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## RESPECTUS PHILOLOGICUS Nr. 29 (34)

### MOKSLINIS TĘSTINIS LEIDINYS

Leidžia Vilniaus universiteto Kauno humanitarinis fakultetas ir Jano Kochanovskio universiteto Humanitarinis fakultetas Kielcuose du kartus per metus (balandžio 25 d. ir spalio 25 d.).

Leidinyje lietuvių, lenkų, anglų, rusų kalbomis skelbiami originalūs moksliniai straipsniai, atitinkantys svarbiausias fakultetų humanitarinių mokslinių tyrimų kryptis: lingvistinius tyrinėjimus, literatūros naratyvų ir kontekstų problematiką, reklamos diskurso paveikumą, vertimo teoriją ir praktiką.

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W czasopiśmie, w językach litewskim, polskim, angielskim i rosyjskim, zamieszczone są oryginalne artykuły naukowe, których tematyka odzwierciedla najważniejsze kierunki badań prowadzonych na wydziałach humanistycznych współpracujących uczelni: badania językoznawcze i literaturoznawcze wraz z ich kontekstami, badania nad reklamą oraz nad teorią i praktyką przekładu.

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**Lina Bikeliene***Vilnius University**Institute of Foreign Languages**Universiteto str. 5, LT-01513 Vilnius, Lithuania**E-mail: l.bikeliene@gmail.com**Research interests: corpus linguistics, learner language***EVALUATIVE LANGUAGE IN LITHUANIAN STUDENTS' ENGLISH WRITING. A STUDY OF IMPORTANT AND INTERESTING**

*Critical thinking, as one of the competences to be developed at universities, requires the ability to evaluate. Though different parts of speech can fall under the category of evaluative language, adjectives are among the most frequently used means to express evaluation. The present study is limited to the use of two positive evaluative adjectives in Lithuanian learner English. It aims to analyse whether the use of "interesting" and "important" in Lithuanian students' writing depends on the text genre, language proficiency, educational institution variables and whether it differs in NNS and NS writing. The data were obtained from the Lithuanian parts of the Corpus of Academic Learner English and the International Corpus of Learner English, the corpus of the first year students' examination essays written at Vilnius University and comparable native English corpora. The results of the study indicate overuse of "important" and "interesting" in Lithuanian students' corpora and highlight the different roles that the variables under consideration play in the use of the studied adjectives.*

*KEY WORDS: evaluative language, learner language, learner corpora.*

Critical thinking is one of the competences students are to develop during their studies at university and "is the most valuable skill that schools can bequeath to their graduates" (Thompson 2011: 1). Alongside the analysis or interpretation skills, critical voice (Cotton 2010) requires the ability to express the evaluation of the topic or item under the investigation. Linguistically conveyed evaluation "forms an essential component of discourse" since "for a text ... to work as communication, there must be frequent indications of attitudes held towards information given in the text and towards the communicative value of the discourse itself" (Hunston 2002: 191). A similar idea is reiterated by Mary Macken-Horarik and Anne Isaak, who acknowledge it to be a powerful phenomenon with the power in "as much in its taken-for-granted-ness as in overt expression of attitude" (2014: 67). Evaluation in linguistics, however, is not a straightforward matter. It can be treated under such headings as stance (Biber, Finegan 1989; Conrad, Biber 2000), appraisal (Martin, White 2005; Mei, Allison 2005), connotation (Lyons 1977), subjectivity (Wiebe *et al.* 2001), etc. In this study, the evaluative language is understood as "the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer's attitude or stance towards, view point on, or feelings about the entities or propositions" (Thompson, Hunston 2000: 5).

Though linguistic analysis of evaluative language encompasses evaluative modals, adjectives, verbs, conditionals, comparative structures and “other evaluative language” (Cotton 2010: 75–76), the evaluative adjectives are of paramount importance. They are seen as “a very important and frequent means” (Hewings 2004: 253) to express the evaluation and persuade the reader that the topic is “of interest and that what is being put forward is valuable and worth seeing” (Marzá 2011: 100).

The present study attempts to analyse two evaluative adjectives, namely, *important* and *interesting*. They fall under different headings in different classifications. Martin Hewings (2004: 265) divides evaluative adjectives into eight main groups: INTEREST, SUITABILITY, COMPREHENSIBILITY, ACCURACY, IMPORTANCE, SUFFICIENCY, PRAISEWORTHINESS and PERCEPTIVENESS. *Important* and *interesting* are included into the INTEREST and IMPORTANCE groups. According to Douglas Biber’s et al. (1999: 673) classification, only *interesting* is assigned to a group of affective or evaluative adjectives, while *important* is placed under the heading of importance adjectives.

Syntactically, it has become commonplace to distinguish attributive and predicative (Biber *et al.* 1999: 505) (or predicate (Tran 2013)) adjectives. The former precede a noun, modify nominal expressions, while the latter follow the linking verbs and do not require a noun (Tran 2013: 6). Sometimes, these two categories are supplemented by a third group of postpositive adjectives, which “function in NP [Noun Phrase] structure as post-head internal modifier” (Huddleston, Pullum 2005: 121). Peter Matthews (2014: 12) redefines the classification by placing the postpositive and attributive under the heading of modifying adjectives. For the present study, the attributive and predicative positions will be of interest. While a number of authors (Biber *et al.* 1999: 512; Tran 2013) have noted the predominance of the attributive position of both adjectives under scrutiny, the predicative position can be seen in the typical grammatical patterns of evaluative adjectives distinguished by Susan Hunston and Gill Francis (2000: 188–190):

- (1) *there + be + something/anything/nothing + a graded adjective + a prepositional phrase beginning with about;*
- (2) *it + be (or another link verb) + an adjective/adjective group + that clause;*
- (3) *it + be (or other link verb) + an adjective/adjective group + to-infinitive.*

Adjectives typically used in the first pattern are considered to be evaluative only “in some way” (Ibid.: 189), but the strong link between the pattern and evaluative adjectives makes all the adjectives appearing in it seem evaluative.

The second and third pattern types are used for the evaluative adjectives only. All the meanings involved in these patterns are within the evaluative scales. The present study aims to examine how frequent these patterns are with the two adjectives under the investigation in undergraduate learners’ writing.

Although extensive research has been carried out on evaluative language from different perspectives (Giles, Busseniers 2012; Llinares, Dalton-Puffer 2015; Ibrahim, Ahmad 2014; Ng 2013; Bednarek 2010; Wiebe *et al.* 2001; Burneikaitė 2009a; Burneikaitė 2009b; Kertz 2006; Almutairi 2014; Hewings 2004; Ryvitytė 2005; Ağçam 2015), there are no studies on the use of evaluative language in Lithuanian learners’ written English, which takes

into consideration different variables. Using variationist and comparative approaches, the present study aims to answer the following research questions:

- whether the use of *interesting* and *important* in Lithuanian learners' English writing depends on the text genre,
- whether the use of the adjectives under investigation in Lithuanian undergraduate texts depends on the language proficiency,
- whether the use of the two adjectives in Lithuanian learners' texts depends on the institutional variable,
- whether the use of *interesting* and *important* in Lithuanian learners' writing differs from the one in comparable texts written by the native speakers of English.

## Data and Methods

The data for the study were obtained from two groups of corpora representing English writing of non-native (NNS, Lithuanian) (Table 1) and native university students (NS) (Table 2). The Lithuanian corpora comprise four different text genres, namely, essays, proposals, research papers and summaries, which allow examining the role of the genre variable.

LICLE-VU and LICLE-VDU are two Lithuanian subcorpora of the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE) (for more on the ICLE corpus, see Granger 1998). They comprise essays written by the third and fourth year students of the English Philology at Vilnius University (VU) and Vytautas Magnus University (VDU). A comparison of the two subcorpora indicates the role of the institutional variable.

In order to study the role of the language proficiency, a corpus of the first year students' of English Philology examination essays (AFK) written at Vilnius University (compiled by Juknevičienė) was used.

Proposals (CALE-PRO-LIT), summaries (CALE-SUM-LIT) and research papers (CALE-RPA-LIT) were collected at Vilnius University. They form the Lithuanian part of the Corpus of Academic Learner English (CALE). The CALE corpus is currently compiled at Bremen University (Germany). Though it is "a specialized learner corpus comprising discipline and genre-specific texts... produced by learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in university courses" (Callies, Zaytseva 2013: 127), the summaries written by the Lithuanian students deviate from the CALE structure as they are discipline controlled only in a broad sense: students from different major studies wrote summaries for their English language course.

Table 1. Non-native (Lithuanian) speakers' corpora used for the study

	Number of texts	Number of words
LICLE-VU	223	128 650
LICLE-VDU	113	64 382
AFK	98	38 772
CALE-RPA-LIT	24	167 744
CALE-PRO-LIT	90	55 874
CALE-SUM-LIT	88	19 946
TOTAL	636	475 368

In order to compare the use of *important* and *interesting* in non-native and native English, two English corpora were selected. The Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS) “remains the best available comparable corpus to match ICLE” (Hasselgård, Johansson 2011: 38); therefore, the British (LOCNESS-BR) and American (LOCNESS-US) sections of LOCNESS were used as a reference corpus for LICLE.

One of the “corpora that contain comparable native speaker (NS) writing and may thus serve as control corpora for the CALE... [is] the corpus of British Academic Written English” (Callies, Zaytseva 2013: 127). Proposals (BAWE-PRO) (for more on the BAWE corpus, see Alsop, Nesi 2009) and research reports (BAWE-RR) written by students whose mother tongue was English were chosen for the present study as counterparts of the CALE-PRO-LIT and CALE-RPA-LIT corpora.

Table 2. Native speakers' corpora used for the study

	Number of texts	Number of words
<b>LOCNESS-BR</b>	90	96 376
<b>LOCNESS-US</b>	208	169 152
<b>BAWE-PRO</b>	37	77 559
<b>BAWE-RR</b>	40	181 794
<b>TOTAL</b>	375	524 881

All the instances of *important* and *interesting* were extracted by using *AntConc 3.4.3w* (Anthony 2014) software. The statistical significance of the obtained results was measured by using *Log-likelihood and effect size calculator* (Rayson 2015) at the level of  $p < 0.01$  with a critical value of 6.63. Though the log-likelihood (LL) value is always positive, a plus (+) and a minus (-) symbols were used to indicate the overuse or underuse.

## Results and Discussion

Two evaluative adjectives, *important* and *interesting*, are among the most often used positive evaluative adjectives occurring in the spoken learner English (De Cock 2011: 202). *Important* is found in the top-five list of positive evaluative adjectives in one out of four corpora of learners' spoken English, namely, in the Chinese subcorpus of LINDSEI (Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage), where it is ranked as the fifth. *Interesting* is ranked as the third in the French and native speakers' subcorpora and takes the fourth position in the German subcorpus. The data of the present study indicate that the tendencies in written English are the opposite with *important* that is predominating in all the corpora under investigation (Figure 1). The highest ratio of *important* to *interesting* (15) is in NNS summaries (CALE-SUM-LIT). Quantitatively, the most equal distribution of the adjectives under scrutiny can be observed in NNS proposals (CALE-PRO-LIT) with the ratio of 1.23. In their essays, students of lower proficiency (AFK) show preference for evaluating something as *important* rather than *interesting* more often than students of higher proficiency (LICLE-VU, LICLE, LICLE-VDU). Institutional preferences can be observed comparing LICLE-VU and LICLE-VDU data. The ratio differences between the two subcorpora exceed by one and a half times.

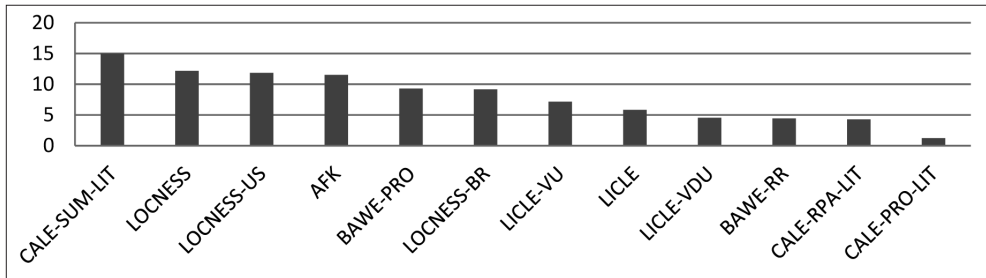


Figure 1. The ratio of *important* to *interesting* in NNS (Lithuanian) and NS corpora

Previous research (Burneikaitė 2009a) reported significant underuse of evaluative markers in Lithuanian learners' writing. The results of the present study indicate the opposite tendencies (Table 3). Lithuanian learners significantly overuse both adjectives chosen for this analysis.

Table 3. Normalised frequency of *important* and *interesting* in NNS and NS writing (per 10,000 words)

	NNS	NS	LL
<i>important</i>	12.52	7.03	+78.24
<i>interesting</i>	2.65	0.93	+43.13

In order to check the role of the genre variable in Lithuanian undergraduates' English texts, LICLE (essays) and four parts of CALE (yearly papers, proposals and summaries) were analysed. Table 4 provides a frequency distribution of the adjectives per corpus. The data highlight a possible genre influence on the use of *important* and *interesting*. Since the genre of research papers explicitly requires the evaluation of the topic, ideas, factors, etc., not surprisingly, the highest percentage of texts with the adjectives under scrutiny is in CALE-RPA-LIT: *important* is used in all (100 percent) and *interesting* in more than a half (54 percent) of all the research papers written by the Lithuanian students. In the other NNS corpora, the percentage of texts containing one of the adjectives is below 50, i.e., less than half of the students felt the need to express evaluation with *important* or *interesting*. In NS corpora, the highest percentage is observed in a comparable genre to research papers, i.e., research reports. The results, however, are lower: 78 and 35 percent for *important* and *interesting*.

Table 4. Percentage of texts containing *important* and *interesting* per NNS corpus

	<i>important</i>	<i>interesting</i>
LICLE	49	11
CALE-RPA-LIT	100	54
CALE-PRO-LIT	29	28
CALE-SUM-LIT	42	5

As shown in Figure 2, there are statistically significant differences between the quantitative use of *important* in summaries and essays (LL +20.15) as well as between

essays and research papers (LL +40.72). The difference between the two corpora, CALE-RPA-LIT and CALE-PRO-LIT, with the lowest frequency of *important*, however, is not significant (LL +0.08). The results are the opposite of what could be expected, since in summaries, students are required to omit the personal evaluation. In order to explain the phenomenon, a wider range of evaluative markers needs to be examined.

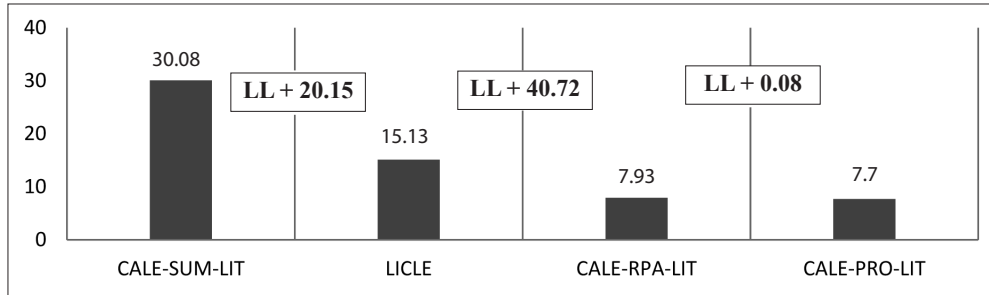


Figure 2. Genre variable: normalised frequency of *important* in NNS corpora (per 10,000 words)

The fact that in the research papers and proposals, i.e., academic genres, the normalised frequency of *important* is almost two times lower than in the essays might be an indication of students' willingness to express overtly positive evaluation in less formal pieces of work and a reservation to show it in more formal ones. This hypothesis, however, after the examination of the second adjective under scrutiny (Figure 3), proves to be wrong.

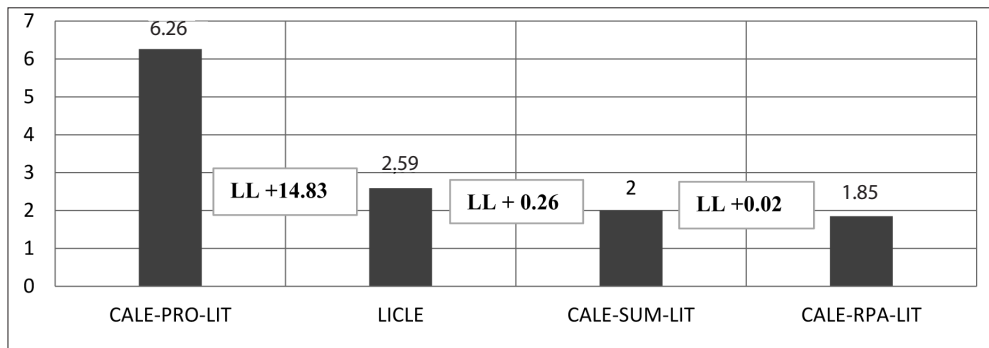


Figure 3. Genre variable: normalised frequency of *interesting* in NNS corpora (per 10,000 words)

The normalised frequency of *interesting* in proposals, on the contrary to *important*, is the highest. This might suggest that students are more inclined to emphasise some interesting aspects while presenting the potentials, i.e., the proposals for their future work. In the presentation of their completed work, i.e., research papers, it becomes more essential to justify the importance of the results. Therefore, the shift from *interesting* to *important* takes place.

Quantitatively, neither institutional (Table 5) nor language proficiency (Table 6) variables play a significant role in the use of *important* and *interesting*. Though the underuse of *interesting* (LL -4.57) in LICLE-VU is slightly higher than that of *important* (LL -1.71), it does not reach the threshold of statistical significance.

Table 5. Institutional variable: normalised frequency of *important* and *interesting* in LICLE-VU and LICLE-VDU (per 10,000 words)

	LICLE-VU	LICLE-VDU	LL
<i>important</i>	14.3	16.8	-1.71
<i>interesting</i>	2.0	3.7	-4.57

From the language proficiency point of view, at a higher proficiency level, students insignificantly overuse *important* (LL +1.70) and underuse *interesting* (LL -0.37). If the institutional variable is ignored and both LICLE subcorpora are compared to a lower level essays written by first year students, the tendencies remain the same with LL +0.94 for *important* and LL - 1.63 for *interesting*.

Table 6. Language proficiency variable: normalised frequency of *important* and *interesting* in AFK and LICLE (per 10,000 words)

	AFK	LICLE-VU	LL
<i>important</i>	17.3	14.3	+1.70
<i>interesting</i>	1.5	2.0	-0.37

As previous research has indicated, the evaluative adjectives are characteristically found in an attributive position. In NNS corpora, it is possible to distinguish a group of nouns modified by the adjective *important*. The nouns *thing*, *things*, *part*, *factor*, *role* and *aspect* are modified as *important* in at least two NNS text genres each. A larger set of data, however, is needed to discern some nouns that are typically modified by *interesting*.

As it has already been mentioned, Hunston and Francis (2000: 188–190) pointed three typical grammatical patterns for evaluative adjectives. Table 7 illustrates that nativeness does not play an important role in the grammatical behaviour of the adjectives under consideration. The usage of *important* and *interesting* is restricted to the second and third patterns; the third pattern (*it + a link verb + important/interesting + to-infinitive*) is a predominant pattern in all the texts followed by the second one, in which *to-infinitive* is replaced by a *that-clause*. In NNS writing, the percentage of instances in one of the patterns varies from 17 (CALE-SUM-LIT) to six percent (CALE-RPA-LIT) for *important* and from 32 (CALE-RPA-LIT) to zero percent (CALE-SUM-LIT) for *interesting*. Comparing different genres in NNS and NS writing, it can be noticed that NS students tend to use *important* in one of the patterns more often than Lithuanian students do. This is, however, not the case for the adjective *interesting*, which is more often placed in the patterns under discussion in two types of non-native speakers' texts, namely, research papers and proposals, than in NS texts. Looking at a language proficiency variable, two opposite tendencies can be observed. At a higher proficiency level, the percentage for *important* decreases by one and a half times from 15 in first year students' essays to 10

percent in third or fourth year students' work. However, for *interesting*, it goes up from zero (AFK) to eight percent (LICLE-VU), i.e., moves towards the tendencies of use in the native speakers' corpus.

Table 7. Percentage of *important* and *interesting* used in typical grammatical patterns (Hunston, Francis 2000: 188-190) for the evaluative adjectives

	<i>important</i>	<i>interesting</i>
AFK	15	0
LICLE-VU	10	8
LICLE-VDU	6	38
LICLE	8	22
CALE-RPA-LIT	6	32
CALE-PRO-LIT	16	23
CALE-SUM-LIT	17	0
LOCNESS	8	24
BAWE-RR	6	12
BAWE-PRO	16	14

Native learners often modify the patterns of the adjective *important* by adding an indication for whom it is intended (1-4).

- (1) ... it is important for SI to establish ... (BAWE-PRO).
- (2) ... it is important for James to tell ... (BAWE-RR).
- (3) ... it is important for Britain to join ... (LOCNESS-BR).
- (4) It is important for us to be able ... (LOCNESS-US).

Lithuanian students make such modifications in two genres only: research papers (5) and essays (6-7).

- (5) It is very important for every person to deliver ... (CALE-RPA-LIT).
- (6) it is important for people to learn ... (LICLE-VU).
- (7) It is very important for everyone to have ... (LICLE-VDU).

Examples (5) and (7) show a double modification of the pattern: not only is the adjective *important* followed by a complement (*for every person/for everyone*), it is as well intensified with an adverb of degree *very*. Such an intensification is particularly characteristic of Lithuanian students' texts and is found in all the NNS corpora (8-13):

- (8) ... it is very important to know ... (LICLE-VU);
- (9) ... it is very important to note ... (LICLE-VDU);
- (10) ... it is very important to provide ... (AFK);
- (11) ... it is very important to choose ... (CALE-RPA-LIT);
- (12) It is very important to stress ... (CALE-PRO-LIT);
- (13) ... it is very important that people would communicate (CALE-SUM-LIT).

Examples from (1) to (12) illustrate the modifications of the third pattern. The second pattern is seldom used in all the examined corpora; therefore, the example (13) stands out as a rare case of the second pattern used with an adverb of degree.



## Conclusions

The purpose of the current study was to determine the role of the genre, language proficiency and institutional variables in the use of *important* and *interesting* in Lithuanian learners' English texts and to compare it with the use in native English writing. The analysis indicates a general tendency of the overuse of both adjectives in NNS corpora, which suggests that Lithuanian learners rely too heavily on the simple evaluative adjectives, which are acquired at A1 level and do not try to leave their comfort zone. The results indicate that the nativeness and the text genre variables influence the use of *important* and *interesting* to the greatest extent, while the language proficiency and institutional variables might be considered of lesser importance. The findings of the present study, however, should be treated as tentative as they highlight the need for a wider-scope analysis on the topic under consideration.

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