

Is Filipino ESL Academic Writing Becoming More Informal?

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Article information	
Abstract	<p>The observation of informalities in academic writing has become tremendous in recent years, as revealed by a plethora of cross-cultural and diachronic studies. Different users of English have already been explored; however, none has centered on the case of English as a Second Language (henceforth ESL) writers, such as Filipino academic writing scholars, in terms of delineating informalities in their academic writing discourse over time. For this reason, this quantitative study aimed to diachronically analyze informality features in academic writing of Filipino ESL researchers in the applied linguistics field. Using the framework of Hyland and Jiang (2017), a significant association between the years of writing and overall use of informalities was found, signifying an increasing number of informality features as time progresses. Specifically, there were five informality features that the writers noticeably observed over the years. However, only two categories of the informality framework, unattended anaphoric pronouns, and sentence-initial conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs, were most pronounced in writing and were increasing. On the other hand, the categories of first-person pronouns, sentence-final prepositions, and listing expressions were less salient and were decreasing. This paper ends with</p>

	pedagogical implications for academic writing instructions as far as appropriating such features as (in)formal is concerned.
Keywords	informality, academic writing, English as a Second Language (ESL), Filipino writers, diachronic change
APA citation:	Tocalo, A. W. I., Racman, S. P., Guiamelon, K. N. A. G., & Mama, B. M. (2022). Is Filipino ESL academic writing becoming more informal? <i>PASAA</i> , 99–125.

Introduction

It is quite known that English is deemed the language of the globe and that it has placed itself in all domains of communication. A pivotal field is the academe as the English language immensely plays a role in the dissemination of information, such as in scientific communication (Flowerdew & Dudley-Evans, 2002). Specifically, it is deemed the language in research publications, academic subjects of second language users, and non-natives academicians' scholarly papers as indicators, among others, of the spread of English as a global language (Crystal, 2003). By and large, academic writing skill, such as in research publication, is imperative inasmuch as in this global competitiveness, the skill welcomes personal and especially professional success as it is an entryway to becoming globally recognized in the academic discourse community (Tocalo, 2021).

Meanwhile, what makes academic writing different from other writing genres is its use of a formal approach to the topic it discusses. A formal approach in this writing communicates to readers objectively and professionally (Hartley, 2008). Thus, academic writers need to be aware of how they write; that is, they need to establish their writing styles with the use of appropriate words to produce a formal tone. This is because readers understand and get accurate information about the content of academic writing work with the help of the author's formal tone and manner of writing in the text (Praminatih et al., 2018). Further, Hyland and Jiang (2017) mentioned that formality is essential in academic writing. It saves the writing from vagueness, misconceptions, and subjectivity that may lead the text to become too personal.

Despite this truism in academic writing, there seems to be an apparent observation of changing behavior in writing by exhibiting a more non-conforming writing pattern. The use of informalities in the genre has become a trend in recent times. According to Ebrahimi and Fakheri (2019), researchers' language used in academic writing has been the focus of interest in research relevant to the identification of formal and informal features (e.g., Chang & Swales 1999; Gilquin & Paquot, 2008; Hyland & Jiang, 2017). Several studies have proven how informality features take place in the academic writing of expert writers (Hundt & Mair, 1999; Hyland & Jiang, 2017) and even of student writers (Al Fadda, 2012; Klimova, 2013; Leedham & Fernandez-Parra, 2017; Prammatih et al., 2018). However, a dearth of evidence regarding how informality changes over the years is evident. There were a few previous studies that discovered such changes in informality in academic writing (i.e., Atkinson, 1998; Constantinou et al., 2019; Hundt & Mair, 1999; Hyland & Jiang, 2017; McCrostie, 2008; Prammatih et al., 2018), yet the context of ESL academic writing remains understudied, specifically that of Filipino scholars using a diachronic approach. Diachronic study is not new in language research. In 1927, its denotative meaning was forwarded by Online Etymology Dictionary. Accordingly, a diachronic study in linguistics concerns the historical event of a language. Thus, it is imperative particularly when a study focuses on a phenomenon that has happened over the years. Schmidtke-Bode and Grossman (2019) added that diachronic studies could elucidate the occurring universal patterns of a language, which can be linked to change, process, continuity, development, transformation, and evolution (Widdersheim, 2018). In particular, the current study is anchored on diachronic corpus linguistics, which uses diachronic corpora to find a diachronic variation in genres, registers, and varieties of a language over sequential periods of time (Hilpert & Gries, 2016). In this way, a clear representation of recent advances in linguistic evolutions will be furthered (Bybee, 2007). Therefore, the present diachronic study explored the informality features present in the ESL academic writing of published Filipino scholars.

Literature Review

Some of the landmark studies on the analysis of the existence of informalities in writing, in general, were Biber's (1992) multidimensional corpus of spoken and written texts, Heylighen and Dewaele's (1999) corpora of Dutch, French, Italian, and English texts, Chang and Swales' (1999) style manuals and writing guidebooks, and Bennett's (2009) corpus of English academic style guides or manuals. All these scholars propounded that informality is becoming noticeable in the writing domain of communication, as revealed by certain categories of and expressions in English in discursal use.

Focusing on academic writing discourse, it was Hyland (2005) who is one of those that pioneeringly solidified the emergence of informalities. He defines informality as an everyday language used by common people to communicate. He added that informality is how writers concede and link with readers. In discussing informalities, it is hard to separate them from the concept of formality, especially in academic writing, where formalities are strictly observed. Heylighen and Dewaele (1999), for example, have distinguished formal and informal styles. They associate formal style with detachment, accuracy, rigidity, and heaviness, while an informal style is more flexible, direct, implicit, involved, and less informative. Hyland and Jiang (2017) likewise expressed that formality decreases the context-dependence and unclear expression of the text, avoiding ambiguity and misinterpretation. On the other hand, informality rejects the usual and formal way of writing to achieve a friendly and welcoming persona. However, although informality can be conceived as a point in academic writing that has an unlikely connotation, it is becoming conspicuous in the discourse today, particularly when Chang and Swales' (1999) informality features were built.

Hyland and Jiang (2017) are one of the well-acknowledged research teams who adopted the informality features of Chang and Swales (1999). In their analysis, the former used the categories of informality, as revealed in Table 1. They changed one category in the informality features identified by Chang and Swales, that is, the *sentence fragments* to *second-person pronouns*, since the researchers noticed that sentence fragments almost never occurred in research writing as their concerned genre of academic writing.

Table 1*List of Informality Features by Hyland and Jiang (2017, p.44)*

Informality Features with Examples
1. first-person pronouns to refer to the author(s) (<i>I</i> and <i>we</i>) e.g., “/will approach this issue in a roundabout way.”
2. unattended anaphoric pronouns (<i>this, these, that, those, it</i>) that can refer to antecedents of varying length e.g., “ <i>This</i> is his raw material.”
3. split infinitives - an infinitive that has an adverb between <i>to</i> and the verb stem e.g., “The president proceeded <i>to sharply admonish</i> the reporters.”
4. sentence-initial conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs e.g., “ <i>And</i> I will blame her if she fails in these ways.”
5. sentence-final preposition e.g., “A student should not be taught more than he can think <i>about</i> .”
6. listing expressions (<i>‘and so on’, ‘etc’, ‘and so forth’</i> used when ending a list) e.g., “These semiconductors can be used in robots, CD players, <i>etc.</i> ”
7. second-person pronouns/determiners to refer to the reader (<i>you</i> and <i>your</i>) e.g., “Suppose <i>you</i> are sitting at a computer terminal which assigns you role R.”
8. contractions e.g., “Export figures <i>won’t</i> improve until the economy is stronger.”
9. direct questions e.g., “ <i>What can be done to lower costs?</i> ”
10. exclamations e.g., “ <i>This is not the case!</i> ”

Hyland and Jiang (2017) concluded in their corpus-based study that there has been a slight increase of around two percent in the use of informality features in published academic writing over the past 50 years. The writers in the applied linguistics discipline have constantly reduced their use of informalities since 1965 by about 10.3% and in the sociology discipline by about 3%. In the electrical engineering discipline, the use of informalities continuously increased by about 9%. The informalities in the biology discipline, on the other hand, raised to 24%. Several researchers contributed to the same line of inquiry using the adapted framework of Hyland and Jiang (2017). Lee et al. (2019), for example, conducted their study to understand more how informal features are used in assessing ESL

argumentative essays and how they compare with L1 peers. According to them, the comparative corpus-based analysis of informality in the high-rated essays of L1 and L2 undergraduate student writing shows that the informality features are significantly higher in L2 texts. Other related studies are presented below, focusing on the concerned variables under study.

Many investigations on informality features were conducted by concentrating on the writings of different groups of speakers of the English language. In the quantitative-qualitative study of Alipour and Nooreddinmoosa (2018), which aimed to fully grasp how informality features are utilized in applied linguistics research articles, native and non-native writings were compared. They gathered a corpus of 200 articles and adopted the ten informal features in the academic writing of Chang and Swales (1999). Results showed that informality features were used more often in native articles than in non-native articles. The most repeated informal feature was sentence-initial conjunctions, while exclamation marks least appeared. Another study was that of Kuhl et al. (2020). Using the frameworks of Atkinson (2004) and Holliday (1999), they analyzed an extensive corpus of research articles written by native English and non-native Iranian authors. They examined the informality features and their relation to ten disciplines representing soft and hard sciences. They emphasized that Iranians are more impersonal than native English authors in terms of using first-person pronouns. These features occur more often in soft disciplines compared to hard sciences. Also, first-person pronouns, unattended anaphoric pronouns, and sentences beginning with conjunctions were the three informal features that often appeared in both groups of speakers.

Meanwhile, other researchers were particularly interested in examining English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) learners' writing. McCrostie (2008) conducted a study among Japanese students majoring in English. McCrostie based his analysis on the previous studies conducted by Petch-Tyson (1998) and Cobb (2003), who concluded that the writings of non-native English speakers were more personal than those of native English speakers. McCrostie, on the other note, found out that first-year students commit redundancy in spoken variety, plural and singular first-person pronouns, and ambiguous words in essays. On the other hand, second-year students' redundancy in spoken variety, first-

person pronouns, and incoherent words decreased. He has concluded that the findings were the effect of students' experiences in writing and the university writing curriculum. Leedham and Fernandez-Parra (2017) likewise studied a specific informality writing feature among Chinese, Greek, and British undergraduate and graduate students majoring in Engineering. They claimed that the Chinese and Greek students used more first-person pronouns “we.” English students, on the other hand, used the first-person pronoun “I” in their written works. The social and cultural background of these students influenced their use of pronouns. A recent study by Praminatih et al. (2018) among Indonesian EFL undergraduate students aimed to analyze thesis abstracts in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016. They found out that there were eight types of informality features in their corpus, such as first-person pronouns, second-person pronouns, sentence-initial conjunctions/conjunctive adverbs, sentence-final prepositions, run-on sentences/expressions, sentence fragments, contractions, and direct questions. Only first-person pronouns, sentence-initial conjunctions/conjunctive adverbs, run-on sentences/expressions, and sentence fragments often appeared over the years. By and large, they concluded that informality features in academic writing have been decreasing over time, a reflection of an improvement in the teaching-learning process.

ESL writers' behavior was also a point of interest among scholars. Tang and John (1999) examined first-year Singaporean students' essays. They wanted to explore the concept of a writer's identity in writing an academic essay, focusing on the use of first-person pronouns. Although they did not mainly aim at determining informality in writing, their study could also be a point of contributory reference to the nature of informality. They argued that the use of first-person pronouns in academic essays is not a homogeneous entity. The students' use of first-person pronouns signifies their expression of their authorial identities, with six types such as ‘I’ as representative, ‘I’ as guide, ‘I’ as architect, ‘I’ as recounter, ‘I’ as opinion holder, and ‘I’ as originator. In the study of Callies (2013), strategies in (non-)representation of authorship in L2 academic writing of beginner writers were examined. In addition, Callies compared small samples of L2 academic writing from the Corpus of Academic Learner English (CALE) and the Michigan Corpus of

Upper-Level Student Papers (MICUSP). Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze the use of pronouns, subject placeholders, verbs, and inanimate nouns commonly found in academic writing. The findings highlighted that the excessive use of first-person pronouns and subject placeholders were default strategies to prevent the author-agent. Sholihah (2018) also aimed to determine if the students majoring in English in Indonesia use informal language in their thesis. Nine informality features in the theses of the students were found: unattended anaphoric pronouns, first-person pronouns, contractions, initial conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs, sentence fragments, listing expressions, direct questions, adverbs in initial or final position, and second-person pronouns. The initial conjunctions and conjunctive, first-person pronouns, and unattended anaphoric pronouns were salient. Finally, Gustilo et al. (2018) did a functional analysis of informality features in the move-step strategies of Filipino writers as reflected in their undergraduate theses from different disciplines. Conclusively, the writers displayed deviance from formal conventions of academic writing through the 160 informal lexis they identified in their corpus. A deeper analysis, however, indicated that such informal expressions were facilitative to expressing a certain move-strategy in writing, postulating their nature as not totally deviations from formal conventions but also as functional linguistic expressions in establishing a particular move.

Diachronic studies on informality features were also common. Aside from the studies mentioned earlier in this paper (e.g., Atkinson, 1998; Hyland & Jiang, 2017; McCrostie, 2008; Praminatih et al., 2018), Hundt and Mair (1999) conducted a diachronic study on informality features by conducting a follow-up study to previous research of parallel British and American corpora from the early 1960s and 1990s. They examined the variables related to the emerging “colloquialization” of norms in written English. This transition in stylistic preferences was evident in socio-cultural approaches to language and corpus-based studies. They used parallel corpora such as Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus (LOB), Freiburg-LOB Corpus (FLOB), Brown corpus, and Frown corpus. They concluded that journalistic prose and academic writing were written genres that were dissimilar in that they could either be open to innovations or preserve their conservative forms. The interpersonal features in academic prose and the use of first and second pronouns in journalistic prose affect the growing colloquialization in the norms of written

English. Another was that of Constantinou et al. (2019), who investigated whether 16-year-old students' degree of formality in their writings changed over ten years, from 2004 to 2014. Using Assessment Performance Unit Corpus (APU) for recent texts and Oxford Children's corpus for older texts corpora, they focused on the features that served as discriminators of both spoken and written discourse (e.g., lexical diversity, lexical sophistication) or as markers of informal electronic communication (e.g., abbreviations, omitted stops, non-capitalised sentences). Ultimately, they advanced that the students' writing had undergone informalisation. The increase of omitted stops omitted and/or uncommon use of apostrophes, non-capitalised sentences and non-standard English, and the decrease in lexical sophistication and lexical diversity contributed to the higher level of informality committed by students.

Research Gaps and Objective of the Study

Existing studies have proven that the use of informality features in academic writing is evident. Previous studies, such as that of Leedham and Fernandez-Parra (2017) among Chinese, Greek, and British undergraduate and graduate students, McCrostie (2008) among Japanese students majoring in English, and Praminatih et al. (2018) among Indonesian EFL students, primarily focused on the writings of EFL writers. The use of informality features in ESL academic writing, specifically in published research articles by ESL writers, needs more exploration. Among the previous studies mentioned above, only four have considered and examined the informality features in an ESL country (i.e., Callies, 2013; Lee et al., 2019; Sholihah, 2018; Tang & John, 1999). Furthermore, diachronically analysing the informality features in writing (i.e., Atkinson, 1998; Constantinou et al., 2019; Hundt & Mair, 1999; Hyland & Jiang, 2017; McCrostie, 2008; Praminatih et al., 2018) has been a point of interest. With these concerns, the present study aligned its aim at attempting to do a diachronic analysis of informality features among Filipino ESL scholars in the applied linguistics discipline since such a discipline has been taken into account by few researchers (i.e., Alipour & Nooreddinmoosa, 2018; Hyland & Jiang, 2017; Kuhl et al., 2020). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that is of theoretical importance in determining informality features following a diachronic perspective of analysis concerning the case of Filipino academic

writing. For this purpose, the present analysis may contribute to engendering a more apparent dichotomy of formality and informality in ESL academic writing by specifically forwarding features of informality reflective of how academic writing evolves in its status in so far as its conventions are concerned. Given that the concept of error in the use of the English language has become elusive due to some features that may be considered a variety of English (Schneider, 2003), the present study could also assist in furthering those features which may be found acceptable today in Filipino ESL academic writing. The concept of a variety of English is not new in the field of linguistics since the introduction of *world Englishes* made popularized by Kachru (1992) when he advanced his well-acknowledged *three overlapping circles of English*. This framework aimed at rejecting the division between native and non-native English speakers since English varieties may categorically have their own linguistic, cultural, and ideological precepts that are not solely native speaker-oriented. The case of Philippine English is positioned in the *outer circle of English* due to the American colonial attachments to the country and the vital institutional role of the English language in different sectors of the country, thereby characterizing its *norm-developing country* description. Schneider (2003, 2007) also discussed that Philippine English is portrayed at a *nativization* stage in his *The Dynamic Model of Post-colonial Englishes* because the country shows codification and standardization of Philippine English predicated on a plethora of scientific studies and its application to teaching. Filipino scholars furthered the case of Philippine English at higher levels by arguing that it has already attained the *endonormative stabilization* stage (Borlongan, 2016) and the last stage, *differentiation* (Gonzales, 2017). Borlongan averred that the Philippines has already attained its independence, resulting in its own formulation of language policies without external influence, and is accepted by its users in the country. Signs of synchronic and diachronic structural stabilization and homogenization for codification are likewise evident in Philippine English. Conversely, Gonzales outlined the existence of substrate-influenced “regional,” social, and hybrid varieties of Philippine English. Even a preponderance of literature on Philippine English has led to the advocates of Philippine English, who studied its features at different linguistic levels. In view of these well-founded beliefs on Philippine English, the current study is also attempting to directly find out in the published works of Filipino scholars certain features of Philippine English that can be made acceptable based

on their occurrences over the recent years. In so doing, this study sought an answer to the question: *‘What are the emerging informality features in the academic writing of Filipino scholars over the years?’*

Methodology

The Construction of the Corpus

Given that this study is quantitative corpus linguistics following a diachronic approach, we had a building of around 1,000,000-word corpus containing selected published research articles in the years 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 from different reputable local and international journals. Among these journals, only the Philippine Journal of Linguistics is not open access. These articles were written by Filipino researchers in applied linguistics, a discipline that has also been taken into account by researchers on informalities in the past years (e.g., Alipour & Nooreddinmoosa, 2018; Hyland & Jiang, 2017; Praminatih et al., 2018). We verified the availability of the articles in the different online journals and found out that their archives have published articles from 2010-2020, the only time span all the journals have. Table 2 reveals the creation of three sub-corpora, corresponding to different time spans: 2010-2013, 2014-2017, and 2018-2020. The ranges of distinctive time were selected to see whether changes in informality features in academic writing were articulated in an earlier or a later period. Thus, our concern was to determine the overall changes in one decade of writing. A similar objective was made in previous studies (i.e., Hyland & Jiang, 2017; Praminatih et al., 2018) specifically related to the course of the present research since Lim (2012) noted that a diachronic linguistic study has to consider data from different points in time.

Table 2*The Construction of the Corpus for Diachronic Analysis*

<i>Journals</i>	2010-2013	2014-2017	2018-2020	Overall Number of Words
Philippine ESL Journal	60,959	120,000	-	180,959
Philippine Journal of Linguistics	79,349	159,283	93,583	332,215
Philippine National University Journal	40,033	-	-	40,033
The Normal Lights	37,948	11,331	-	49,279
Asian Journal of English Language Studies (AJELS)	38,592	116,887	68,391	223,870
TESOL International Journal	6,350	12,066	53,974	72,390
The Asian ESP Journal	-	-	53,368	53,368
The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies	8,090	40,922	-	49,012
Overall Number of Words	271,321	460,489	269,316	1,001,126

Data Gathering and Analysis Procedures

The data presented in this study were a collection of published research journal articles in applied linguistics written by Filipino writers from 2010-2020. To ensure that the authors were Filipinos, we checked their nationality by further searching them through different online platforms. The 2010 to 2020 years were taken since they were the years of article publications commonly found among the journals we selected. At the same time, they were the recent years of publications of the journals during the data gathering of the current study, hence reflecting the aim of the study in delineating recent insights about (in)formality of academic writing of Filipino scholars. Each year should also have eight to ten research articles. As the sources of the articles, our priority was refereed local research journals that are popular and reputable in the Philippines. Since not all such local journals have published articles in a particular year, and not all reach eight articles in a year, we selected other reputable international journals in which Filipino scholars commonly publish their works as far as our knowledge is concerned. This was the primary reason some journals do not have data in a time span, as represented in Table 1. The research articles were then downloaded and grouped according to the three time spans mentioned above. This means that we had three sub-corpora, 2010-2013, 2014-2017, and 2018-2020. The research articles went through a complete removal process of cutting out unnecessary sections of the articles for analysis, such as the reference lists, acknowledgments, and marginal inputs, which were not relevant to finding out informality features in the author's writing style in their research articles. The collected articles were converted into text (*txt*) files for the concordance software (AntConc) to read and retrieve the data for analysis. To examine the informality features, we used the framework of Hyland and Jiang (2017) in Table 1, consisting of ten categories of informality features in academic writing: *first-person pronouns, unattended anaphoric pronouns, split infinitives, sentence-initial conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs, sentence-final prepositions, listing expressions, second-person pronouns/determiners that refer to the readers, contractions, direct questions, and exclamations*. A combination of electronic analysis and human intervention was done to detect them in each of our three sub-corpora. The use of AntConc software facilitated the electronic analysis; that is, the words reflective of a possible informality feature based on the framework of Hyland and Jiang (2017) (e.g., *this* for the *unattended anaphoric pronoun*) was searched in the concordance feature of the software to retrieve sentences or lines that use such words from our three sub-corpora. The human intervention, on the other hand, was carried out by doing a double-check of the concordance lines of AntConc to find out whether certain

items were really expressing informality in context, especially the categories *unattended anaphoric pronouns, sentence-initial conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs, sentence-final prepositions, second person pronouns/ determiners that refer to the readers, and direct questions*. The frequencies of each word or item and their normalized values per 10,000 words were taken to present them in an excel file according to where in the sub-corpora they were found for the comparison of the three time spans. Such a normalization was necessary due to the different number of tokens of the three sub-corpora or time spans being juxtaposed. Furthermore, the chi-square test was applied to determine statistical significance in the overall use of informality features over time.

Results and Discussion

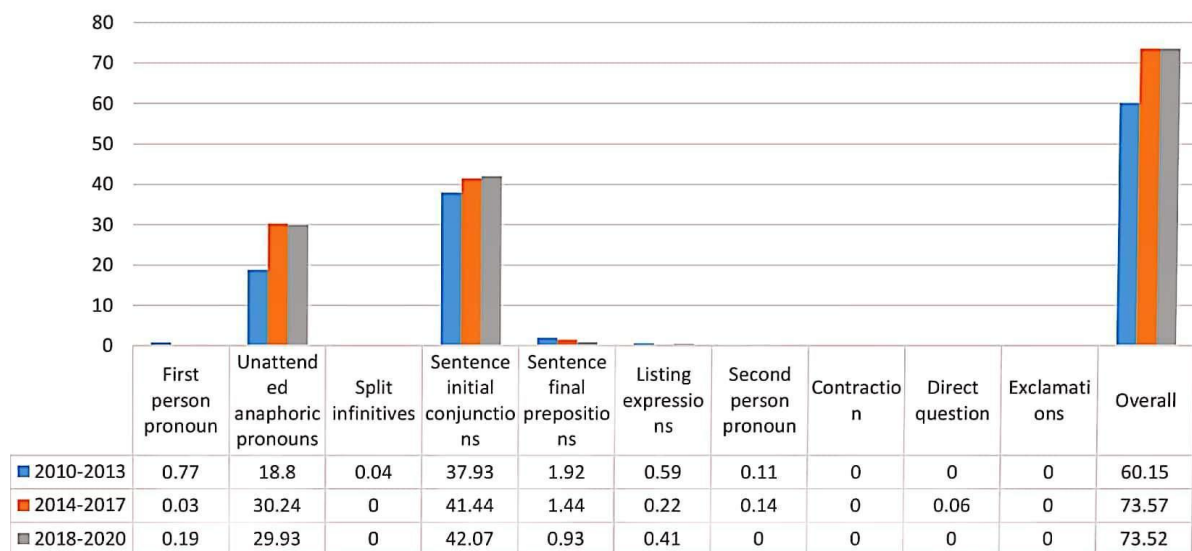
The Chi-square test demonstrated that there is a statistically significant association between the use of informality features and the years of academic writing ($\chi^2 = 110.551, p = .000$), signifying an observation that the use of informalities varies in years. Note that such informality features were only those that were found in the current analysis. Overall, there is increased use of informality (+22.23%) from 2010 to 2020, as reflected in Figure 1. This finding indicates that informality features in ESL academic writings tend to become more informal as time progresses. The result of the study is contradictory to the study of Hyland and Jiang (2017) and Praminatih et al. (2018), in which the use of informality features decreased over time in applied linguistics. Praminatih et al. (2018) mentioned that it is due to the improvement of university teaching and learning processes and the tendency of EFL writers to become more conservative in their academic compositions. In this connection, Filipino ESL scholars are opposite to the EFL writers; the former has a slight tendency to be less strict in observing formality conventions in academic writing. It is worth mentioning that this observation is not tantamount to the idea that academic writing instructions in an ESL setting, such as the Philippines, are deteriorating since the data analyzed in the present study are published research articles. This relative freedom of writing of Filipino or ESL writers in general, as expressed in their increasing use of informalities in their published works, could heighten their description as *norm developing* vis-à-vis the overlapping circles of English of Kachru (1992), denoting their inclination not to strictly conform to the standards of English use – formal writing conventions in this case. Meanwhile, using the dynamic model of post-colonial Englishes of Schneider (2003, 2007), Filipino English users whose own

Philippine English variety is already at stage three, the nativization phase (Schneider, 2007), while Borlongan (2016) and Gonzales (2017) argued that it has already attained stage four, the endonormative phase, and the last stage, the differentiation phase. All these theoretical underpinnings aver the claim that Filipino English writers have their propensity to write without any external control from any standards which have been conventionally put forward by the traditional bases of English or native speakerism model. Furthermore, we argue that these informality features have been committed for a reason, as Hyland and Jiang (2017, p. 49) expressed:

They [academics] also change for reasons which more directly relate to the rhetorical purposes of the genre and gradual adjustments to norms of interpersonal persuasion rather than efforts to weaken existing structures in favor of more 'friendly', relaxed or conversational practices.

Figure 1

Distribution of Informality Features (2010-2020)



The following sections showcase the findings of each category of informality features that has an observation of increase and decline from 2010 to 2020.

Unattended Anaphoric Pronouns

As revealed in Figure 1, unattended anaphoric pronouns showed a drastic increase (+59.20%) from 2010 to 2020. Hyland and Jiang (2017) mentioned that unattended anaphoric pronouns are interconnected with informality due to their dominance in spoken discourse, and writers are suggested to avoid it. The sentences below show how this kind of informality is used in discourse:

These are assumed to be acquired preferences that are adaptable rather than fixed personality characteristics. (FIL_ESL_2010_04)

These may include other modifiers and phrases showing personal convictions like I believe, I find and any other similar phrases. (FIL_ESL_2014_05)

This is because of the components or factors comprising it: writer, reader, text, and arguments (Du Bois, 2007; Hyland, 2005, 2010). (FIL_ESL_2019_06)

Our findings are incongruent with Hyland and Jiang (2017) who observed a decline of unattended anaphoric pronouns over the past 50 years in the applied linguistics field. Concerning the frequencies of informality features, unattended anaphoric pronouns also frequently appeared in the study of Sholihah (2018). Hyland and Jiang (2017) explicated that unattended references could be influenced by spoken discourse in writing behavior. While writers usually employ them in academic writing, they argue that writers do not realize the potentiality of ambiguity the linguistic expression may provide among the readers. In the paper of Gustilo et al. (2018), Filipino writers were found to be omitting a nominal after the demonstrative pronoun, particularly when they evaluate and generalize ideas in writing, causing vagueness to the referent and emphasis in idea construction. Such a claim is also true for most of the discourses found in our current analysis. All these claims may contribute to the idea that controlling unattended anaphoric pronouns is perhaps one of the features of English language use that is continually overlooked in ESL instructions. Sholihah (2018), for example, found out that teachers prefer not to give any correction toward unattended anaphoric pronouns when correcting ESL students with mistakes.

Sentence-initial Conjunctions or Conjunctive Adverbs

As reflected in Figure 1, sentence-initial conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs likewise showed a substantial increase (+10.91%). While other standards of formality in writing merely consider initial coordinating conjunctions as informal, Chang and Swales (1999), who are the basis of Hyland and Jiang's (2017) framework, noted all initial conjunctions as expressing informality. The sentences below show how this kind of informality is used in discourse:

And there seems to be a generic, distinguishing variable that cuts across all aspects of management of English language teaching in the Philippines surveyed. (FIL_ESL_2011_01)

However, both groups of teachers have least awareness on the principles of comprehension instruction, which seems inconsistent with their pedagogical beliefs in teaching comprehension strategies. (FIL_ESL_2016_07)

And as shown on the table, the speakers who violated the maxims in general wanted to inject humor in the conversations. (FIL_ESL_2018_03)

The increased use of sentence-initial conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs was also found in the study of Praminatih et al. (2018), which examined Indonesian EFL students' thesis abstracts. Hyland and Jiang (2017) found out that sentence-initial conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs also increased by 50% since 1985. According to Chafe (1986), sentence-initial conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs appear mostly in spoken language and impromptu language production. Likewise, style guides advised the authors to avoid using this informality feature (Hyland & Jiang, 2017). In this study, we found out that Filipino authors developed three types of sentence-initial conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs. They are coordinating conjunctions (e.g., "*For* reading attitude is an important determinant and L2 specific language."), subordinating conjunctions (e.g., "*Since* a prototypical noun phrase contains determiner and a head noun, this paper describes the nouns in Ibanag."), and conjunctive adverbs (e.g., "*However*, before they can become successful, they need to have mastery in verbal comprehension and verbal

reasoning.”). Among the types, the most frequently used was the coordinating conjunctions and the least frequently used was the subordinating conjunctions. Lee (2014) mentioned that when it comes to English academic writing, ESL learners are in an unfavourable position due to significant cross-linguistic differences. Accordingly, even at higher levels, there is still a problem in using conjunctions due to a lack of systematic instruction in academic writing style and structure. Gustilo et al. (2018), however, debunked the idea by claiming that initial conjunctions in discourse are a fulfillment of strategic writing in exemplifying a move strategy in academic writing.

First-person Pronouns

Although there is negligible use of first-person pronouns, Figure 1 demonstrated a substantial decrease (-75.32%) from 2010-2020. The sentences below show how this kind of informality is used in discourse:

We have, however, argued that implementing these directions is constrained by factors internal and external to the Filipino researcher of languages. (FIL_ESL_2012_02)

I found that unlike the initial proposition of van Dijk (2005), localized culture, context and discursive practices influence the unique features of a semantically-determinant act in the Philippines. (FIL_ESL_2014_22)

We call this representation as extra fictional voice, which differs from the implied author. (FIL_ESL_2019_09)

Chang and Swales (1999) mentioned that first-person pronouns mainly refer to the name(s) of the author(s). Hyland (2001) argues that in academic writing, a writer uses first-person pronouns to develop an authorial identity in which their contribution to the article is emphasized. In line with the result of the present research, Hyland and Jiang (2017) also found out that among the four disciplines, only applied linguistics showed a drastic decrease in the expression over time. Praminatih et al. (2018) are also supported by the finding. For this reason, Filipinos are probably reflective of the suggestion of Sholihah (2018), that is, to refrain from using first-person pronouns and that writers can use passive or simply replace the / with the word “researcher” to avoid authorial identity. Thus, they are more

objective in forwarding their construction of knowledge in writing. In addition, the decreasing use of first-person pronouns in academic writing is due to the self-consciousness of the researchers that they became more aware of the language use (Hyland & Jiang, 2017).

Sentence-final Prepositions

As shown in Figure 11, a less noticeable amount of using sentence-final prepositions showed a drastic decrease (-51.56%) from 2010 to 2020. The sentence below shows how this kind of informality is used in discourse:

The reading program developed by Ocampo (1996) could also be a document to reckon **with**. (FIL_ESL_2010_07)

Little evidence was seen that the use of clause is attributed to the nature of the case being decided **upon**. (FIL_ESL_2015_01)

The study also showed that language choice was affected by the language of the Twit the user was responding **to**. (FIL_ESL_2017_09)

This declining phenomenon over time is no surprise since it supports other related studies. Praminatih et al.'s (2018) data showed that sentence-final prepositions appeared only once in the Indonesian EFL thesis abstract. Hyland and Jiang (2017) also revealed that sentence-final preposition is one of the lowest informality features in academic writing in his corpora. Chang and Swales (1999) likewise explicated that sentence-final prepositions should be avoided in formal writings since prepositions should be in the middle of the sentence. Although Pablo and Lasaten (2018) found out Filipino learners usually commit grammatical errors in the use of prepositions in their academic writing, the prepositions used in our study are not indicative of errors, only informality as to their position in a sentence. Hence, we argue that the slight use of the expression by both EFL and ESL writers may have adopted and applied it while writing their research papers without realizing that they have committed informality.

Specifically, in applied linguistics, the decrease in sentence-final prepositions mirrors Hyland and Jiang's (2017) study of informality features in both

hard and soft sciences, and applied linguistics as one of the disciplines that represents the latter. They noticed an increase in informality in the hard sciences compared to the soft sciences. Mainly speaking, informality in applied linguistics decreased by around 10.3% from 1965 until 2015. This decrease in informality, particularly in a sentence-final preposition, is continuously happening until the current year, as the results of the present investigation have shown.

Listing Expressions

As displayed in Figure 1, only a limited amount of listing expressions surfaced in the data. Nevertheless, there is a substantial decrease (-30.51%) from 2010 to 2020. The sentences below show how this kind of informality is used in discourse:

Although no curricular model was strictly followed, academic activities such as reading, counting, writing, **etc.** called for appropriate teacher preparation. (FIL_ESL_2010_01)

It is interesting to note that varied teaching strategies like the use of ICT, cooperative learning strategies, the use of communicative approach, **etc.** (FIL_ESL_2017_06)

This inclusion of materials reinforces Bachman and Palmer (1996), which states that learners bring with them their own personalities, like and dislikes, interests. **etc.** (FIL_ESL_2019_13)

The decrease in the appearance of listing expressions contradicts the result of the data Sholihah (2018) gathered. The scholar indicated that out of nine categories of informality features, listing expressions ranked four in occurrences in the papers of Indonesian students majoring in English. This observation postulates an idea that an ESL writer may also differ in writing behavior, such as in committing this kind of informality feature. The result of the present study, however, supports the claim of Hyland and Jiang (2017). Listing expressions had the third lowest frequency out of ten informality features in their analysis, contributing significantly to the decrease of informality in writing in applied linguistics. Meanwhile, Chang and Swales (1999) mentioned that the use of listing expressions contributes to vagueness in writing, which requires readers to fill in

the missing information. In this case, Filipino ESL scholars may consciously attempt to detail their ideas in writing to express clarity of knowledge construction.

Conclusion

Informalities in academic writing have been an area of interest for researchers lately. This study explores the changes in language expression observed in ESL academic writing in one decade. Focusing on the applied linguistics discipline of Filipino scholars, the present research showed that ESL academic writing is becoming more informal from 2010-2020 when the total values of items are taken into consideration. This result was enunciated by a correlation calculation which demonstrated an association between the years of writing and the use of informality features. Specifically, out of the ten categories of informality features of Hyland and Jiang (2017), only five constantly appeared across time: *unattended anaphoric pronouns*, *sentence-initial conjunctions*, *first-person pronouns*, *sentence-final prepositions*, and *listing expressions*. The present study found that *unattended anaphoric pronouns* and *sentence-initial conjunctions* showed a drastic increase from 2010-2020, while *first-person pronouns*, *sentence-final prepositions* and *listing expressions*, which are all in small figures in general, showed a substantial decrease. Based on these findings, we argue that the fact that the corpus we used were published research articles of Filipino scholars, those two categories of informality features – *unattended anaphoric pronouns* and *sentence-initial conjunctions* – should not be conceived as deviance from formal conventions of academic writing. These expressions are, in fact, largely increasing as time progresses in our current analysis, hence, calling for a changing stance and behavior in academic writing discourse among ESL writers. They can likewise be facilitative to idea construction, such as the claim of Gustilo et al. (2018) in describing them as strategic and helpful in realizing a particular move or rhetorical purpose in writing. For example, as stated, unattended anaphoric pronouns are commonly used when giving evaluations and generalizations in writing, while sentence-initial conjunctions are of assistance in linking ideas from one sentence or discourse to another. In academic writing instructions, ESL teachers may not categorically appropriate these two categories as informality features in academic writing. They may be introduced as a nature of ESL writing behavior and may soon

be part of our linguistic repertoire. However, we likewise recognize that using unattended anaphoric pronouns in writing may cause vagueness and confusion among the readers. To address this conundrum without undermining the idea that they can be a natural part of ESL writing behavior, ESL teachers may craft *noticing* language writing activities to make ESL learners practice their skill in identifying the referent idea of a specific unattended anaphoric pronoun in a sentence. By doing so, learners will gradually master the reduction of ambiguity of understanding an idea in a sentence when an unattended anaphoric pronoun is present. At the same time, ESL teachers could teach how to construct sentences without leaving anaphoric pronouns unattended and the proper placement of sentence prepositions and conjunctions in academic writing. Our contention here is that ESL teachers must be careful of discursively constructing such two informalities as a total exemplification of deviance from formality in academic writing. Academic writing seems to have a changing status by observation of expressions conceived to be “informal” in nature. Meanwhile, those remaining categories of informality features that were negligibly and were decreasingly observed should be the areas that need more application of pedagogical precepts as far as formal academic writing conventions are concerned. Consequently, as stated by Pablo and Lasaten (2019), the curriculum developers should develop teaching strategies that can help learners identify errors – informal expressions in the case of the present study – in academic writing for these expressions not to be fossilized. Such teaching mechanisms would help ESL learners thrive in global scholarly writing by learning, at the very least, the fundamentals of formality in academic writing discourse.

In order to spell out more some writing idiosyncrasies of ESL writers in academic writing as far as (in)formality level is concerned, future quantitative and qualitative studies may extend our study by considering the other linguistic levels, not just grammatical and lexical concerns as the case of the present analysis, in describing informality in academic writing. Moreover, a larger and more robust corpus of different academic writing disciplines produced by other nationalities or groups of ESL writers is encouraged to delineate better the writing behavior of ESL academic writers.

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