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Researchers from France and the US compared grids for analyzing academic texts to explore similarities and differences and to raise questions to each other. The analysis focused on two US and three French grids for analyzing students' and scholars' academic texts. The comparative work makes it possible to shed light on fairly fundamental choices in terms of the relationship to the norm, to evaluation, to prescription, and to description; in terms of the constitution of data, the elaboration of units of analysis, and processing tools; and in terms of the theoretical foundations of methodological choices, the modalities of the comparative approach.

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von: Daniel Bart, Bertrand Daunay, Christiane Donahue

Comparative Analysis, Grids across Contexts

The Careful Work of Exchange

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Daniel Bart, Bertrand Daunay & Christiane Donahue

Abstract

Researchers from France and the US compared grids for analyzing academic texts to explore similarities and differences and to raise questions to each other. The analysis focused on two US and three French grids for analyzing students' and scholars' academic texts. The comparative work makes it possible to shed light on fairly fundamental choices in terms of the relationship to the norm, to evaluation, to prescription, and to description; in terms of the constitution of data, the elaboration of units of analysis, and processing tools; and in terms of the theoretical foundations of methodological choices, the modalities of the comparative approach.

Introduction

Cross-cultural and cross-tradition teaching and research exchanges around writing, higher education, literacies, and didactics have been ongoing between scholars at l'Université de Lille (France) and Dartmouth College (USA) for many years now. Those exchanges have been fostered by the scholars' mobility, back and forth between countries and within Europe, sharing projects and learning from one another. In 2021–22, in order to contribute further to "exchanges of methods and research themes relevant to shared areas of expertise in analyses of students' [...] textual literacies" (Donahue 2020: 1), we undertook a comparison of our analytic grids for studying academic texts ("grid" here meaning the organized set of codes implemented for each analysis):

- two grids from research at Dartmouth College's institutional digital portfolio project, "DartWrite" (Baker et al. 2020): the "orienters'" grid[1], used by faculty to make decisions about orienting students in their choices for writing courses based on their Directed Self Placement[2] essays (henceforth DSP), and the "researchers'" grid[3], used in a study intended to identify the textual variables at play in orienters' orientation choices;

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1   https://www.josch-journal.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/c-orienters-grid.pdf
2   Directed Self Placement is a process used to help US college students determine their writing level on entry to the university and to choose the curriculum most adapted to their level.
3   https://www.josch-journal.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/q-research-grid.pdf

- three grids developed by French researchers from the l'Université de Lille[4]. Two of the grids concern the analysis of sources students and researchers used in academic writing, whether to identify the non-theoretical references convened in the texts—references to non-conceptual, non-scholarly knowledge (Bart/Daunay 2019)—or to identify students' references to "change" (departing from previous knowledge) or "continuity" (building/extending previous knowledge) in terms of how their work contributes to the scholarly conversation (Bart/Daunay 2021). The third concerns the didactic and scholarly writing of teacher-researchers and describes their enunciative modalities for inserting the discourse of others into a text (Daunay/Delcambre 2017).

For this comparative analysis, we have constituted an *ad hoc* research corpus in the context of our transnational collaboration. We are examining this corpus not to compare this research for its own sake, and even less to generalize by assuming an "Americanness" or a "Frenchness" of the research. Instead, the comparison aims to question, based on this specific limited corpus, *possible* methodological variations which are, themselves, generalizable. We note that we have not situated this article within a particular body of scholarship, primarily because our focus is simply on the different research practices (each with its own universe of references) in relation to each other. There are certainly rich traditions of both research and assessment that could themselves be put into dialogue in a future project evolving out of this one.

Various corpora and purposes of use

A variety of bodies of work
We note that the research analysis grids we are comparing are based on very different purposes:
- The orienters' grid used in the US research is linked to institutional evaluation issues, since it involves orienting students to different course levels by evaluating their DSP;
- the two grids in the US context, especially the orienters' grid, are designed *a priori* to operate in a recurrent manner on annual corpora of student papers, whereas the French grids were designed for use limited to corpora collected on one occasion;
- the two US grids, both for the orienters and for the researchers, are designed to work on fairly large corpora with multiple coders, whereas the three French grids are built in relation to more limited corpora (although the final corpus could be large) and pairs of coders (who are also the researchers).

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4   https://www.josch-journal.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/french-grids.pdf

The following table compares the corpora covered by the five grids.

Table 1
Comparison of the corpora covered by the five grids

	Number of source writings of the corpus	Size	Number of coders
Enunciative modalities grid (Daunay & Delcambre, 2017)	3 courses or course materials, 3 scientific productions (articles, book chapters or communications) provided by 4 colleagues.	Several hundred pages, 191,491 words (Daunay & Delcambre, 2017, p. 46)	2
Non-theoretical references grid (Bart & Daunay, 2019)	20 excerpts from student papers, 20 excerpts from research articles	One hundred pages, 37,404 words	2
Change and continuity grid (Bart & Daunay, 2021)			
DSP Orienters' grid	700 DSP essays	About 1050 pages No word count	8
DSP Researchers' grid	175 DSP essays	About 265 pages No word count	5

Various approaches to data construction

For methodology, the coders of the five grids, despite the difference in the number of people involved, adopted more or less the same process, which is summarized in the US research (Baker et al. 2020: 2):

> We then tested our ability to apply the features with sufficient agreement on small sets of essays that had been de-identified in terms of placement recommendations. We achieved between 74 % and 87 % agreement, 71 %–84 % after Cohn's Kappa, for most of the features. We modified, redefined, or removed any for which we could not achieve agreement over three rounds of testing and refining.

Since the coders in the French research were pairs of researchers, more spontaneous adjustments were sufficient. But a strong difference from a methodological point of view lies in the *units* of data on which the grids operate. For the US research grids, each unit of the corpus for the coders is the whole student essay for most of the features studied. As shown in Table 2, below, each row of the data collection and analysis table then populates the codes assigned to a student text.

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Table 2
Excerpt from Baker et al.'s (2020) data table

Q26 Essay number	Q1 Degree of understanding of Source 1: Kolata	Q2 Degree of understanding of Source 2: Freedman	Q3 Degree of understanding of Source 3: Walker et al.	Q4 Source integration: use a check mark for each type of integration strategy you encounter – check once
130	Lack of understanding	Some understanding	Essay not referenced	Source used with no integration strategy, Post-reference explanation
131	Some understanding	Some understanding	Lack of understanding	Source used with no integration strategy, Signal phrase introduces author, Signal phrase explains topic/goal, Post-reference explanation

For the French research grids, the units are not the full texts that make up the corpus overall, but rather, excerpted text segments. A unit here is defined in terms of form: it is a passage framed by two strong punctuation marks. These excerpts are then coded, and the way an excerpt uses a source becomes one of the variables. The units were marked off in the corpora (as long as they were related to the subject of the research at the thematic level), and then coded through the relevant grid. For example, the excerpt presented in Table 3 below shows two items identified and coded within the framework of the "entry into the subject" (introduction) research, as they make the statement of a non-theoretical reference. One is coded as "historical reference" and the other as "reference to a broad field of research".

Table 3
Excerpt from Bart and Daunay's (2019) data table

Number	Source	Item	Categorization
A01–01	A01	From the slate to digital platforms, educational action has always been based on the technical means of the moment.	Historical reference
A01–02	A01	Usually described in secondary terms (supports, tools or auxiliaries), these objects are perceived in a strictly functional way, dissociated not only from their specific "mode of existence" as technical objects (Simondon, 1958), but also from the activity of the users and their driving role in the evolution of societies.	Reference to a broad field of research

The US research has tables with as many lines as there are texts (700 for the orienters and 175 for the researchers), while the table of data on enunciative modalities had 1337 lines, changes and continuities had 178 and non-theoretical references had 198.

In each case, these methodological choices connect to the aims of the research: for example, since the US research aimed to identify the determining variables in the orientation choices of orienters, the unity of each text studied needed to be preserved; this unity has no real significance for the French research. But the choice of unit of observation connects more broadly to a theoretical orientation: on the one hand, researchers are investi-

gating the practices of the writers in relation to a type of discourse (the *DSP essay*); on the other hand, researchers are investigating the specific modalities of discourse functions, which causes a certain destructuring of the writing. Note, too, that in the French research the destructuring is doubled in the case of the two research projects on the ways introductions are crafted. In those cases, not only does the coding concern excerpted passages, but these passages are identified in texts that are themselves the result of cutting up the larger text (only the introductory paragraphs of articles and student dissertations were kept).

Modes and aims of the analyses targeted by the grids

Intuitive and professional standards

The US analytic grids, as compared to the French research grids, are connected to a specific pedagogical and professional framework. The grid used by the orienters to analyze the students' DSP texts is thus itself analyzed via the researchers' grid. So we will describe here how these two US grids work in relation to this US framework, keeping in mind that in the next section we will see that the question of normativity (a standard for evaluating or making judgments about outcomes, assumed to be shared) comes up for the French grids as well.

With both US grids, for the orienters and the researchers the norms seem obvious and consensus-based as far as mastery of language is concerned (C8, Q16, Q17, Q19). Among these, it is a question of "conventions" (in C8, Q17) or of an even more implicit referent (in Q16, Q19). This is also the case for other formal aspects, such as the textual structure in the orienters' grid (C3, C4) or that of the researchers (Q11: "good choices about paragraphing"). The notion of "risk-taking" (Q18) relativizes or reinforces this spontaneous normativity, depending on the point of view one adopts: it relativizes normativity, because non-conformity can be valued; it also reinforces normativity in the sense that non-conformity can be stigmatized. Among the 18 essays that were coded as taking risks in "sentence structure", we find 15 coded "full mastery" in Q16 ("Degree of control over sentence structure") and none coded "little mastery". Among the 13 essays to have "little mastery" in Q16 and Q17, 12 (no. 9, 10, 30, 35, 50, 51, 68, 70, 71, 115, 131, 146) none is coded for risk-taking in the language domain. Remember, however, that the researchers' coding of risk-taking features is intended only to identify what drove orienters' evaluations, not to evaluate students' choices.

Students' degree of understanding material (C5, Q1, Q2, Q3) also seems to be grounded in consensus-based norms, even though the researchers' grid proposes a three-level "degree of understanding" scale. For the other criteria of the orienters' grid (C1, C2, C6, C7), the orienters are being asked to carry out a professional evaluation, and their intuition is solicited in a global perspective. We are in a criterion-referenced summative evaluation perspective; hence the strength of a model of norm-driven value judgments. We see this logically in the boldface used in the orienters' grid, which marks the expected standard and whose absence is negatively connoted.

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In all these cases, the criteria are grounded in a "default theory" of the traditional logic associated with school disciplines, in two respects: 1) the criteria at work (the bold of the orienters' grid or the keywords for questions Q1, Q2, Q3, Q16, Q17, Q19 of the researchers' grid), and 2) the modalities of evaluation of the texts envisaged globally on the basis of the criteria referenced in (1). These criteria, which can be characterized by their normative and expert professional intuition dimensions, seem to be among the most discriminating in terms of students' placement (Baker et al. 2020: 3).

Description versus evaluation

The researchers' grid escapes these dimensions of evidence, consensus, and value judgment for certain aspects by constructing descriptive categories with an objective and non-exclusive content. This is the case for the modalities of student writers' quotations (Q4, Q5, Q20-Q24): if certain words (such as "regular" in Q5) seem to identify a norm, all the items can be read as possible modalities listed in a neutral way.

This is perhaps what most distinguishes the orienters' from the researchers' grids. For example, while it is not cited specifically, the "5-paragraph essay" model seems to be the standard in the orienters' grid; in the researchers' grid, it is cited as *one of* the modalities of "Scaffolding/progression of ideas" (Q9) but also as something whose "*avoiding*" can be valued as "evidence of risk-taking" (Q18). The list of "risk-taking evidence" (Q18) can also be seen in this way (even if the absence of a response to this criterion can in itself appear devaluing). And this is the case (apart from Q11, as we have seen) for most of the items concerning the textual structure (Q9, Q12, Q13, Q14) or the modalities of argumentation (Q7, Q8), even if some of the names of these criteria seem to carry values (even in a playful form), such as "Star Wars" in Q12 and Q13.

There is therefore both distance and proximity between the orienters' and researchers' grids. The distance is explained by the researchers' concern to be descriptive and not evaluative (as explicitly noted in Baker et al. 2020: 2)—even if, as is often the case, the distinction was, according to the researchers, difficult to maintain. But the proximity between the two grids can be explained by the very logic of the construction of the categories, which is rooted in the aim of the research: to better understand the student writing features that were triggering the orienters' recommendations.

On this topic, the grids of the researchers of the US project and those of Bart/Daunay (2019; 2021) concerning a sub-category—the writers' ways of crafting introductions—can also be compared. At first glance, the fact that each study identified the presence of a given criterion in a neutral way, far from the traditional evaluative assessments of student writing, seems to suggest these grids are similar. But the comparison of the grids makes it possible to question their neutrality with respect to the writers' introductions, even if, in the categories constructed, there are no *a priori,* explicit value judgments based on normative criteria in use in professional practices. For example, a close analysis of the labels of the Bart/Daunay categories allows us to see a loss of neutrality:

- explicitly (for example, when quotation marks surround *historical* in the category "'Historical' reference not sourced to a historian") or
- implicitly (for example, it is hard to imagine that "reference to a common (everyday) discourse" is a valued writer's choice when "common" discourse is stigmatized everywhere, by everyone). Not to mention the hierarchical effects that can be implicitly drawn between the categories (for example between "Reference to a personal interest" and "Reference to the academic context").

While this loss of neutrality is not apparent in Daunay/Delcambre's (2017) grid, which is more clearly neutral and descriptive with no evaluative or normative character to the analysis of the texts in the corpus, the three French research grids are similar in another way. At the root, a *norm* underlies the very construction of the research questions: a certain conception of research writing. The difference is, perhaps, that in the other two French studies this norm is more explicitly cited precisely in order to describe, question, and explain it. We can clearly see a double difference between the two grids of the US research and the three grids of the French research: the US ones refer to a norm of the academic teaching-learning universe in order to identify the key factors of the evaluation of the students' productions, while the French ones question a norm of research discourse through contrasting the modalities of how it is carried out. The US research leaves that questioning to the orienters – that is, the research results are returned to the orienters to use in their own questioning of their practices.

In this sense, we emphasize that, in the French research on introductory material, where a comparison is made between student writers and experienced researchers, the aim is not to establish or verify the degree of adequacy of student writing to a norm of research discourse but to describe modes of discursive functioning (in particular, the functioning of theoretical references). There is, however, a risk in the work of describing research discourse: these results could be seen as standards to be attained by students. For example, it would be possible to transform the description of the rate of paraphrasing/metaphrasing in research articles into a numerical objective to be attained by apprentice researchers. This risk is even greater in work that compares the writings of beginners and experienced researchers as if it were a question of encouraging the former to resemble the latter, which is, at least from a teaching point of view, debatable.

Since we are using a comparative approach, a word on the fact that the three French studies focus methodologically on the question of comparison or cross-comparison. This is because they are all based on corpus comparisons. The comparative dimension is not absent from the US research, but in the researchers' grid, the comparison is rather internal to the same corpus: it is a matter of comparing the characteristics of the DSP essays according to the orientations proposed. As for the orienters' grid, the comparison is implicit, since it is a matter of evaluating texts in order to classify them. This difference in comparative orientation may also say something about a more or less implicit conception of the norm, which we attempt to describe next.

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Logic of the differences between the grids

This comparison points to three variables that may explain the differences between grids: the aim, the construction of categories, and the objects actually analyzed.

The aim

Even if the authors assume that their categories of analysis "can serve as a framework for analyzing students' difficulties and guiding the help that can be given to them," the aim can be strictly theoretical (Daunay/Delcambre 2017: 40), or it can be both theoretical and pedagogical, whether peripherally (Bart/Daunay 2019; 2021) or centrally (Baker et al. 2020). The US aim, to understand the features that drive the orienters' professional evaluation choices, linked categories of the researchers to those of the orienters, in order to be able to identify what was at stake in the evaluation of the texts. This difference in aim explains why the descriptive dimension of the texts sometimes gives way to a more evaluative one when implementing criteria elaborated by the professionals (in order to be able to describe them).

How the categories are constructed

This greater or lesser proximity between the professional context and the theoretical work in each study may explain the ways in which the data were constructed. With regard to Daunay/Delcambre (2017), the categories of analysis were explicitly constructed on the basis of previous research by the authors (Daunay 2002; Delcambre 2001) or other researchers (among others, and centrally, Boch/Grossmann 2002). These categories therefore owe little to the context and are constructed on theoretical grounds and for theoretical purposes; they are focused on the (linguistic) distinction between metaphrase and paraphrase. On the other hand, in the US project (Baker et al. 2020) the categories are explicitly constructed in relation to professional practices, even if the researchers' reading of the students' essays was disconnected from these practices. For the researchers, moreover, informed by their own previous research for the constitution of their grid[5], it was a question of appealing to a professional intuition.

Between the two is the research of Bart/Daunay (2019; 2021): the criteria, as in the research of Baker et al. (2020), were developed from multiple (cross) readings of the corpus, intuitively, from the experience of the researchers, and from a perspective specific to the corpus itself. This encounter between *a priori* intuition and the corpus data, however, was not explicitly subject to prior professional and theoretical categories.

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5   Dartmouth writing faculty had studied, for example, what text features acquired in a first writing course reappeared in a second writing course ("transfer"); what kinds of writing students were doing pre-university; and whether students' sense of their progress could be seen in their writing.

The analyzed objects

The third difference lies in the very objects of the analysis, which can explain the greater or lesser proximity to professional issues of student learning. The three grids of French research operate on writing in learning contexts *and* scholarly writing: in Daunay/Delcambre's research (2017), the corpus is divided between writing with a teaching purpose and writing with a research purpose; in the two research studies on ways of crafting introductions (Bart/Daunay 2019, 2021), the corpus is divided between excerpts from student theses and scholarly articles. Conversely, the two grids in the US research concern only student writing, even though they may involve how that writing refers to scholarly discourse. In addition to this difference, there is the difference in the authors of the texts in the corpus involved: in the first French research, only teacher-researchers are involved; in the other French research, teacher-researchers and students are involved; in the grids of the US research, only students are involved.

Conclusion

This comparison alone brings out some essential methodological aspects which make it possible to shed light on fairly fundamental choices in terms of the following:
- the relationship to the norm, to evaluation, to prescription, to description;
- the constitution of data, the elaboration of units of analysis, and processing tools;
- the theoretical foundations of methodological choices, the modalities of the comparative approach.

Such a cross-examination of analytical grids has a reflexive dimension insofar as the confrontation allows for a better understanding of the theoretical, methodological, and even academic presuppositions that these grids more or less implicitly entail. For the actors concerned, this reflexive return was facilitated by the work in another language: the fact of working on corpora and methodologies written in another language created an effect of disorientation, of distancing or *straniamento*, to borrow the term of the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg (1998).

Another outcome of this work, for the authors themselves, comes from questioning the objects to which these grids are applied. In the US research, the grids concern texts (DSP essays) which are read and treated as such and which retain their unity; in the French research, parts of texts can be isolated in order to excerpt portions (items) which are categorized using the grid. The discovery of this difference, implicit at first, seemed to us particularly interesting because it allowed us to clarify two orientations in the study of academic literacies: one centered on the practices (of the orienters, of the student authors, etc.) relative to a certain type of text (for example: the question of the division into argumentative paragraphs) and the other centered on the functioning of a certain type of dis-

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course (for example: variation of the forms of quotation, weight of the nontheoretical references, etc.). Exploring these objects and grids was illuminating for all three of us.

This methodological comparison has led us to question the way in which our research orientations can lead to a destructuring of the writing studied. But above all, the comparison leads to the fact that writing can be fruitfully analyzed without always being read as a whole. This seems to us to be a point that is all the more crucial to identify and reflect upon, since the theoretical underpinnings of academic literacies, as much from the side of academic literacies as from the didactics of French, are precisely about the meaning and significance of the texts produced, giving full importance to their overall coherence, to their global construction, or to other wholistic features. Our cross-analysis of our respective grids has allowed us to better identify this tension that our future reflections and work will have to clarify. In addition, it reminds us that a longstanding tradition in French pedagogical research (whether specifically about writing or not) to resist "applicationism"[6] as a driver of these methods is deeply useful.

In terms of the comparison between academic literacies and didactics of French, two theoretical fields with strong contextual specificities, we think it is time to make better known the francophone concept of didactics that underlies the three French projects presented here and that has been the subject of many discussions among the authors. This concept, which has started to become better known outside of Europe in recent years, has specific contours as a non-normative theoretical discipline dedicated to describing the phenomena of teaching in specific contents (see in particular Schneuwly 2011). For researchers outside of the French context, this concept offers new and generative ways of understanding writing, literacy, and their relations to other disciplines and to the construction of knowledge.

Of course, the comparison we undertook here would not be complete without a comparison of the results obtained. But that is an entirely other project for future exchanges. As it stands, however, the work of comparison can only enrich the understanding of each method by identifying its specificities or its links with other methods.

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