

Culture in Language: Academic English, Variation in Research

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Introduction to Comparative Research on Academic Writing

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1. Introduction: Knowledge & cultures

1.1. Defining culture

James Spradley:

Culture is the acquired knowledge people use
to interpret experience and generate behavior.

Where does “cultural variation” (in metadiscourse) come from
in early academic knowledge presentation?

contextualisation by author as

male - female?

language: first - second?

institutional acculturation in the discipline?
on a functional basis?

2. Key Concepts

2.1. convention vs. individuality

2.2. reader-/listener-orientation,
argumentation structure,
discourse management

2.3. genre

2.4. meta-language:
author-involvement, -commitment (hedging)

3. Texts as database

3.1. Corpora combine theory and practice different compilation principles:

- ChemCorpus (Michaela, Dana)
- SPACE Corpus (Christoph, Dana)
- ZAMA (Sven)

- CamAcCorpus (Daniel)
- GhanaAcCorpus (Jacinta)
- Brno Corpus
- TürkCorpus?
- SEEurop. Corpus?

3.2. Culture in a genre approach to academic discourses

research "output"

- **research article**
 - book reviews
 - project proposals
- conference presentations

discipline-specific
culture-specific

science "journalism"

- **popular science articles**
 - popular blogs (David Crystal)
 - popular science films (Horizon)
- popular science books

teacher "talk"/e-learning

- ppt presentations
 - lectures
 - student presentations
- textbooks
 - Wikis
 - www pages

student "literacy"

- fieldwork notes / essays
- **MA/BA thesis**
- seminar presentations

"Novice Academic English"

author-specific
culture-specific

3.3. Common compilation principles?

- argumentative essays? (ICLE)
- Chem Corpus
 - Magister Theses
 - Magister Written (timed)
 - BA Theses
 - MA Theses
 - Reports?
 - Applications?
- Brno Corpus
- TurkAcCorpus?
- SEEAceWriting Corpus?
- related project: CamAcwriting (Nkemleke fc.)

Nkemleke (fc.)

2: to produce a Manual that helps students “successfully” write in the following genres

Research articles

Theses and
dissertations

Term papers

Books and monographs

Conference
presentations

Grant proposals

Statements of intent

Research proposals

Abstracts

3.4. Example ZAMA Corpus from Stellenbosch

- 150 texts
- gender balanced
- ethnic/language background according to name:
English, Afrikaans, (S)African languages, rest (Indian, Chinese, Luo)
- department-stratified: aim 5 (6) MA theses in over 20 disciplines
 - Anthropology
 - Chemistry
 - English (Lit.)
 - Curriculum Studies
 - Geography
 - History
 - Journalism
 - (Gen.) Linguistics
 - Mechanical Engineering
 - Civil Engineering
 - Psychology
 - (Public) Law
 - Political Science
 - etc.

4. Sample Analysis ZAMA Corpus: Variation in personal pronoun usage

author involvement: *I, me, my*
we, us, our
reader address: *you, your*

semantic differences:
inclusive - exclusive *we, pluralis majestatis/modestiae*
you as audience - *(any)one*

examples:

„I will now review some of literature relevant to South Africa in order to provide a context for the study.” (ZMA06BA-YE)

„[...] these larger social patterns [...] will have to be addressed if we are to curb this phenomenon.” (ZMA08MV-YX)

„Furthermore, you need to ‘comprehend’ [what] you’re reading [...]” (ZMA10MM-EE)

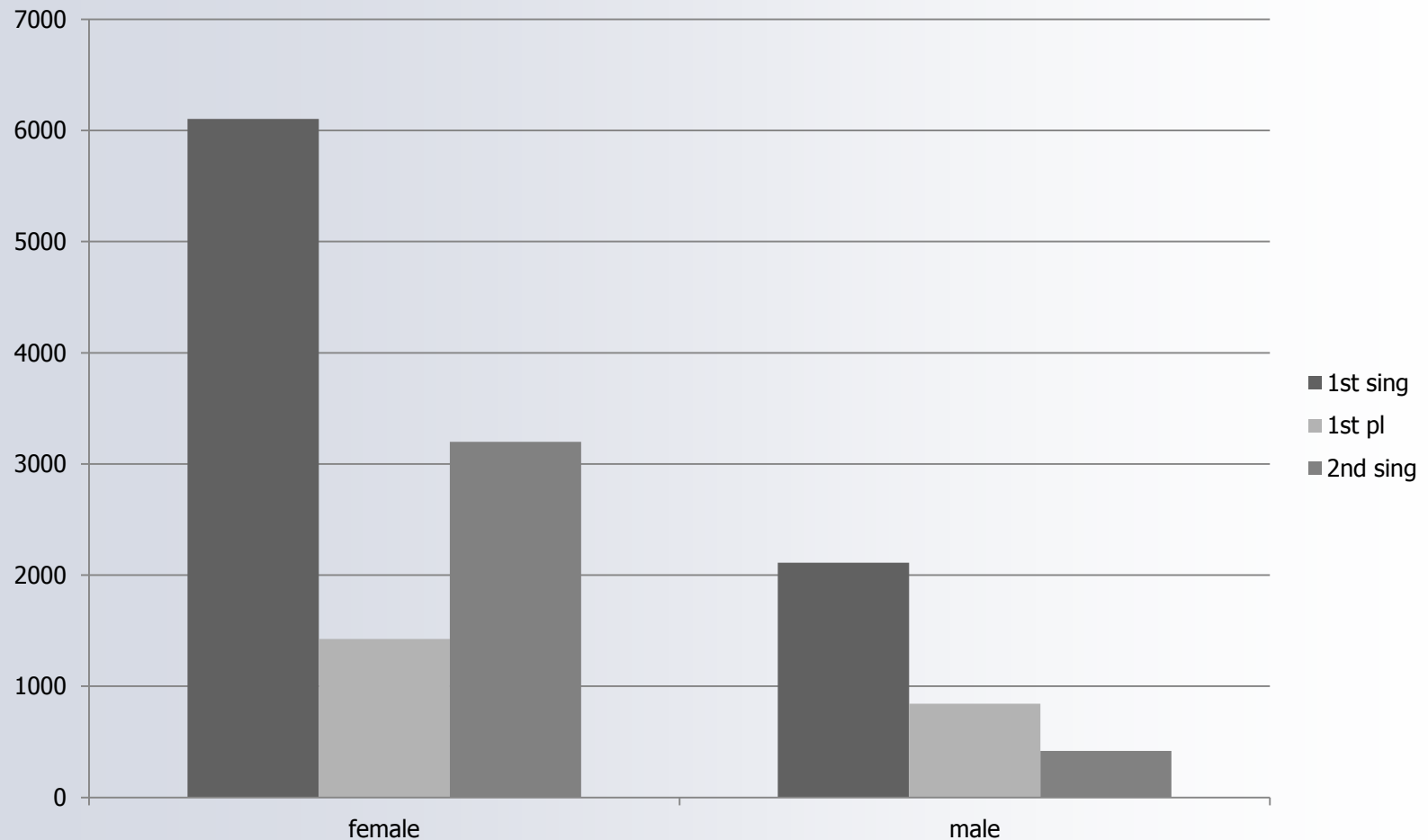
4.1. Variation in personal pronoun usage

	female	male
1 st sing	6105	2112
1 st pl	1427	844
2 nd sing	3200	419

	Afrikaans	English	SAfrLang
1 st sing	2540	6934	2867
1 st pl	918	1313	1480
2 nd sing	925	3930	726

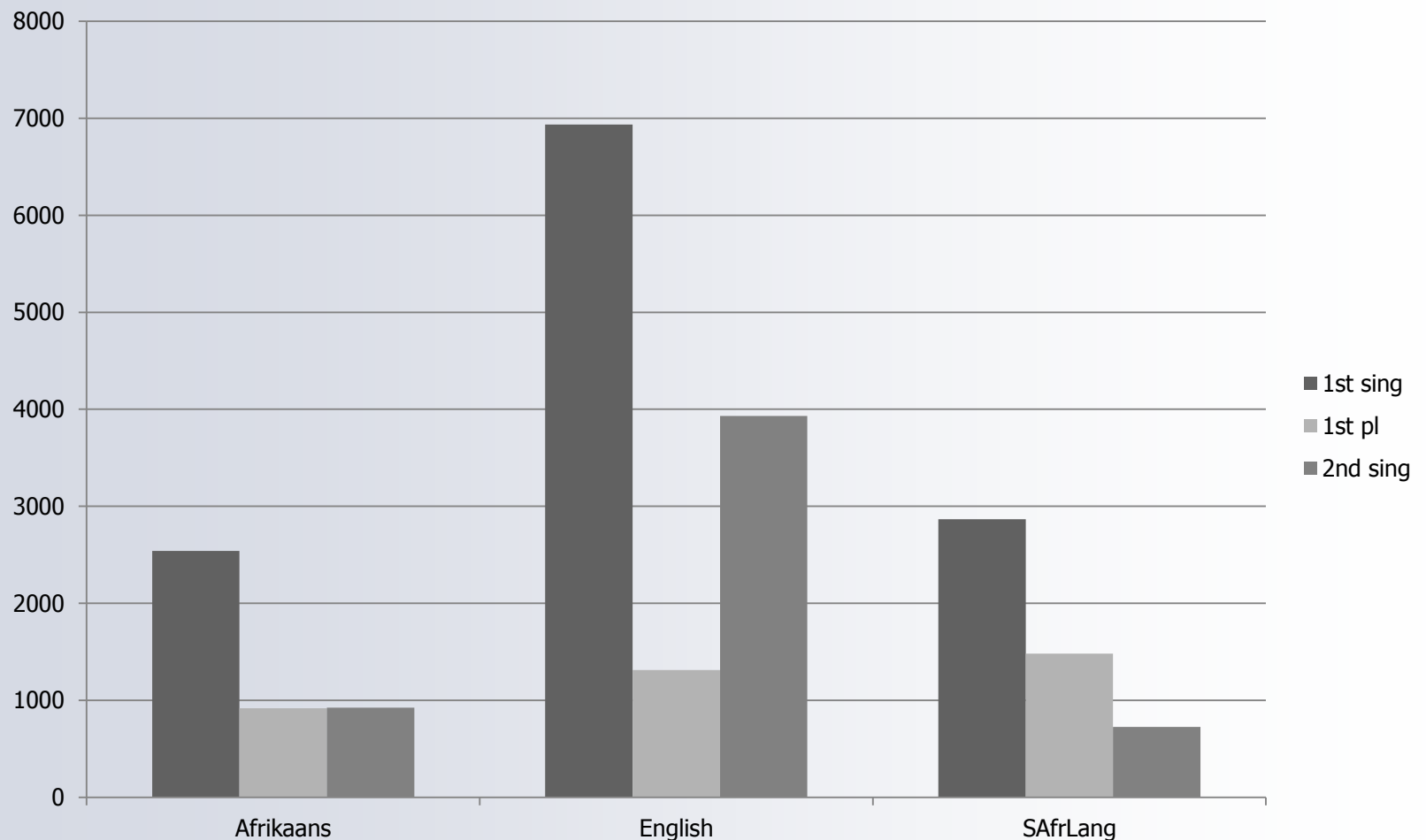
4.1. Variation in personal pronoun usage by gender

relative/1M words and by 4 functional categories



4.1. Variation in personal pronoun usage by language

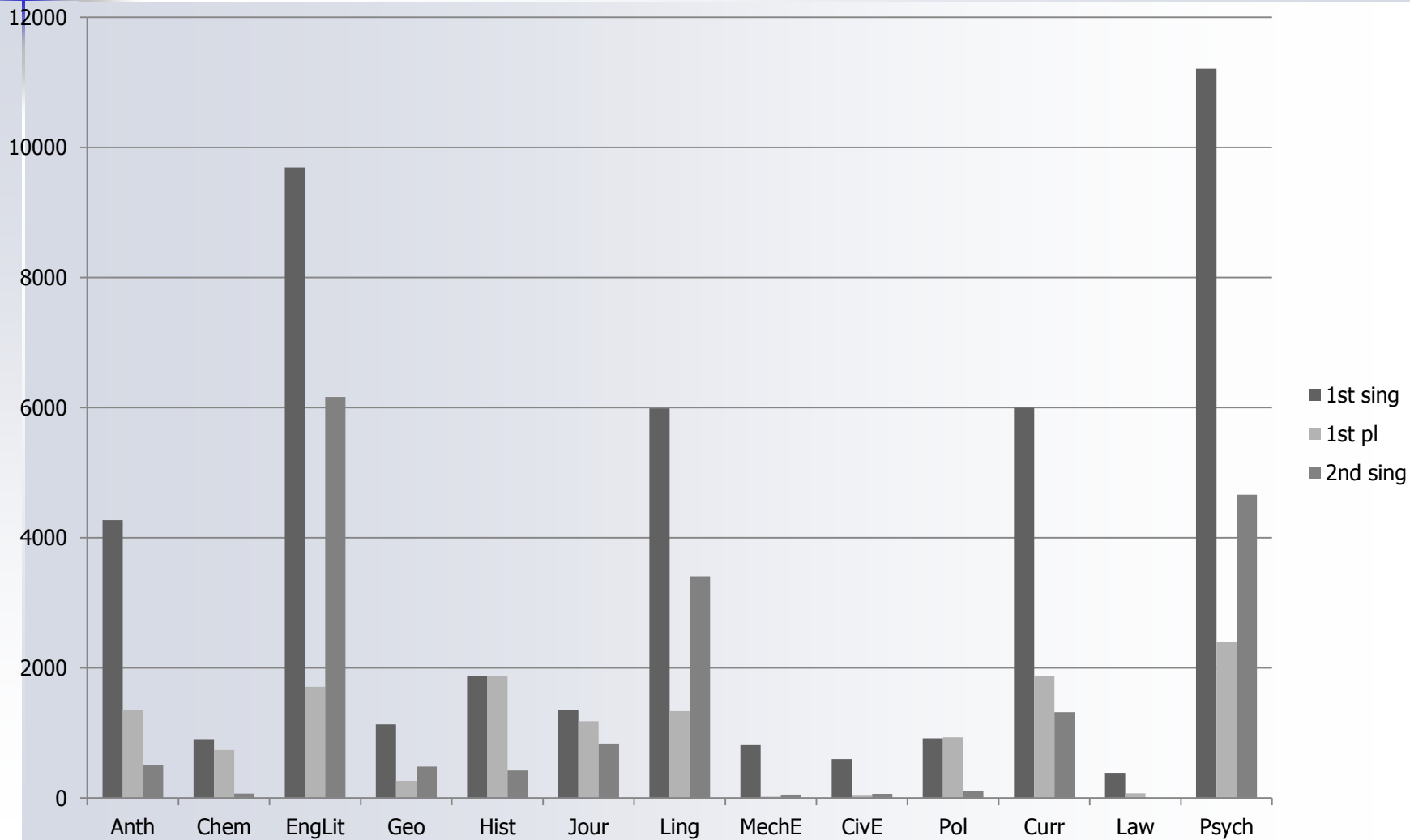
relative/1M words and by 4 functional categories



4.2. Variation in personal pronoun usage by discipline

	Anth	Chem	EngLit	Geo	Hist	Jour	Ling	MechE	CivE	Pol	Curr	Law	Psych
1 st s.	4272	904	9695	1132	1872	1347	5989	815	598	917	5998	386	11212
1 st pl	1355	739	1710	264	1881	1179	1337	19	36	932	1872	73	2398
2 nd pl	509	67	6163	481	421	839	3409	51	63	104	1319	0	4661

4.2. Variation in personal pronoun usage by discipline



5. Conclusion

combine research – teaching - cooperation?

general:

- variations are culture-specific
- discipline culture > gender/language culture

metalanguage instruction on a functional basis?

personal pronouns (explicitly categorical)

> cohesion (overused through teaching?)

> modality/hedging (complex, less awareness)

-- > more comparative research

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