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CERLIS Series
Volume 1

Stefania M. Maci & Michele Sala (eds)

Genre Variation
in Academic Communication
Emerging Disciplinary Trends

CELSB
Bergamo

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CERLIS SERIES Vol. 1

CERLIS

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GENRE VARIATION IN ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION.
EMERGING DISCIPLINARY TRENDS

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DONATELLA MALAVASI

Research Articles in Business and Marketing:
A Comparative Analysis of English *Discussions*
and Italian *Conclusioni*

1. Introduction

The emergence of a genre-analytic approach in the 1990s has prominently affected research in discourse analysis. From the ESP perspective (Swales 1990, 2004; Bhatia 1993, 2004; Dudley-Evans 1994), a variety of professional and academic genres have been studied in their regularities in terms of communicative purposes, discourse community, intended audience, contents and stylistic choices. In this context, academic discourse has ‘catalysed’ burgeoning research on a variety of genre realisations, such as the research article (RA), the abstract, the book review, the textbook and the review article (Swales 1990, 2004; Myers 1992; Bhatia 1993; Motta-Roth 1998; Bondi 1999; Hyland 2000; Stotesbury 2003; Diani 2004). In particular, research articles, which are widely accepted to be the central genre of knowledge production, have received extensive attention in genre analysis, and much research has been done on their generic peculiarities, text features such as metadiscourse, and their conventional IMRD structure (Introduction–Methods–Results–Discussion, Swales 1990). More recently, however, the genre-based tendency to highlight commonalities among texts has given way to a new strand of research on academic discourse which accounts for comparative, cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic patterns. From these viewpoints, RA stylistic and rhetorical variation has been examined across disciplines as the ‘manifestation’ of their epistemic conventions, or across languages and cultures as the ‘reflection’ of

their specificities (Mauranen 1993a, 1993b; Hyland 2000; Dahl 2004; Bamford/Bondi 2005; Giannoni 2005; Hyland/Bondi 2006; Mur-Dueñas 2011).

Set against this theoretical background, the chapter sets out to explore the cultural variability of formal and rhetorical variation in the closing parts of RAs written in English and in Italian. In particular, the aim of this study is to highlight argumentative similarities and differences across the final sections of Business and Marketing research articles. As a whole, the RA is to be considered a complex artefact which enables researchers to make the results of their studies public, construct knowledge, and gain readers' acceptance for their work and for themselves as authoritative members of the scientific community they belong to (Swales 1990). Nevertheless, it is the last section of RAs, which is generally labelled as Discussion, that displays a major rhetorical orientation: this is where authors summarise conclusions, recapitulate the main points, highlight theoretical implications, and suggest potential applications or lines of further research (Swales 1990, 2004; Dudley-Evans 1994; Yang/Allison 2003; Soler Monreal/Gil Salom 2007).

Thus, in an attempt to find out how the English and Italian writer presents, evaluates, comments on and discusses results argumentatively, the present study will look at the occurrences of some frequent words which contribute to the rhetorical articulation of RAs. This chapter will specifically concentrate on a selection of metadiscourse strategies (Vande Kopple 1985; Crismore *et al.* 1993; Hyland 1998, 1999, 2005) and *verba dicendi* (Thompson/Ye 1991; Thomas/Hawes 1994), which signal both the RA writer's intrusion into the discourse, and his/her attempts to influence the receiver's perception of the text.

The next section provides a presentation of the materials used for the study as well as the methodology adopted. The results of the quantitative as well as qualitative analysis of English *Discussions* and Italian *Conclusioni* will be reported in Section 3. Finally, in Section 4 the results of the comparative study will be discussed and attention will be paid to the link existing between national cultures and the argumentative characterisation of Discussion sections from the same discipline.

2. Materials and methods

The study is based on two comparable corpora. The first consists of 44 Discussion, Conclusion and closing sections from English RAs totalling approximately 74,000 tokens. Texts were drawn from some of the RAs published in three international journals in 2000 (*Academy of Management Journal*, *AoMJ*; *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *ASQ*; *Marketing Science*, *MS*), which together with other journals¹ and their 1999 issues make up a corpus of academic business and marketing texts.² The second corpus, which addresses a national readership but covers a parallel range of sub-disciplines in Business and Marketing, includes 44 concluding parts of Italian RAs totalling circa 32,000 running words. The papers were published in 2000 in three specialised journals (*Economia e Management*, *EM*; *Studi Organizzativi*, *SO*; *Micro & Macro Marketing*, *MM*).

As regards the criteria for corpus design, sections for analysis were identified on the basis of their conventional functional headings (e.g. *Discussion*, *Discussion and Conclusion*, *Conclusioni*), or varied functional headings (e.g. *Concluding remarks*, *Summary*, *Osservazioni Conclusive*, *Considerazioni Finali*). The portion of RAs dedicated to concluding remarks appears to be generally labelled as *Discussion* in English texts, whose rhetorical organisation turns out to mirror-image the conventional IMRD structure (Table 1).

1 The specialised journals taken into account for the compilation of the whole Marketing corpus are: *Academy of Management Journals (AoMJ)*, *Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ)*, *Business and Society Review (BaSR)*, *Business Strategy Review (BSR)*, *Journal of Marketing Research (JoMR)*, *Journal of World Business (JoWB)*, and *Marketing Science (MS)*.

2 The corpus of Marketing RAs together with two comparable corpora constitutes the HEM or History, Economics and Marketing Corpus which was compiled by a research group at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia.

Sections / Headings	AoMJ (n = 15)	ASQ (n = 14)	MS (n = 15)	Total (n = 44)
<i>Discussion</i>	9	10	4	23
<i>Discussion and conclusion(s)</i>	2	4	2	8
<i>Conclusion(s)</i>	0	0	4	4
Discussion and conclusion as two separate sections	4	0	2	6
Other labels: <i>concluding remarks, summary</i>	0	0	3	3

Table 1. English RA closing sections and their headings.

By contrast, Italian RAs tend to show a less formalised text structure which, instead of featuring *Discussion*, includes a section bearing the title *Conclusioni* or “an alternative functional heading to this effect” (Yang/Allison 2003: 372), i.e. *Considerazioni finali*, *Considerazioni conclusive*, or *Osservazioni conclusive* (Table 2). Only one Italian article closes with a section in which the labels *Discussione* and *Conclusioni* appear together.

Sections / Headings	EM (n = 19)	MM (n = 12)	SO (n = 13)	Total (n = 44)
<i>Conclusioni</i> [Conclusions]	18	4	9	31
<i>Discussione e conclusioni</i> [Discussion and conclusions]	0	0	1	1
Other labels: <i>osservazioni conclusive, considerazioni finali</i> [concluding observations / remarks, final considerations]	1	8	3	12

Table 2. Italian RA closing sections and their headings.

From a methodological perspective, the study was carried out with the support of corpus linguistics tools such as wordlists, KWIC concordances and collocates (Sinclair 1991, 1996, 2003, 2004).³ In an effort to identify the argumentative techniques which are predominant in English *Discussions* vs. Italian *Conclusioni*, the frequency wordlist

3 For the processing of wordlists, concordances and collocates, the PC software *Wordsmith Tools 3.0* (Scott 1998) was used.

for each corpus was generated and inspected. The quantitative and qualitative study of a selection of the 20 most pervasive words of each collection of texts was aimed at identifying some predominant function elements which signal authors' attempts to persuade the intended audience of the validity of their research findings. Starting from the recognition of some of the highest ranking closed-class words (viz. conjunctions, prepositions, determiners and pronouns) in the two databases, the extended lexical units in which they occur and their phraseological behaviour were investigated. The choice to prioritize from the outset grammatical words over lexical items and to consider them as the point of departure for the analysis follows the methodology proposed by Groom (2010). As he suggests (2010: 59), words and keywords belonging to closed grammatical classes can be "perceived as useful indicators of the characteristic style of a particular text or corpus" and, thus, "form a valid and preferable basis for empirical linguistic research into specialised discourses".

The selected items were concordanced, and analysed in their linguistic co-text as well as collocational patterns (Sinclair 1996, 2003, 2004). Particular attention was paid to the tendency of the nodes under study to occur in sequences of words which comprise metadiscursive devices and *verba dicendi*. In the light of the existing literature on metadiscourse (e.g. Dahl 2004; Hyland 2005; Hyland/Bondi 2006; Bondi/Diani 2008; Bondi/Mazzi, 2008; Cacchiani 2010; Molino 2010), the analysis focused on interpersonal or interactional metadiscourse elements (viz. hedges, boosters, attitude signals, self mentions, and engagement markers), which are used to enter a dialogue with the audience, while textual or interactive devices (viz. frame markers, transitions, evidentials, code glosses, Vande Kopple 1985 and Hyland 2005), that are deployed by writers to guide the reader through the text, were partly taken into account. Besides, reporting verbs were examined in their three-fold categorisation (Thompson/Ye 1991; Thomas/Hawes 1994): research verbs, which occur in statements of findings or procedures (*analyse, calculate, discover, explore, find, observe, show*); cognitive verbs, related to mental processes (*believe, suspect, view*); and discourse verbs, concerned with verbal expression (*discuss, hypothesise, state*). Metadiscourse and reporting verbs were looked at as they allow

academics to make explicit or conceal their presence in texts, and mark the rhetorical acts they perform in their argumentation process. Finally, the comparison drawn between the two corpora was intended to verify whether languages and national cultures could be interpreted as significant variables governing the argumentative discussion of results in business and marketing in English and in Italian.

3. Results

As anticipated in Section 2, this section is intended to illustrate the main findings of the analysis of some lexical, grammatical and metadiscursive items which are indicative of the RA writer's presence in the text, as well as his/her interpretation and evaluation of results. The study of the English corpus of RA *Discussions* (Sub-section 3.1) will be followed by the study of the Italian *Conclusioni* (Sub-section 3.2). A combination of patterns will provide some evidence to the (dis-)similar strategies developed by academics in English and in Italian to establish a relationship with their readership and convince them of the legitimacy of their outcomes (Section 4).

3.1. English *Discussions*

The focus of this section is on the analysis of the phraseological behaviour of some grammatical words which appear among the 20 most widely spread tokens of the English corpus. A preliminary reading of the frequency-based wordlist (reproduced in Table 3) suggests that research-related meta-elements, i.e. explicit and lexical references to studies and results, are absent.

<i>N</i>	<i>WORD</i>	<i>FREQ.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>WORD</i>	<i>FREQ.</i>	<i>%</i>
1	THE	4,030	5.47	11	BE	540	0.73
2	OF	2,832	3.84	12	ON	517	0.70
3	AND	2,078	2.82	13	ARE	504	0.68

4	TO	1,958	2.66	14	THIS	498	0.68
5	IN	1,709	2.32	15	WITH	483	0.66
6	A	1,302	1.77	16	BY	445	0.60
7	THAT	1,292	1.75	17	NOT	418	0.57
8	IS	787	1.07	18	OUR	407	0.55
9	FOR	764	1.04	19	WE	384	0.52
10	AS	577	0.78	20	MAY	345	0.47

Table 3. English RA Discussions: the most frequent words and their frequency of occurrence.

Disregarding some of the most frequent function words such as *the*, *of*, *and*, *to*, the study will concentrate on the following nodes: *as*, *this*, *not*, *our*, and *we*. The nodes under consideration are assumed to bring insights into some argumentative practices that are peculiar to English *Discussions*, while pointing to some distinctive aspects that differentiate English RA closing sections from Italian *Conclusioni*. As Groom observed (2010: 63), grammatical words “can tell us at least much about the preferred meanings of a particular discourse community as they can tell us about the preferred stylistic features associated with its community”.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the search word *as* (577 entries) suggests that it is one of the most pervasive elements of the English Discussion sections. The inspection of a random 100-line concordance sample of the node reveals that *as* is frequently used as a preposition to signal RA authors’ interpretations of results, comments on other research findings, and, ultimately, their endeavour to entice readers into accepting the upshot discussed (in c. 35% of the concordance sample). This is testified to by excerpt 1 (my italics as in the other quotations), in which a clarification and interpretation of findings is offered:

- (1) But the paper also suggests that caution is required before *interpreting these results as a mandate* to build large networks of indirect ties. The arguments and findings of this paper draw attention to three factors that need to be considered before embarking on a strategy of substituting indirect for direct ties. (ASQ11)

Additionally, worthy of note is the use of *as* for ‘exophoric’ source attributions and for ‘endophoric’ references, which account for about 10% of the sample. On the one hand, the recourse to *as* allows academics to review the existing literature and theoretical items in an effort to support their claims, to protect them from criticism, and to confer validity on their findings by mentioning widely accepted knowledge (see example 2).

- (2) *As Barnett and Carroll (1995) noted*, organizational theories have for some time been polarized according to their perspective on the adaptability of organizations. (ASQ4)

On the other hand, *as* is employed by scholars to guide the audience in the reading of the whole RA and in the understanding of the results. Specifically, in the closing section of RAs, an earlier stage of the research or a previous section of the paper itself is sometimes pointed to, and findings appear to be schematically (or visually) recapitulated, and discursively (or verbally) presented as the outcome of research. Typical examples are:

- (3) *As discussed in the Methods section*, there was no differential trend in the response rates of promoted and nonpromoted tellers that would reflect a differential mortality (subject attrition) threat to internal validity (AoMJ4)
- (4) Our proposed (and validated) spatial coverage model provides both a ‘snapshot summary’ of the search engines vis-a-vis each other (*as in Figure 2*) [...] (MS3)
- (5) *As we found here*, achieving success and sustainment depends on a long process of building legitimacy across three conceptually distinct dimensions and being able to overcome significant challenges based on critical legitimacy deficiencies. (ASQ10)

By referring to figures (4) or previous considerations (3), academics reinforce their claims and introduce explanatory remarks whereby they embark on interpretations of data. It is also thanks to exemplifications and long stretches of language introduced by *such as* and *as well as* (in c. 20% of the concordances under consideration)

that writers take readers by the hand, and ‘venture’ to detail and clarify the issues under study (6 and 7):

- (6) This finding becomes particularly useful with the advent of virtual organizations, whose members are separated by time and location but connected through *technology channels such as* electronic bulletin boards, e-mail, and group decision support systems. (AoMJ5)
- (7) Such applications would require researchers to perform additional reliability tests to determine the consistency in observers’ overall ratings of the eight mood circumplex categories. Such efforts would provide further validation of the observer’s instrument *as well as* extend its practical utility (ASQ6)

Furthermore, data suggest that it is not simply around *as* but also around other repeated terms such as *this* (498 entries) and *our* (407 entries) that scholars shape their rhetorical reasoning in English RA Discussions. Corpus insights on the use of the deictic *this* and the possessive *our* reveal that they tend to be followed by nominal forms which refer to both research-related meta-elements and marketing variables. *This* and *our* turn out to collocate with similar nouns such as *study* (85 and 37), *research* (19 and 16), *finding(s)* (15 and 65), and *result(s)* (8 and 51). Additionally, *our* clusters with lexical items that highlight the empirical, model-developing and experimental gist of marketing research (e.g. *data*, 23 occurrences; *sample*, 17 occurrences; *model*, 19 occurrences), whereas *this* often co-occurs with the ‘final’ product of studies, viz. *paper* (15) and *article* (8). Irrespective of their semantic preference, *this* and *our* followed by a noun are repeatedly accompanied by both certainty-related verbs (e.g. *show/showed*, 16 occurrences and *demonstrate/demonstrated*, 10 occurrences), and more tentative and speculative ones (e.g. *suggest/suggested*, 60 occurrences; and modals such as *may*, 15 occurrences), as can be observed in the following excerpts.

- (8) Even more interestingly, *our analysis demonstrates* that firms actually seek to embed themselves in interfirm networks: by entering markets where they experience a moderate level of multipoint contact, firms increase the strength of joint-location ties to multipoint rivals and thereby increase their interdependence with those rivals. (ASQ7)

- (9) *This finding suggests* that these firms did not view a smaller number of potential suppliers of new technology as a strategic threat. Instead, a larger number of suppliers may simply provide more opportunities for them to form collaborative relationships. (AoMJ14)

The co-occurrence of *this* and *our* with boosters and more than twice as often with hedges reflects the twofold goal of writers. On the one hand, academics evidently strive to present themselves as temperate *personae* who do not want to impose their opinions. On the other, they also try to ‘promote’ themselves as competent researchers who endeavour to convince the readership of the validity of their experiments and findings. The tendency to rely on metadiscourse elements to present findings in a prominently tentative but also confident way is complemented by more or less overt assessments, evaluations and descriptions of results. The phrase *this* or *our* *, where the wildcard * stands for a range of research-related nominal forms, is embedded in evaluative statements, typically characterized by the use of positive evaluative elements (e.g. *better*, *consistent* in example 10, *contribute*, *extend*, *first*, *interesting*, *shed light*, and *useful* in excerpt 11).

- (10) *This result is consistent with* previous findings in both psychology (e.g., Chertkoff and Esser 1976) and experimental economics (e.g., Rapoport et al. 1995). (MS9)
- (11) *This finding becomes particularly useful* with the advent of virtual organizations, whose members are separated by time and location but connected through technology channels such as emails [...]. (AoMJ5)

Evaluative expressions, positive lexis and categorical assertions are used by researchers to highlight the strengths of their study, to compare it with previous analyses, to stress its consistency, importance and efficiency, and to insist on the relevance, usefulness and future applicability of their research. In doing so, however, academics do not shirk their responsibilities to comment on negative results or limitations of the studies they conducted. This is evidenced by a set of concordances of *this* or *our* followed by *analysis*, *research*, *study*, *finding(s)*. The analysis of these nominal phrases shows that

they are often imbued with a negative aura of meaning by their surrounding co-text and co-occurring words (e.g. *handicapped* in example 12, *incomplete, inconsistent, lack, limited, problematic, suffer* in excerpt 13).

- (12) Here, as well, we found no significant effects on the patent-based outcome measures, although *this analysis was also handicapped* by our inability to incorporate multiyear lags. (ASQ4)
- (13) Additionally, *our analysis suffers from at least two errors of omission*. Our sample was biased toward profitable overseas opportunities because we did not have data on the countries that were not chosen for entry. Furthermore, we explicitly limited our analysis to the choice of the level of equity control made by Japanese parent firms. (AoMJ13)

The presence of negative evaluation highlights that studies in the disciplines of Business and Marketing are overwhelmingly presented in their good points as well as with their flaws.

The tendency to discuss research weaknesses is also corroborated by the occurrences of *not* (418 entries). The negative particle largely appears in the descriptions of the limitations of an 'experiment'. Specifically, the incompleteness, fault or failure of a study and its outcomes are not purposely unsaid, but explicated and mitigated. Obvious negative-sounding expressions are reformulated, softened and replaced by an alternative, which consists of *not* followed by positive words. *Formulae* of this kind, which pervade the discussion sections under study, are *not + allow, capture, consider, explain, reflect, support* or *is/are not* followed by positive expressions (e.g. *clear, supportive, without limitations*), as in the following examples:

- (14) For these reasons, *our findings do not make us sure* that being promoted caused a decrease in motivation in this sample on the basis of this finding. Future research on promotions may better examine objective performance outcomes. (AoMJ4)
- (15) Despite the contributions we believe we have made, *the research is not without limitations*. Most notably, the use of only two networks limits the generalizability of the findings. (ASQ10)

In the unfolding of the results discussion and interpretation, non-personal references to analyses and their upshot are interwoven with a personal projection of the writer into the text. Support for the explicit manifestation of authors' voice, who step into the text to stamp their personal views on the results discussed, is observed in the reiteration of *we* (384 occurrences). Notably, data from the corpus indicate that the first person plural pronoun tends to collocate predominantly with research verbs (e.g. *find/found*, 58 occurrences, see example 16; *examine/examined*, 13 occurrences; *studied*, 8 occurrences; *observed*, 8 occurrences), and, to a lesser extent, with cognitive and discourse verbs (e.g. *believe*, 15 occurrences, see excerpt 17; *argue/argued*, 11 occurrences; *note/noted*, 8 occurrences; *conclude*, 5 occurrences, see instance 18):

- (16) *We found* significant effects in support of our hypotheses for each component of this mediated effect. First, having a friend in the employing organization had a strong positive effect on negotiated salary increases. (ASQ1)
- (17) [...] *we believe* our findings indicate that culture is important but that its role is far more complex than past research and theory suggest. (AoMJ10)
- (18) Thus *we conclude* that in general it is important to consider both overall coverage ability and overlap in selecting combinations of search engines. (MS3)

The use of reporting verbs reflects the emphasis placed by scholars on the key part they play in the study they conduct, and the more 'marginal' role they ascribe to themselves in the interpretation of outcomes and implications. RA writers intervene primarily to emphasize their *agentive self* or to stress their contribution to the analysis being carried out, and only secondarily to show their *epistemic self* and to argue for the reliability of their findings (Dyer/Keller-Cohen 2000).

The analysis of the closing portions of RAs in English highlights academics' willingness to characterise the results of their research as legitimate. Common strategies, viz. *we* followed by research verbs, hedges, and evaluative lexical items, are prominently

adopted by Business and Marketing scholars to account for the findings of their studies, exemplify them, evaluate their relevance, while, simultaneously, negotiating their research outcomes with interlocutors and opening a space for discussion.

3.2. Italian *Conclusioni*

In the light of the previous analysis, the Italian corpus of *Conclusioni* will be scanned for evidence of techniques employed by this second group of writers to present and discuss argumentatively the findings of their research. The inspection of the first 20 most frequent words (listed in Table 4) reveals the paucity of text- and research-related signposts or lexical signals pointing to the analyses carried out and the results obtained.

<i>N</i>	<i>WORD</i>	<i>FREQ.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>WORD</i>	<i>FREQ.</i>	<i>%</i>
1	DI [of]	1,739	5.47	11	DEL [of the]	318	1.00
2	E [and]	915	2.88	12	E' [is]	318	1.00
3	CHE [that / who / which]	594	1.87	13	UNA [a]	302	0.95
4	IN [in]	586	1.84	14	DELLE [of the]	289	0.91
5	LA [the]	547	1.72	15	DELLA [of the]	268	0.84
6	IL [the]	458	1.44	16	I [the]	262	0.82
7	A [at / in]	382	1.20	17	SI [one]	261	0.82
8	UN [a]	382	1.20	18	NON [not]	218	0.69
9	LE [the]	361	1.14	19	DA [from / by]	212	0.67
10	PER [for]	338	1.06	20	DEI [of the]	211	0.66

Table 4. Italian RA *Conclusioni*: the most frequent words and their frequency of occurrence.

For reasons of consistency with the analysis presented in 3.1, this study will focus on some function words that can be considered potential markers of the Italian authors' intrusion into the text. The nodes which are selected by virtue of their hypothesised capability of giving evidence to the argumentative strategies adopted by Italian scholars are *è*, *si* and *non*.

The third person singular form of the verb *essere* [to be], *è* (318 occurrences), is used in non-personal constructions to define or clarify the manifold business variables under study (e.g. *sviluppo* [development], *soddisfazione* [satisfaction], *impresa* [business/company/firm], *management*), to specify or reformulate some research-related meta-elements (such as *ipotesi* [hypothesis], *dato* [data], *modello* [model], *obiettivo* [aim/objective], *studio* [study]), and to re-state the main findings illustrated earlier on in the RA. The different uses of *è* are exemplified by excerpts 19 to 21:

- (19) Anche in Italia *lo sviluppo del mercato delle imprese è ormai un fenomeno irreversibile*, se si osserva che la crescita in molti settori non può che avvenire attraverso operazioni di acquisizione. (EM18)
[Also in Italy, the companies' market development is almost an irreversible phenomenon, if one observes that growth in many sectors occurs only through acquisitions.]
- (20) *La nostra ipotesi di fondo è che* il ruolo di questa teoria [...] si è esaurito. (SO3)
[Our basic hypothesis is that the role of this theory [...] is no longer relevant.]
- (21) La ricerca ha infatti confermato la natura sociale e situata del processo di socializzazione all'uso delle tecnologie, valorizzando l'importanza della mediazione sociale nei processi di socializzazione e sviluppo organizzativo mediati dalle tecnologie. *Quest'ultimo non è un percorso rigido.* (SO6)
[This research has indeed confirmed the social and situated nature of the process of socialization to the use of technologies, by valuing the importance of social mediation in the processes of socialization and organizational development that are mediated by technologies. This is not a rigid path.]

In particular, the verb *è* is repeatedly embedded in impersonal sequences in which writers offer readers their own interpretation of the study conducted and discussed. In detail, decisive proof of academics' presence in the text is provided by a repertoire of metadiscourse devices such as *certo* ([certain], 2 occurrences), *evidente* ([evident], 2 occurrences), *probabile* [probable], 2 occurrences), *possibile* ([possible], 7 occurrences), *vero* ([true], 6 occurrences), as in the examples below:

- (22) *Quel che è certo è che* tali comportamenti finiscono per alterare le condizioni competitive dell'intero settore [...]. (EM8)
[What is certain is that these behaviours end up altering the competitive conditions of the whole sector.]
- (23) Innanzitutto lo studio qui esposto è di carattere esplorativo: poiché il campione di imprese esaminato non è rappresentativo dell'intera popolazione di aziende italiane, *non è possibile* generalizzare i risultati emersi. (MM12)
[First of all, the study presented here is an explanatory one: as the sample of companies examined is not representative of the population of Italian companies, it is not possible to generalize the results obtained.]

The closing portions of RAs in Italian turn out to intermingle certainty-related expressions (e.g. *certo, certamente, decisamente, sicuramente* [certain, certainly, definitely, surely]) and recurrent constructions which encode the writers' 'invitation' to the audience to conform to their knowledge claims. Authors' intention to signal their inferential conclusions and to recommend their interlocutors some specific interpretations of data and findings is conveyed by clusters such as *è necessario* ([it is necessary], 8 occurrences), *è da* followed by *notare, intendersi, dimostrare* ([it is to be / it should be noted, intended, demonstrated], 3 occurrences), and *è opportuno / bene / d'obbligo / inevitabile / preferibile* ([it is appropriate / worth / obligatory / inevitable / preferable], 8 occurrences), as in 24 and 25.

- (24) Allo stesso modo la dichiarazione di incoerenza *non è da intendersi* in termini assoluti, in quanto la stessa è riferita esclusivamente alla categoria di appartenenza [...]. (EM3)
[In the same way, this statement of incoherence should not be intended in absolute terms, as it refers exclusively to a specific category [...].]
- (25) Al fine di evitare ambiguità [...], dunque, *è necessario* sottolineare con forza che la gestione sistematica e strutturale del passaggio dall'idea all'impresa è una professione diversa da quella accademica, così come lo è la fondazione di una nuova impresa. (SO9)
[In order to avoid ambiguities [...], thus, it is necessary to underline that the systematic and structural management of turning ideas into an enterprise along with the foundation of a new business is a profession different from the academic one.]

Apart from boosters, constructions used to formulate recommendations and infrequent tentative expressions (e.g. *possibile* [possible], 6 occurrences; *probabile* [probable], 2 occurrences), forms of explicit evaluation are strongly represented in Italian closing sections. Evaluative meanings appear to be encoded by adjectives such as *interessante* [interesting], *importante* [important] *difficile* [difficult], *utile* [useful] and its antonym *inutile* [useless], as in 26 and 27:

- (26) *È inoltre interessante* notare che i gruppi che hanno la migliore performance [...] nel 1997 sono proprio quelli che hanno un assetto proprietario insolito per il capitalismo italiano: le public company e le coalizioni di istituti di credito. (EM5)
[It is also interesting to note that the groups which performed best [...] in 1997 are those that have an ownership structure unusual for Italian capitalism: public companies and coalitions of credit institutions.]
- (27) Allo stesso tempo, tuttavia, *è importante affermare* con forza il principio secondo il quale alla possibilità di scelta tra diverse professioni in funzione delle predisposizioni individuali debba necessariamente accompagnarsi un'effettiva decisione, da parte dei docenti o ricercatori coinvolti in attività imprenditoriali, su quale delle due attività concentrare in via prioritaria le proprie energie. (SO9)
[At the same time it is however important to state that the possibility of choosing among different professions according to one's own personal inclination must be accompanied by a decision on the part of professors and researchers involved in business activities about which of the two activities they would give priority to.]

As a result, the co-occurrence of *è* with evaluative items, and certainty expressions appears to be indicative of Italian academics' tendency to highlight their conviction about their claims, direct the reader towards a conclusion, and establish their attitude towards the findings of their research.

The signals of Italian scholars' overt stance and intrusion into the discourse are counterbalanced by more impersonal forms of self-reference which highlight writers' inclination to conceal their presence in texts, and 'disguise' their involvement. *Si* impersonal constructions (261 entries), which represent the unmarked choice of Italian authors to refer to themselves, occur prominently in passages reporting,

summarising and discussing results. As regards *verba dicendi*, the examination of the concordances of *si* followed by reporting verbs demonstrates that it tends to cluster with discourse and cognitive verbs (e.g. *proporre* [propose/suggest], 6 occurrences; *argomentare* [argue], 3 occurrences; *affermare* [state], 3 occurrences; *dire* [say], 3 occurrences; *ritenere* [believe], 6 occurrences; *pensare* [think], 3 occurrences), and to be seldom followed by research verbs (*osservare* [observe], 5 occurrences). Typical examples are:

- (28) L'economia digitale, *come si è detto*, è il mezzo per facilitare la separazione dell'economia delle cose da quella della conoscenza [...]. (EM9)
[The digital economy, as was said, is the means which facilitates the distinction between the goods economy and the knowledge one.]
- (29) *Non si deve però pensare* che questo sia un processo interattivo armonioso; al contrario, esso è negoziale e, talora, anche conflittuale. (SO7)
[Nevertheless, one should not think that this is a harmonious and interactive process; on the contrary, it is a negotiating and, sometimes, also controversial process.]
- (30) Focalizzandosi sulla situazione italiana, *si osserva* che [...] l'introduzione dello sportello unico e la semplificazione amministrativa costituiscono opportunità di attuazione di interventi di process reengineering [...](EM13)
[As regards the Italian situation, it can be observed that [...] the establishment of single points of contact and the administrative simplification are opportunities for process reengineering projects to be implemented [...].]

Concordances for the impersonal *si* suggest that findings are more commonly presented as the outcome of discursive and cognitive or mental processes rather than analytical and research procedures. Accordingly, Italian scholars turn out to downplay their role in research when explaining procedures, and to construct an authoritative self as *writer* and *arguer* (cf. Fløttum *et al.* 2006).

Nevertheless, in their presentations and discussions of findings Italian academics appear to rely on elements which signal not only conviction but also caution, modesty and sincerity. In an effort to protect themselves from others' criticism or to justify the need for further research, Italian writers do not skip over their research 'failures' and limitations. It is mainly acknowledging possible

research weaknesses that RA writers use the negative particle *non* [not] (218 occurrences). Emblematic examples are:

- (31) Alcune ipotesi fatte vengono, come si è visto, confermate; altre, che pure erano state poste, *non permettono conclusioni certe*. (MM8)
 [As already seen, some of the hypotheses advanced have been confirmed; while other hypotheses which were also proposed do not lead to definitive conclusions.]
- (32) *Non mancano* tuttavia elementi che, nel metodo applicato, vanno migliorati, soprattutto con riferimento all'area dei test sulla bontà di adattamento del modello ai dati osservati. (MM9)
 [There is, however, no lack of elements which in the method applied need to be improved, especially with reference to the tests on the adaptability of the model to the data observed.]

In detail, writers explain and reformulate the critical points of their analysis (33), and, in an attempt to make the audience accept their research findings, they present the flaws of their study together with its strengths (34 and 35). However, whereas research limitations are mitigated and almost neutralized, its 'good points' are likely to emerge more strongly. This strategy embraces devices such as *non ... ma piuttosto* [not ... but rather] (34) and *pur non potendo* [although not being able] (35), which, while avoiding the misrepresentation of facts, highlight some of their strengths.

- (33) La prima ipotesi [...] *non* è stata verificata. Cioè *non emergono* dati quantitativi che depongono a favore del fatto che l'atteggiamento nei confronti della discarica (favorevole o sfavorevole che sia) non ha ricadute dirette sul comportamento di differenziazione. (MM8)
 [The first hypothesis [...] has not been verified. In other words, quantitative data were not available to support that the attitude towards the landfill site (either positive or negative) has no direct impact on the recycling behaviour.]
- (34) [...] la metodologia utilizzata nel presente lavoro *non propone una soluzione alternativa, ma piuttosto uno strumento* che consenta di rivedere le categorie Assogestioni, al fine di giungere alla costruzione di peer groups e di effettuare confronti tra fondi effettivamente comparabili (EM3)
 [[...] the methodology adopted in this study does not suggest an alternative solution but rather a tool which can be used to review the Assogestioni

categories, in order to create peer groups and compare funds that are actually comparable.]

- (35) *Pur non potendo fornire evidenze a supporto dell'una o dell'altra tesi, la ricerca permette di apprezzare alcune somiglianze e talune diversità con il campione nordamericano. (EM1)*
[Although not being able to provide evidence to either one of the two theses, this study allows to appreciate some analogies and differences with the North American sample.]

The considerations put forth so far suggest that, in order to stress the truthfulness of their results and the validity of their claims, Italian scholars are inclined to favour impersonalization strategies, discourse-oriented as well as cognitive verbs, boosters and evaluative devices.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of the RA final sections presented in 3.1 and 3.2 brings to the fore some similarities and differences in the ways in which writers close their papers in English and in Italian. Both English *Discussions* and Italian *Conclusioni* are devoted to presenting findings, establishing their importance, interpreting them, evaluating the whole study, indicating limitations, drawing implications, and recommending directions for future research. Additionally, RA writers tend to review some of the main points by drawing on the existing literature, and offer their interpretation of the issues under discussion. As a consequence, the closing portions of RAs in English and in Italian are permeated by exemplifications, references to other researchers' contributions, and reformulations of the outcomes thoroughly presented in the Results section.

While offering interpretations of data and expressing more or less overtly their opinions, however, English and Italian authors turn out to develop different argumentative strategies in order to establish credibility and convince readers of the reliability of their studies. Writers of English papers tend to intermingle forms of personal and

impersonal reference to make explicit and conceal their presence in the text. Specifically, *we* and *our* followed by signposts pointing to research-related elements are combined with non-personal references to analyses and findings. The foregrounding of the proactive role played by English researchers and their dialogic positioning are replaced by writers' ostensible 'invisibility' in Italian *Conclusioni*. In detail, Italian closing parts, in which authors employ few markers of dialogic and personal presence, are pervaded by a range of impersonal constructions, which include the pronoun *si*, references to non-human agents (i.e. research- and marketing-related items), and copular constructions (such as *è certo che...*[it is certain that], *è probabile che...* [it is probable that]). Furthermore, the language of English and Italian Discussions reveals that, while intruding into the text, the two groups of scholars tend to construct different identities. The analysis of *verba dicendi* in the two corpora suggests that in English texts scholars prioritize their role as researchers, whereas Italian academics are more inclined to project an image of themselves as writers and arguers.

Specifically, in English *Discussions* the author is clearly visible in the text through self-mention and takes responsibility for the research carried out and the results obtained. Personal constructions and research verbs help English academics 'promote' their proactive role as competent researchers, and characterize their conclusions as the legitimate and logical consequences of the studies being conducted. The certainty and 'goodness' of findings, which can be detected in a diversified repertoire of boosters and evaluative items, is however diluted and mitigated by the higher incidence of hedges. These devices are used to confer tentativeness to the considerations put forward, and indicate that information is presented as an opinion rather than accredited fact. The English writer's predisposition to portray his/her evaluations in a personal, explicit but also prudent manner is counterbalanced by the more impersonalised but only apparently detached approach of the Italian author.

In Italian *Conclusioni* the writer appears to opt for a more authorial presence through the use of *si*, to minimise his/her role as researcher, to give prominence to marketing/business phenomena and to allow facts to speak for themselves. Behind this screen of apparent

objectivity and impersonality, however, Italian academics take responsibility for the asserted propositions and the conclusions drawn. In detail, they tend to convey their involvement by the prominent use of cognitive and discourse verbs, and to emphasise the validity of their findings by means of boosters, evaluative markers, and explicit references to recommended interpretations of data.

Although the results based on these two small corpora can only be provisional and tentative, it is hoped that these preliminary findings will help gain new insights into the cultural and linguistic variability of RAs and their sections.

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