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Evaluation in moderation: Evaluative adjectives in student academic presentations

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Evaluation is inherent in academic discourse and fundamental to shaping college students' critical thinking and ability to assess the status of discipline-specific information. The current study focused on the use of evaluative adjectives in native English speaking (L1) and English as a second language (L2) college student academic presentations ($N = 40$). The goal was to find out how the two groups of presenters compared on their frequency, referential choices, variability of evaluative adjectives, patterns of adjectival structures, and level of sophistication of the adjectives they used and also to identify common trends for both groups along the categories. The findings revealed that, even though the two groups shared some common patterns in their use of evaluative adjectives across the various categories, the L2 presenters most notably differed in the frequency and the much smaller range of adjectives with which the common patterns were realized. The findings of the study are discussed in light of their language learning and teaching implications.

Key Words: adjectives, evaluation, stance, academic presentations, spoken academic discourse, advanced L2 proficiency, ESL, EAP, higher education.

1. Introduction

Evaluation is inherent in academic discourse and fundamental to shaping college students' critical thinking and ability to assess the status of discipline-specific information. By and large, higher education institutions offer students rich intellectual environments where the subtle epistemic distinctions are mixed with facts, speculations, and a variety of viewpoints, opinions, and attitudes towards specific disciplinary content. On the one hand, instructors commonly try to help their students understand, evaluate, and interpret knowledge by shaping their viewpoints and giving them various perspectives to assess the status and validity of the academic information that comes their way. On the other hand, students are also expected to express their informed points of view and engage with evaluation in their oral or written texts in order not only to display disciplinary knowledge but also to convey their stances towards it.

Over the last couple of decades, a substantial body of research has been specifically devoted to the notion of evaluation across a variety of academic registers and genres (e.g. Biber, 2006; De Cock, 2011; Sampson, 2004; Swales & Burke, 2003). In many other research areas, a number of terms have been used to refer to similar notions—for example, 'evaluation' (Hunston & Thompson, 2000), 'stance' (Biber et al., 1999; Biber, 2006), 'appraisal' (Martin, 2000; Martin & White, 2005), etc. In many ways, there are some important distinctions encoded in the different terminologies but, for the purposes of this paper, the term 'evaluation' will be adopted as it fully captures the functional value of the notion in terms of scope and flexibility. Thompson and Hunston (2000) defined evaluation as 'the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer's

attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about' (p. 5). They also point out three main functions of evaluation, some of which may be at work simultaneously:

1. to express an opinion as a reflection of not only one's personal values but the values of their community;
2. to establish and maintain a relationship with the reading or writing audience;
3. to organize the discourse (p. 6).

These functions have attracted a great deal of research interest from different perspectives across various genres and modalities mostly because of the common realization that evaluation pervades academic discourse (Samson, 2004) and 'forms the very backbone of the argumentative structure of many of its texts' (Bamford & Anderson, 2004, p. 7). However, it remains an elusive notion as it is a broad and multifaceted concept that does not have its own grammar (Hunston & Sinclair, 2000). Consequently, evaluation can be interpreted from a multitude of different, yet complementary, perspectives (e.g. discourse, sociolinguistic, ideological, etc.) and it can also be studied with various methodologies—for instance, some researchers start from a single lexical item or phrase and trace it back to its contexts of use, while others start from the context in order to derive the evaluative items or structures associated with it. The latter approach was used in the present study with a focus on 'evaluation in action' in Thompson and Hunston's (2000, p. 6) words.

In terms of language choices most commonly associated with evaluation, many have observed (e.g. Biber et al., 1999; Biber, 2006; Hunston & Thompson, 2000) that it can be expressed by a range of lexical and structural devices (e.g. adverbial structures, stance verbs, nouns, clauses, etc.). However, the use of adjectives for evaluative purposes seems to be 'the most straightforward case of evaluation.' (Hunston & Sinclair, 2000, p. 83). What makes adjectives one of the most functional lexical categories to express evaluation is not only their semantic content but also their syntactic flexibility. That is, semantically, adjectives can express a wide range of meanings (e.g. descriptive, relational, classificational, evaluative, etc.), of which the most prominent ones in academic discourse are for evaluation purposes (Biber, et al. 1999). In terms of syntactic positions, adjectives can serve both attributive syntactic roles (i.e. occurring as constituents of noun phrases, usually preceding the head noun) as well as predicative syntactic roles (i.e. occurring as subject or object predicatives, thus, characterizing the noun phrases in subject or object positions). Their syntactic flexibility not only allows them to occur in structures of different complexity (i.e. in addition to being noun premodifiers, they can also have phrasal or clausal complements of their own in predicative positions) but it is also connected to various patterns of meanings they can express. For instance, the adjective *poor* in predicative position most commonly refers to a bad financial state (e.g. Why are some countries chronically so *poor*?); however, when *poor* is used in an attributive position, its meaning usually becomes evaluative and changes to "not good state" (e.g. *poor* health, *poor* performance, *poor* quality, etc.). Thus, there is a strong relationship between meaning and syntactic position of adjectives which has to be kept in mind in studies designed to uncover different evaluative uses of adjectives in various contexts.

While evaluative adjectives have been studied mostly in the written academic genres and less commonly in the spoken ones (Swales & Burke, 2003), no attention has been given to the way they are employed in student academic presentations, much less in English as a second language (L2) presentations. The lack of such research undoubtedly leaves a wide-open gap in the description and teaching of this oral genre—a gap which students usually have to fill either through imitation or self-discovery. However, that should not be the case, especially in today's higher education which has become increasingly internationalized and, consequently, has opened many opportunities for college students to participate in international disciplinary communities and present their research at international forums. Thus, consciously developing a good presentational competence and enhancing it with the expression of evaluation in a discipline-acceptable way

should be seen as an important aspect of a students' professionalization, which usually starts while they are still in college.

The current study will focus on the use of evaluative adjectives in native English speaking (L1) and L2 student presentations as this is a noticeably under-researched area of the genre. The participants were students from several programs in the humanities, education, and applied linguistics who were preparing to work in various educational settings. Considering that one of the primary purposes of academic presentations is for higher-level college students to display their critical assessment of disciplinary issues, it is useful to know more about the characteristic features of evaluation in presentations. The goal of the study was not only to find out how the two groups of presenters compared on their frequency, referential choices, variability of evaluative adjectives, and patterns of specific adjectival structures but also to identify common trends for both groups along the categories. Additionally, it was of interest to determine the range of sophistication of the presenters' adjectival choices—an aspect that may help English for academic purposes (EAP) teachers and material designers address the notion of evaluation as part of the bigger issue of using richer and more sophisticated vocabulary (i.e. vocabulary beyond the 2,000 most frequent words) in their oral academic discourse (Morris & Cobb, 2004; Zareva, 2012). To my knowledge, such an investigation has not been carried out on the genre of student academic presentations, so the current research would be a valuable contribution to the body of research on evaluation by adding to it a study on college students' presentations. It will also offer specific ideas to EAP instructors and material designers, especially the ones working in the areas of oral academic communication, about how they may use the findings of the study to provide students with presentation guidelines and possible directions of expanding L2 students' adjectival repertoires for evaluation purposes.

The study will address the following research questions:

1. How do the L1 and L2 presentations compare on their use of evaluative adjectives in their presentations?
2. How do the L1 and L2 presenters compare on their preference to express personal (performed) evaluation along with commenting on the evaluation of others (reported evaluation)?
3. Do the L1 and L2 presenters tend to use evaluative adjectives variably or not? What is the lexical sophistication level of the adjectives that were used evaluatively by each group of presenters?

2. The study

2.1. Participants

The data were collected at several US universities during regularly scheduled classes. The study was based on two corpora of academic presentations given by L1 and L2 students ($N = 40$) who, at the time of data collection, were taking upper level courses (i.e. courses directly related to the students' areas of specialization) in areas of the humanities, education, and applied linguistics and were planning to teach in various educational contexts. The presentations were delivered towards the end of the participants' first semester of study and, in terms of content, they were evaluated as good presentations by the respective instructors. To collect some demographic information about the participants and their previous and current experience with giving academic presentations, the presenters filled out a questionnaire which contained multiple choice, open-ended, and Likert-scale items. The participants reported that they were not given any specific directions or guidelines about the presentation assignment beforehand.

The L1 group ($n = 20$) consisted of upper-level college students (female = 14, male = 6; M_{age} = 26.06 years old), seeking degrees in English literature, teacher preparation, education, and applied linguistics. A few of the students ($n = 5$) reported they had previously had some public speaking

training; however, all students considered it important to have good presentation skills (M = 5.3 on a 6-point scale).

The L2 presenters (n = 20; female = 15 and male = 5; M_{age} = 27.3 years old) were degree-seeking students in similar areas of specialization and, based on their proficiency tests (TOEFL and IELTS), they were considered proficient users of English. They were native speakers of 12 different languages (Arabic, Chinese, French, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Slovenian, Spanish, Subia, Vietnamese, Ukrainian) and had learned English through formal instruction in their countries of origin. The L2 students reported having studied English for about 13 years on average, but none of them had previously had any training in giving presentations or public speaking. They had spent less than a year in the USA (M = 9 months) and, like the L1 students, considered it important to have good presentation skills (M = 5.4 on a 6-point scale).

2.2. Data

All presentations were given to satisfy a course requirement. The presentations were one of the main graded course assignments for the courses they were assigned and they were scheduled towards the end of the respective terms. Special effort was made to keep the two corpora comparable by controlling for several variables that could potentially influence the use of adjectives in the presentations. These variables included:

1. Research type of the presentations: All presentations were based on library research carried out on course-related topics of interest to the students.
2. Content areas: The topics of the presentations were limited to coursework typically done by students seeking a degree in the areas of the humanities, education, and applied linguistics. The students themselves chose the topics of their presentations in relation to the specific content of the courses they were taking.
3. Time limit: The instructors had typically limited the presentation time to 15–20 minutes and the students tended to observe the time limit ($M_{\text{presentation time}}$ = 15.5 min.).
4. Word count of the presentations: The data included only the participants' monologic part of their presentations with a word count of similar size per presentation (M = 1997 words).
5. Presentation delivery: All presenters used some sort of a visual (usually PowerPoint slides) and all presentations were delivered extemporaneously.

The presentations were audio-recorded and transcribed orthographically. Afterwards, both corpora were tagged for parts of speech (PoS). The PoS tagging was carried out automatically by using the free web-based CLAWS (the Constituent Likelihood Automatic Word-tagging System) tagging option offered by the University Center for Computer Corpus Research on Language at Lancaster University (http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/claws/). The tags were also manually checked for consistency. All words tagged as adjectives followed Biber at al.'s (1999) grammatical specifications.

2.3. Data analysis

First, PoS analysis was carried out to identify the adjectives in each presentation. Afterwards, the adjectives that were used evaluatively in the context of each presentation were coded manually according to several criteria. It is important to note here that some adjectives can be used both descriptively as well as evaluatively, so the categorization of all adjectives was determined based on the broader context of their use in each presentation. In some instances, the local context (the words immediately preceding and following the adjective) was sufficient (e.g. *significant* impact), but there were also instances in which the evaluative function could be determined only in the wider context of the presentation (e.g. *significant* in 'significant differences' was not considered evaluative if used as a statistical term).

The first classification criterion of the evaluative adjectives was based on the syntactic positions they occupied. In terms of syntactic position, some of the evaluative adjectives occurred in an attributive position—i.e. preceding a noun (e.g. *complex* issue, *unpleasant* stranger, *significant* edge, *better* chances) and others occurred predicatively in copular verb constructions (e.g. That was really *important* to them.) or as object predicates (e.g. They considered it *important* to look into these issues.).

The second classification criterion was related to the distinction between performed evaluation (i.e. evaluation expressed by the speaker/writer) and reported evaluation (i.e. evaluation reported by the speaker/writer). Thus, the evaluative adjectives were coded as performed when they were used in reference to a presenter's evaluative opinion or advice (e.g. So, I found that particularly *interesting* in my research.). In all other cases, when the evaluation was attributed to speakers/writers other than the presenter, they were treated as reported (e.g. The researchers reported a very *strong* relationship between these two factors.).

To find out the extent to which the presenters varied their use of evaluative adjectives in their presentations, the number of different evaluative adjectives (types) was also calculated (Table 1).

Table 1. General description of the L1 and L2 corpus of student presentations.

	L1 presentations (n = 20)		**L2 presentations** (n = 20)	
Corpus size	43,217		38,896	
Total number of adjectives (tokens)	2313		1576	
	tokens	types	tokens	types
Total number of evaluative adj.	762	584	509	399
- performed predicative adj. evaluation	353	266	233	175
- performed attributive adj. evaluation	273	213	161	127
- reported predicative adj. evaluation	89	66	61	52
- reported attributive adj. evaluation	47	39	54	45

3. Results

To address the first question of how the L1 and L2 presenters compared in their use of evaluative adjectives, several one-way ANOVAs were carried out with "group" used as an independent variable. The dependent variables were number of evaluative adjectives, position of the evaluative adjectives (attributive or predicative) and evaluation reference (performed or reported evaluation).

First, it was important to establish whether the participants' presentations were of similar length in terms of word count as length is likely to have an effect on the frequency of the evaluative adjectives. The analysis of the word size of the presentations showed that they did not differ significantly (p = .865) in this regard.

The two groups, however, differed significantly on some aspects of their evaluative use of adjectives. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 2. The results are reported in raw frequency (i.e. with the repetitions of same adjectives included in the count) because they were similar to the results of the same comparisons carried out on lemmatized types (i.e. with the repetitions excluded). On average, the L2 presenters used a significantly smaller number of evaluative adjectives compared to the L1 presenters ($F(1,38) = 9.303$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .197$) and the same was true for their use of evaluative adjectives in a predicative position ($F(1,38) = 6.532$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .147$) and attributive position ($F(1,38) = 5.732$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .131$).

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of the L1 and L2 presenters' use of evaluative adjectives per presentation (raw frequency).

	M		*SD*	
	L1 (n = 20)	L2 (n = 20)	L1	L2
Mean word count per presentation	2049.05	1944.8	335.61	372.18
Total number of evaluative adj. in predicative position	22.10	16.00	11.03	7.89
Total number of evaluative adj. in attributive position	14.35	11.10	6.46	6.48
Total number of evaluative adj.	38.10	25.45	14.22	11.9
- performed predicative adj. evaluation	17.65	11.65	10.22	7.13
- performed attributive adj. evaluation	13.65	8.10	5.80	4.43
- reported predicative adj. evaluation	4.45	2.70	4.71	3.13
- reported attributive adj. evaluation	2.35	3.05	2.81	3.24

Next, the L1 and L2 participants were compared on their preference to express performed vs. reported evaluation. The L2 presenters noticeably differed from the L1 presenters in their use of performed evaluative adjectives in both predicative position ($F(1,38) = 4.642$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .109$) and attributive position ($F(1,38) = 11.758$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .236$). However, they were similar in their use of adjectives to refer to the evaluative comments of others in their presentations ($p > .05$).

To find out whether the L1 and L2 presenters used different evaluative adjectives or whether they tended to use the same ones repetitively, the mean raw frequency (tokens) of all evaluatively used adjectives was compared to their lemmatized types (i.e. with the repetitions removed) for each group. The participants in both groups tended to use adjectival evaluation noticeably repetitively across all categories. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Differences (tokens vs. types) of evaluative adjectives in L1 and L2 presentations.

Adjective categories	*L1* (n = 20)				L2 (n = 20)			
	tokens	types	*M* (SD)	*t* ($p < .05$)	tokens	types	*M* (SD)	*t* ($p < .05$)
performed predicative adj. evaluation	17.65	13.3	4.35 (4.37)	4.453	11.65	8.75	2.90 (2.95)	4.390
performed attributive adj. evaluation	13.65	10.65	3.00 (2.43)	5.526	8.05	6.35	1.70 (1.38)	5.508
reported predicative adj. evaluation	4.45	3.30	1.15 (1.5)	3.437	2.7	2.25	.45 (.89)	2.269
reported attributive adj. evaluation	2.35	1.95	.40 (.75)	2.373	3.05	2.6	.45 (.89)	2.269

Finally, the lexical sophistication of the evaluative adjectives was determined qualitatively by running each group's adjectives through Cobb's (2002) VocabProfiler (http://www.lextutor.ca/vp/eng/). The goal was to find out the percentage of evaluative adjectives that belonged to the high frequency vocabulary bands (i.e. the first 2000 [1K and 2K] most frequent words in English), compared to the percentage of the more sophisticated categories of words that were part

of the Academic Word List (AWL) and lower frequency bands. Overall, the main difference between the two groups was that the L2 presenters' category of high frequency evaluative adjectives (49% 1K + 14% 2K = 63%) was larger than the L1 presenters' (37% 1K + 13% 2K = 50%), which may have affected their much lower rate of use of more sophisticated evaluative adjectives (17%) compared to the L1 presenters' (27%). Both groups used AWL evaluative adjectives at a similar rate (*L1* = 23%, *L2* = 20%).

4. Discussion

The current study focused on the use of evaluative adjectives in L1 and L2 student presentations as this is a markedly under-researched aspect of this genre. Considering that one of the primary purposes of academic presentations is for college students to display their critical evaluation of the issues they have researched in their discipline of study, it would be practically and empirically useful to find out more about this aspect of presentations, especially for students who are planning to enter the ESL teaching profession or the education system. In what follows, I will briefly discuss the findings related to each of the research questions with an eye on their language learning and teaching implications.

RQ1: How do the L1 and L2 presentations compare on their use of evaluative adjectives in their presentations?

The first research question aimed to determine comparatively the extent to which the L1 and L2 presenters employed adjectives to express evaluation. Overall, the two groups of presenters shared some common patterns across the various categories; however, they most notably differed in the frequency with which the common patterns were realized—that is, the L2 presenters expressed adjectival evaluation significantly less frequently than the L1 students across all categories with the exception when they reported on the evaluation of others.

One common pattern across the two groups was that the presenters used a substantial number of adjectives altogether—that is, on average, the L1 students used 116 adjectives and the L2 students used 79 adjectives per presentation. However, only about a third of these adjectives actually included in their meaning an element of evaluation about the entities or propositions the students were talking about. This shared trend suggests that, even though adjectives are commonly associated with the notion of evaluation, students did not use them primarily for that purpose in their presentations. Rather, they seemed to use adjectives predominantly for descriptive purposes—for instance, for classification (e.g. *initial* stage, *general* conclusion), to show a relationship with a subject area (e.g. *phonemic* awareness, *lexical* competence), to generally describe a noun (e.g. *private* school, *secondary* education), or to refer to subject area specific concepts (e.g. *implicit* learning, *generative* grammar, etc.).In that sense, one of the main findings of the study was that both the L1 and L2 presenters employed evaluative adjectives fairly moderately—more so the L2 than the L1 presenters.

One possible reason for this could be that all students may have interpreted the presentation more as an opportunity to display their knowledge and competence in the issues they had researched in a neutral way rather than as an opportunity to highlight their viewpoints, attitudes or stances towards their research. However, the L2 students' more infrequent use of evaluative adjectives seemed to suggest that they may have viewed their role as presenters more along the lines of stating the facts and reporting the main arguments of the topics they had researched rather than marking their attitudes and committing themselves to specific stances and viewpoints in their presentations. Conversely, the L1 presenters tended to claim their knowledge on the topics more prominently and seemed to interpret their role as presenters not just to state the facts, but also to be convincing and persuasive in displaying their knowledge of the main arguments of the issues they had investigated.

It is also possible that the L1 and L2 presenters viewed their authorial roles differently. That is, the L1 students seemed to perceive themselves more as budding researchers who were not only expected to be familiar with the central arguments of the issues they discussed but also to gain access to the knowledge database of their disciplinary community by displaying their competence with evaluative persuasion. The L2 presenters seemed to view themselves more as speakers who were expected to show familiarity with the epistemological assumptions of the discipline rather than communicate their author's evaluation, attitudes, and personal feelings towards the issues they discussed. It should be noted here though that, in the absence of discussion with the presenters on this point, such an interpretation is largely speculative; however, these patterns of usage suggest a direction for further research that would be useful to explore. In any event, L2 presenters would benefit in some important ways (e.g. in terms of relevance to the discipline, mode of delivery, educational expectations, etc.) if they were made explicitly aware not only of the expectations related to the expression of personal evaluation in their academic presentations, but also of the importance of more markedly and frequently signaling their stance towards the informational content they talk about.

Given that the L2 participants in this study reported no previous training or experience with giving presentations in their native language or in English, which is more often than not the case with newly-admitted degree seeking ESL students, it would be unreasonable to assume that they would simply "know" how to use effectively various language features (in this case, adjectives) to indicate their position towards the issues they comment on. It is also unreasonable to expect that they will "pick up" on their own the educational expectations and the language forms that go with them after having had some exposure to their new academic culture. Not to mention that the issue of signaling author's critical evaluation in academic speech or writing becomes even more complicated considering some recent debates about cultural preferences for engaging in or avoiding contentious academic discourse. In other words, while the culture of Anglo-western higher education values and encourages direct and assertive authorial expression of position (Chanock, 2010), these expectations may be in conflict with students' previous experience or cultural frames of the academic presentation as a speech act (Chanock, 2010; Zareva, 2009). In this regard, as more and more ESL students enter the Anglo system of higher education and try to succeed in their studies (undergraduate or graduate), it would be helpful to them to know how the expectations of the Anglophone academic culture about expressing scholarly evaluation compare to their own experiences or preferences so that they can make informed choices about the extent to which they would accommodate those new cultural frames.

In terms of preferred syntactic structures, the presenters from both groups shared a common preference to use evaluative adjectives more in predicative than in attributive structures, though, again, this trend was realized considerably less prominently in the L2 than L1 presentations. Overall, the predicative patterns accounted for 58% of both groups' choices, which percentage is similar to the one reported by De Cock (2011) for the L1 speakers in the Louvain Corpus of Native English Conversation (LCNEC). Even though the nature of the spoken data used in both studies is different (i.e. the LCNEC consists of informal interviews of fifty British university students while the present study is based on the L1 and L2 academic presentations), the similarity in speakers' choices to use evaluative adjectives more in predicative than in attributive positions suggests that the spoken mode of delivery could be a factor that triggers those syntactic preferences in various academic contexts (in this case, interviews vs. academic presentations).

The presenters' most common choice of making evaluative comments was with structures controlled by adjectives (e.g. *important, interesting, different, possible, difficult, hard, true, good*, etc.) in subject predicative constructions, where the copula verb *be* was overwhelmingly the most common verb of choice, for example:

> Some things are very ***abstract*** and ***hard*** to, uh, bring across the people if they don't understand the language. [L1]

> They are all ***different*** and so ***unique***. So, if we use only English words, it's so ***boring*** and it's not ***interesting*** at all. [L2]

The second most preferred pattern was with evaluative adjectives with extraposed constructions, in which the adjectives marked some specific evaluation and assessment towards the proposition in the extraposed structure. For instance:

> So, it's ***clear*** [that ETS is concerned about making improvements and being unbiased worldwide]. [L1]
>
> Okay, moving on, uh, why we are going to talk about this? Because it is ***important*** [to teach multi-word units in class]. [L2]

Finally, the use of evaluative adjectives in object predicative positions was quite infrequent, perhaps because such structures require verbs that control complex transitive patterns (e.g. verbs such as *find*, *consider*, *call*, *make*, etc.). For example:

> And she also found it ***interesting*** that students who had lived and studied in the US longer, um, their learning style preferences were more similar to American students. [L1]

RQ2: How do the L1 and L2 presenters compare on their preference to express personal (performed) evaluation along with commenting on the evaluation of others (reported evaluation)?

This research question was intended to throw some light on whether the participants tended to balance their own views and opinions with reporting the views of others or whether they tended to give a preference to one or the other. It was of interest to look into this aspect of student presentations mostly because the informational content of the presentations was derived primarily from a variety of written sources (e.g. books, book chapters, articles, official reports, theses, etc.), where the authors of these sources usually take a particular stance and make authorial authoritative claims about the issues they addressed in their research. Given that all presentations were based on library research, it was expected that the students would report on the evaluation of other scholars and researchers alongside their own evaluation, but it was of interest to find out how they would balance both.

The results showed that a commonly shared pattern across the L1 and L2 presenters was their preference to mark much more often their personal opinions and attitudes toward the issues they discussed than to report on the evaluation of others. For instance, the presenters engaged with stating their own evaluation (on average, L1 = 31 and L2 = 20 performative adjectives) about three to four times more often than they did to refer to the evaluation of others (on average, L1 = 7 and L2 = 6 reported adjectives). This finding suggests that the students tended to interpret the presentation as an imbalanced assignment in terms of evaluation. That is, in the absence of specific guidelines, they seemed to see it as an assignment where they were primarily expected to convey their own evaluative opinions and attitudes towards the main points they argued rather than report on the stances of other researchers, whose work they had used for the informational content of their presentations. It is also possible that their perceptions of the presentation may have been influenced by the combined effect of a host of other factors—some discipline-specific, others student-related, yet others related to the cultural interpretation of the primary goals of student academic presentations. It will be interesting and practically useful if future research into the role of evaluation in this specific genre could disentangle some of those influences in a systematic way.

Looking at the two groups comparatively, the results revealed that, in terms of performed evaluation, the L2 presenters tended to be less inclined to share their personal attitudes, viewpoints, and feelings on the issues they talked about compared to the L1 presenters. However, in regard to reported evaluation, the two groups were very similar both in terms of frequency and structural patterns. While it is not easy to compare the results of the present study to other studies on the

use of evaluative adjectives in spoken academic discourse (e.g. De Cock, 2011; Swales & Burke, 2003; Samson, 2004) because of differences in corpus sizes, classification criteria, nature of the data, etc., it is more straightforward to compare the normalized frequencies across those studies. In general, several conclusions can be drawn from the comparisons. First, there is some overlap in those studies regarding the various adjectives reported, particularly the ones that belong to the 1K and 2K most frequent vocabulary in English (e.g. *good, interesting, important, great, different, difficult*, etc.), which is probably a result of the words' wide range of applicability to a variety of contexts. Secondly, the more specialized the corpora are, the more they start to differ in what qualities the speakers choose to bring up in their evaluation—for instance, there were some adjectives that were reported as fairly frequent in informal student interviews (e.g. *nice, happy, beautiful, funny, friendly, impressive*, etc.) (De Cock, 2011) that did not occur in Samson's (2004) data of 10 written economics lectures or the present study. And vice versa, there were fairly frequent adjectives that occurred in both Samson's (2004) and the current research (e.g. *clear, relevant, useful, complex, ambiguous*, etc.) that did not occur in De Cock's (2011) data or in Swales and Burke's (2003) study on evaluative adjectives in the Michigan Corpus of Spoken Academic English. Thirdly, the more formal the academic discourse becomes, the more differences we start to see in the range of evaluative adjectives that speakers choose to use, which is probably regulated by the speakers' perception of priority, their relationship to the audience, the speaker's perception of value and disciplinary acceptability, and the goal of the discourse. Each of these factors plays a role in evaluation in general, so future research should try to identify and distinguish the ones that are most impactful from the ones that have a secondary influence. Finally, the status of the speaker (students vs. lecturers) and, perhaps, discipline seem to greatly influence the frequency of various evaluative adjectives. For instance, while the L1 and L2 students in the current study mostly directed their evaluation to what was *good*, *important*, and *interesting* in their research, the economics professors from Samson's (2004) study highlighted most prominently what is *different*, *central*, *steady*, and *optimal* in their lectures.

By looking at the frequency of the most used adjectives in each corpus, we can generally see how the two groups of presenters prioritized somewhat differently what aspects of their research to comment on evaluatively (see Table 4). Apart from the much smaller range of adjectives in the L2 presentations, we can see that the L2 presenters highlighted first what they considered *important*, followed by what they found *interesting* in their research, what they considered *different*, what the *main* factors, reasons, and processes were, what aspects of their research were *good* or *difficult*. They speculated about what was *possible*, reflected on what they or others were *aware* of, and also pointed out what was *hard, true,* and *great* about some ideas, researchers, and actions.

The L1 presenters prioritized their evaluation somewhat differently but, more importantly, they tended to be much more self-reflexive in their evaluative comments—an aspect that was barely present in the L2 presentations. The L1 students referred to what they were *able* to do with the information they found in the research process, how their research was *helpful* to them, what their certainties and uncertainties were (*sure*), what they became *aware* of in the course of their research, etc.—the kind of self-reflexivity that is expected in students' presentations, at least, in the Anglophone academic culture. More importantly, reflexivity has been commonly found to take students beyond information processing and enhance their metacognitive awareness and learning, foster better understanding of complex material, and promote change in attitudes, values, and beliefs along the way (e.g. Granville & Dison, 2005; Sterling et. al., 2016). In that sense, making L2 students aware of self- reflexivity as an aspect of their overall evaluation encoded in their presentations will not only help them connect their learning to the research they do, but will also expand their scope of evaluation in their oral discourse.

Table 4. Most frequent performative evaluative adjectives in the L1 and L2 presentations.

L1 presentations	L1 Raw frequency	L2 presentations	L2 Raw frequency
good	33	important	32
interesting	31	interesting	22
important	29	different	21
able	18	good	15
big	14	main	9
helpful	13	difficult	9
sure	12	possible	7
comfortable	10	aware	7
great	10	hard	6
aware	8	useful	6
true	9	great	6
different	9	interested	5
negative	9	true	5
huge	9		
complex	8		
positive	8		
difficult	7		
clear	7		
obvious	7		
interested	6		
significant	6		
appropriate	6		
possible	6		
real	5		
actual	5		
controversial	5		
relevant	5		
effective	5		

Note: Only adjectives that occurred at least five times in each corpus are reported in this table for comparative purposes. This frequency corresponds to a normalized frequency of 12.5 per 100,000 words, which is usually used to report results from other studies, based on larger corpora.

RQ3: Do the L1 and L2 presenters tend to use evaluative adjectives variably or not? What is the lexical sophistication level of the evaluatively used adjectives by each group of presenters?

The last research question was aimed to target the variability and level of sophistication of the evaluative adjectives in each group's productively used repertoire. The results showed that using the same adjectives repetitively for evaluative purposes was a commonly shared strategy among the presenters. This finding did not come as a surprise since lexical and structural repetition is a commonly used strategy in presentations, though more prominently evident in L2 than L1 presentations. While the L2 students employed repetition noticeably more often than the L1 presenters,

it did not feel too overwhelming from a listener's point of view. What is more concerning, though, is the significantly smaller L2 range of evaluative adjectives compared to the L1 range, which makes it very likely that the L2 students' much smaller productively used adjectival repertoire was probably the main reason for the higher rate of repetition. In this regard, it would be useful to remind L2 students of the availability of evaluative adjectives with similar semantic content with which they can achieve the same effect while avoiding repetition (e.g. ***important*** = *considerable, significant, substantial,* etc.; ***good*** = *appropriate, suitable, favorable, beneficial, worthwhile, positive,* etc.; ***main*** = *central, predominant, essential, fundamental,* etc.). Overall, expanding L2 students' adjectival repertoire (both productively and receptively) would allow them not only to add variability to their evaluation but also to nuance more richly and show greater awareness of delicate shadings of meaning in their oral presentations.

The analysis of the extent of lexical sophistication among the evaluative adjectives in the L1 and L2 presentations confirmed that both groups of presenters used evaluative adjectives predominantly from the high frequency category, which was not unexpected. In general, discussions about lexical variability commonly emphasize the value of knowing vocabulary within the first 2,000 most frequent words in the English language as this is the vocabulary that provides the greatest coverage across all registers (e.g. Laufer & Nation, 1995; Morris & Cobb, 2004; Nation, 2001; Zareva, 2012). However, the high percentage of evaluative adjectives which the L2 presenters chose from the 1K and 2K bands (63%) and the much lower percentage of such adjectives form the lower frequency bands (17%) suggested that, perhaps, the L2 students' lower frequency adjectival repertoire was either underdeveloped or was not as functional under the cognitive pressure of extemporaneous speech production as their high frequency repertoire. Raising L2 students' awareness of the notion of lexical sophistication in general and explicitly directing their attention to what counts as sophisticated usage and what does not will make them better equipped to meet the demands for precision and disciplinary sophistication in their academic speech and writing. Additionally, given that academic presentations are prepared oral discourse, L2 presenters should be encouraged to plan in advance not only the structure of the informational content of their presentations, but also the language they are going to use to discuss that content, especially in terms of variability and sophistication.

5. Conclusion

Evaluation is inherent and expected in academic presentations and the study revealed that both the L1 and L2 students were aware of that expectation and accommodated it to a varying degree in their presentations. Connecting the findings of this study back to the main functions of evaluation that Thompson and Hunston (2000) had pointed out, we see that the presenters used evaluative adjectives to fulfill primarily one of the three main functions—i.e. to express their own opinion on the academic issues they discussed not only as a reflection of their personal values but also as a reflection of the values of their disciplinary community. It can also be argued that, to some extent, the presenters also tried to use their adjectival evaluation to establish a relationship with their audience of peers by sharing various aspects of their cognitive processes that they became aware of during their research. That revealed not only the students' heightened level of metacognition but also their attempt to add to the stances of their immediate community of practice and maintain a relationship of solidarity and contribution. Thus, in light of the practical functionality of adjectival evaluation in student presentations, it would be useful to bring up this linguistic aspect to the students' attention and encourage them to express their evaluation not only in writing but also in their oral academic discourse.

Overall, even though the two groups shared some common patterns in their use of evaluative adjectives, the L2 presenters conveyed personal evaluative comments noticeably less often and with a much smaller range of adjectives than the L1 presenters. This is not to say that the L1 presentations should be seen as providing the norm against which the L2 presentations are to be judged. In fact, in the absence of previous research, one of the primary goals of this study was to

offer an initial description of how evaluation is encoded in L1 and L2 students' use of adjectives so that EAP teachers and material designers could gain new insights into this aspect of student presentations.

Interestingly, the findings revealed that, even though adjectives are most strongly associated with evaluation, they were not used primarily for that purpose in students' presentations. Rather, presenters employed adjectives predominantly for descriptive purposes, which in turn implied that, overall, student presenters tend to convey evaluation in moderation—more so the L2 than the L1 presenters. The L2 presenters seemed to view their authorial role primarily in terms of stating the facts and showing familiarity with the central arguments of the topics they discussed. While these are fundamental aspects of presentations, there is also an expectation (at least, in the Anglophone academic culture) that students will display their disciplinary knowledge with evaluative persuasion—an aspect that L2 students should be made explicitly aware of in their EAP oral communication classes. By looking at the frequency of the most-used adjectives in each group's data (Table 4), instructors can easily craft guidelines or give students some guidance about the possible directions of their critical evaluations, including self- reflexivity—an aspect that was barely conveyed in the L2 presentations.

Finally, in terms of specific syntactic and lexical features associated with evaluatively used adjectives, the findings revealed a stronger preference of use of subject predicative structures (especially constructions with the copula verb *be*) rather than attributive structures. Evidently, marking the attributes of entities usually immediately preceding nouns is a less preferred choice compared to linking certain qualities or values to specific subjects. Lexically, it was not a surprise that repetition of certain adjectives, especially the ones from the higher frequency bands, was a shared strategy among all presenters. However, it was more worrying to see the significantly smaller range of evaluative adjectives the L2 presenters used productively, which was probably the main reason for the much higher rate of repetition among this group of participants. In this regard, expanding L2 students' adjectival repertoires (receptively and productively) and encouraging them to plan to use adjectives from the lower frequency bands would allow them not only to add variability to their evaluative adjectival choices, but also to show greater awareness of subtle shadings of meaning in their evaluative comments—a characteristic feature of evaluation that should not be ignored in academic discourse.

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