that there is ample scope for further research on reader engagement and evaluative markers, particularly in the multilingual context.

Conflict of interest statement

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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ⁱ The acronym KIAP comes from the Norwegian: Kulturell Identitet i Akademisk Prosa.

ⁱⁱ Readers familiar with the history of the French language may be surprised to find that it is not given the highest ranking for clarity given the much quoted phrase by Rivarol (1784) ‘ce qui n’est pas clair n’est pas français’. Rivarol explicitly situates French above languages such as English and Italian in terms of clarity.