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Relating Biber et al.'s developmental progression index of grammatical features in academic prose to the CEFR

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A series of corpus-based studies by Biber and his colleague (Biber 1988, 2006, Biber et al. 1999, Biber & Gray 2016, Gray 2015) reveal that grammatical features which appear frequently in academic prose differ drastically from those in conversation. The former uses dependent phrases functioning as pre- and post-modifiers of the head noun, while the latter uses dependent clauses functioning as constituents of other clauses such as verb complements and adverbial clauses. Based on these findings, Biber et al. (2011) proposed a developmental progression index (DPI) of grammatical complexity. These studies, however, are not well recognized or adopted by curriculum planners, course instructors, material developers, and assessment designers working in the area of EAP, hard-CLIL and EMI, despite the fact that these courses do not only aim at the acquisition and appropriate use of vocabulary and grammatical constructions peculiar to academic contexts but also help learners acquire and deepen disciplinary knowledge through various receptive and productive activities of academese. One of the reasons for little awareness of linguistic features peculiar to academic prose by practitioners lies in the lack of applied studies which relate the DPI to more widely accepted proficiency scales: e.g., the CEFR's six proficiency levels. This paper attempts to relate the DPI to the CEFR, comparing grammatical features in the DPI with those in the English Grammar Profile (EGP online, Hawkins & Filipović, 2012) and then proposing grammatical structures necessary for university students at different proficiency levels to learn to become more competent users of academic prose.

Keywords: grammatical complexity, academic prose, EGP, CLIL

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Recommendation (for student section)

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