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The Spoken Academic English of Dutch University Lecturers

Klazien Tilstra and Dick Smakman

Department of English, Leiden University Centre for Linguistics, Leiden, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

While English is used more and more at Dutch universities, it is subject to criticism, specifically regarding the lack of expressiveness. Our study described the differences in linguistic expressiveness between L1 spoken Dutch and L2 spoken English of nine Dutch university lecturers, by comparing their adjective and verb use mainly: variation of words used, frequencies, sophistication of word choice, and accuracy. It also looked at the views of the lecturers themselves on the richness of their language. Type/token ratio analyses showed that both the lectures in their L1 (Dutch) and those in their L2 (English) conformed to what may be expected in terms of variety of words used in academic lecturing. Frequency analyses for both L1 and L2 speech yielded remarkably comparable lists of highly frequently used, basic, commonly known words, and considerable lists of infrequently used, typically sophisticated and academic words. However, although the comparison of words, and in particular adjectives and verbs, suggested little to no difference between the L1 Dutch and L2 English of the speakers, a comparison of verbs in context showed that in L1 Dutch most common verbs were used in more elaborate and complicated idiomatic sentences.

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Introduction

The Internationalisation of Higher Education

The use of English as the preferred language of instruction in Dutch universities is widespread and increasing, which is the effect of the 1999 Bologna Declaration and the ensuing process of creating a common European Higher Education Area. The Netherlands has been at the forefront of this movement towards replacing L1-taught courses with L2 English. All the Dutch universities mention the importance of internationalisation in their strategic plans. Wächter and Maiworm showed that a strikingly high number of English Taught Programmes was found in the Netherlands in 2014.¹

The advantages of the internationalisation of universities are manifold. Students gain international competences and increase their opportunities for working in an

CONTACT Dick Smakman  d.smakman@hum.leidenuniv.nl

¹Wächter and Maiworm.

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international environment. Universities can attract more talented people (“brain gain”). They can also attract more international students, which is financially beneficial (“financial gain”). This group of students enhances the university’s international profile and makes them more competitive nationally as well as internationally.² In addition, research revealed that altruistic motivations, such as development cooperation (contributing to the development of “third world” countries by providing high-level education for students from these countries) are prevalent.³

Sceptics underscore their impression that the Bologna Process and its concomitant standardisation of higher education in Europe has opened a market for higher education that is driven too much by marketing and promotion;⁴ universities act on the knowledge that “English sells”. It is argued that the Bologna Process has brought no real internationalisation, just further “Anglification”,⁵ a term indicating the increasing hegemony of English at non-Anglophone universities. There are also concerns regarding the loss of content and precision when lecturers share information in their L2. Questions are also raised about the receptive and productive skills that students need to participate actively in lectures.⁶ Available research on the perceptions of students and lecturers themselves shows fewer concerns; in these studies, the majority of students report no differences in learning and the majority of lecturers report no differences in academic level.⁷

Criticism on the Spoken L2 English of Dutch University Lecturers

Dutch university lecturers’ communication in English is regularly criticised. University newsletters (see for instance *Delta*, *Mare*, *Ad Valvas*, *DUB*) report on discussions in which Dutch lecturers lecturing in English are said to formulate less clearly in, use fewer nuances, and simplify their language, changing from inspiring speakers into, at best, adequate teachers. It is even suggested that students often speak better English than their teachers. The Dutch journal *Onze Taal*, “Our Language”, critically raised the question of the level of language of lecturers and students, asking “hoe verheffend het taal niveau van al die docenten en studenten in hun tweede taal ... nu eigenlijk is” (“how elevating the level of language of all those lecturers and students in their second language ... really is”).⁸ A recent edition of the Dutch *NRC* national newspaper also criticised the level of language of university lecturers, asking whether lecturers can keep up, under the title “De Professor Is Not So Good to Follow”.⁹ Another edition of the same newspaper describes a higher education system in which Dutch is replaced by a kind of stripped English that consists of 1,500 words and uses a simple grammar, called “Globish”.¹⁰ The Commissie Nederlands als Wetenschapstaal, which is a committee stimulating the use of Dutch as a language of academia, expressed their worries in 2003, when they argued that English, in particular in the Humanities and the Social

²Coleman; Mauranen; Wächter and Maiworm.

³Wächter and Maiworm.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Jenkins.

⁶Mauranen.

⁷Pilkinton-Pihko; Airey and Linder; Grift, Meijer, and Van der Salm.

⁸“Op de Barricaden?”, 19.

⁹Huygen.

¹⁰Verbrugge.

Sciences, should be of a high level, in order to be able to express small nuances in meaning and so prevent loss of meaning.¹¹

Lack of Empirical Research on the Spoken L2 English of University Lecturers

Most of the authors of the publications mentioned above, unfortunately, do not base their ideas on any empirical research but merely on personal observation and conviction. This is not surprising, as empirical research on the command of L2 English of Dutch university lecturers is scarce. Only three publications were found. These are briefly discussed below.

An observational study from the early days of the internationalisation of the Dutch universities by Adriana Anthonia Vinke (from 1995) compared lectures in L2 English with lectures in L1 Dutch by the same (fourteen) lecturers at three technical universities. It focused on the differences between the lecturers' educational effectiveness in their L2 English lessons and in their L1 Dutch lesson, which was operationalised through seven observational categories of which one referred to linguistic proficiency, namely the category of "clarity" (fluency as well as precision of expression). The observations suggested that when using English the lecturers spoke with more hesitations, stumbled over words more, and produced more errors, false starts, and silences. Furthermore, a higher number of unclear words occurred in their L2 English spoken lectures, compared to their L1 Dutch spoken lectures. The dissertation does not reveal the specific expressions that were labelled as errors or the specific words that were classified as vague, neither in L1 Dutch nor in L2 English.

In 2006, in response to students' complaints about their lecturers' English proficiency, the Delft University of Technology decided to test and assess the language proficiency of their entire scientific staff.¹² The screening project showed that the majority of the scientific staff had a C1 proficiency level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which is one level above the expected proficiency level of their students. It should be noted that CEFR levels measure both written and oral proficiency.

Finally, Yolanda Grift, Annemieke Meijer, and Frank Van der Salm analysed four years of student evaluation scores of undergraduate Economics students of Utrecht University. They encountered a positive and high correlation between the scores of the lecturers' teaching skills and language skills. It might indicate a reciprocal influence as found by Christian Jensen in a Danish study, who found that students' evaluations of the lecturers' English were influenced by their perceptions of the lecturers' general lecturing competence, but that the reverse was true as well, namely that the students' rating of the lecturers' general lecturing competence were influenced by their perception of the lecturer's English skills.

Two of the investigations were done at technical universities in the Netherlands, and one at a regular university at an Economics faculty; no research at Humanities or Social Sciences departments is available. There are reasons to believe that Humanities and Social Sciences students have a different relationship with language and that this affects their proficiency and perception, and the same goes for their lecturers. While precision is a general academic requirement, expressiveness and nuance are particularly important in language use within the Humanities and the Social Sciences.

¹¹Commissie Nederlands als Wetenschapstaal.

¹²Klaassen and Bos.

Increasing Interest in Spoken Academic Language

Language use in an academic context has typically focused on the research article (inspired by John Swales' seminal article *Genre Analysis*); helped by developments in corpus linguistics, acknowledgement of the significance of speaking at universities gained ground at the end of the 1990s. The most prominent big corpora of spoken academic English that have been compiled since then are the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English, TOEFL 2000 Spoken and Written Academic Language, the British Academic Spoken English corpus, and the English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Setting corpus.¹³

Richness in Language

The criticism regarding L2 English language usage (as expressed above) comes down to criticism of the richness of language. Richness of language is traditionally assessed by measuring the type/token ratio (TTR) of a particular text: the ratio between the number of word types and word tokens. This simple method, which is enabled by word-count programmes like WordSmith or Nvivo, provides a good first indication of the variation in the use of words in a text. In addition, richness of language is sometimes judged by the number of “common” and, in particular, “advanced” words occurring in a text. It is assumed that high-frequency words show the most “common”, “basic”, or “lower-level” words and that the low-frequency words show the most “advanced” words, only used by proficient speakers.

An obvious drawback of TTR analyses is their accuracy. TTR analyses do not count word categories, but word tokens and types, i.e., spellings between spaces and sameness of these spellings. They recognise (sameness of) spellings, but not (sameness of) word categories. They do not distinguish between different lexical word categories or different function word categories. Suppose that in a text the verb category *write* is used in four forms—as *write*, *wrote*, *written*, and *writing*—then the word count tool will count four “words”. It will not recognise the four forms as expressions of the same ground form of the verb. Or, suppose the adjective *big* is used in three forms—as *big*, *bigger*, and *biggest*—then the word count tool will count them as three “words”, but not as three expressions of the same adjective. The only way to gain accuracy in this respect is by tagging the words of a particular text.

Douglas Biber *et al.* showed that the richness of an L1 English text differs per genre. They found that the mean TTR of conversation, academic writing, fiction, and written news systematically differed. The mean TTR of conversation was the lowest, followed successively by the mean TTR of academic writing, fiction, and written news, each showing successively higher levels of lexical richness. Conversation had the lowest mean TTR because it shows much repetition, and there is little preparation time, so the authors explained, while academic writing is characterised by restricted, specific vocabulary and will therefore show less variability. Fiction is likely to show more variability because it is focused on elegance of expression, and written news will show the most variation because it has to address a wide range of people, places, events, etc. Biber *et al.* did not look specifically at the TTRs of academic speech: we hypothesise, however, that the mean TTR of academic speech lies between the mean TTR of regular conversation and academic writing.

¹³Mauranen.

Batia Laufer and Paul Nation and Helmut Daller, Roeland van Hout, and Jeanine Treffers-Daller argued that not every word type contributes in the same way to richness of language. In their view, rich language is proficient language, showing a sufficient variety of advanced, non-colloquial vocabulary. They proposed a more nuanced TTR method, namely one that not only looks at the frequency of words, but also at the occurrence of specific words. By using lists of basic vocabulary and lists of vocabulary that in the view of language professionals qualify as advanced, they combined the quantitative with the qualitative. John Read argued that lexical richness should be considered an umbrella term, covering not only lexical diversity (as TTR measures do), but also lexical sophistication, lexical density, and lexical accuracy (mentioned by Ineke Vedder and Veronica Benigno).

Approach in the Current Research

The current investigation takes TTR measures as a tool to gain insight into richness in spoken language. Although this method overlooks certain distinctions, as explained above, it nevertheless enables us to reveal likely richness of language over larger stretches of language. In addition, we describe the relative use of adjectives and verbs of speakers. Finally, we present qualitative evidence of the sophistication of words used. This triangular approach will provide a realistic impression of richness in language. The lecturers were in addition asked to informally evaluate their own English.

Research Questions

The current research tried to gain insight into the nature of spoken academic English (L2) of adult speakers (university lecturers) who have finished their acquisition process and use it at the highest academic level. We compared this English with the linguistic characteristics of the spoken academic Dutch (L1) of the same speakers. The overall issue was whether there were differences in the richness of these two languages. The research questions were:

- (1) What are the differences in the TTRs of the lecturers' L1 Dutch and L2 English
- (2) What is the relative use of adjectives and verbs in the lecturers' L1 Dutch and L2 English?
- (3) What does the use of "common" and "advanced" adjectives and verbs tell us about the richness of the investigated speech?
- (4) How do the speakers themselves view the issue of richness in their language?

Methodology

Speakers

The speakers were found by approaching academic lecturers who taught both in their L1 and L2 in the second semester of 2015. The search focused on lecturers in the Humanities and Social Sciences, assuming that those sciences need the most "rich" language to explain their subject, and are therefore particularly interesting for our study. As indicated in the introduction, the little literature available on spoken L2 English in Dutch academia

Table 1. The speakers ($N = 9$).

Speaker	Academic position	Years of experience teaching in English
1	Assistant professor	1
2	Assistant professor	10
3	Assistant professor	10
4	Associate professor	5
5	Associate professor	5
6	Associate professor	10
7	Full professor	5
8	Full professor	>10
9	Full professor	>15

does not include research in these broad disciplines. This was another reason to choose speakers with these backgrounds.

In total, nine speakers participated. All spoke Dutch as an L1 and English as an L2. All speakers remain anonymous at their own request. All lecturers had more than fifteen years of teaching experience. The youngest speaker was in their early forties and the oldest speaker was in their early sixties. Two of them were women; seven were men. The speakers were from two different universities in the Netherlands. More information on the speakers and the recorded material is in [Table 1](#).

Recordings

The speakers agreed to be recorded on two occasions: one while delivering a lecture in Dutch and another while delivering a lecture in English. The lectures were on an academic topic in their field and were taught at BA or MA level. Some lectures were for large audiences and some were tutorials with only a few participants. Two-thirds of the lectures were recorded by the first author attending the classes, and one third of the lecture recordings were provided by the lecturers themselves in the form of recorded video lectures.

Based on availability, up to 4,000 words per lecture were transcribed, and the minimum target number was 2,000. This was based on the intuitive assessment that 2,000 words may still provide a representative impression of the main characteristics of the language used in a lecture by a speaker and that more than 4,000 would not add more information or new tendencies. Six sets of 4,000 words and three sets of between 2,500 and 3,000 words were collected (each set consisted of a Dutch and an English spoken lecture by the same lecturer), creating a L1 Dutch lecture corpus of 31,500 words and a comparable L2 English lecture corpus.

The lectures in Dutch were all BA level courses, and the lectures in English were mainly MA level courses. The language used in the BA lectures did not differ in character from the language used in the English MA lectures. [Table 2](#) shows the levels of the eighteen recorded lectures. As far as we could judge there were no visible differences in language use between BA and MA lectures. And, there were neither obvious gender nor obvious age differences in speech.

The Corpus Analysis

The analyses were conducted with the help of the corpus analysis software tool Nvivo (www.qsrinternational.com). This tool generated both quantitative and qualitative data

Table 2. The recordings ($N = 18$).

Lecturer	Lecture in Dutch Level	Lecture in English Level
1	BA	BA
2	BA	MA
3	BA	MA
4	BA	MA
5	BA	MA
6	BA	BA
7	BA	MA
8	BA	MA
9	BA	MA

on the linguistic richness of the lecturers' spoken L1 and L2 language. The main function used was the word frequency query tool, which produces overviews of all the word types (called "type" or "item") occurring in selected texts, in order of decreasing frequency of occurrence. Per word type, they show how many times it was counted (its "count") and its relative importance (its "relative weight" in percentages). By clicking on a "type" one can see the sentences in which the "type" occurs. It has been suggested that the words at the top of word-frequency lists are the best entrenched words, or what we might call the most "easy" or "common" words.¹⁴ The words occurring in the lowest part of the frequency lists are the less entrenched words, or what we might call the more "difficult" or "advanced" words.

Common versus Advanced Words

This study distinguished between different word categories and looked in particular at the variation of adjective and verb use. Moreover, it distinguished between "common" and more "advanced" adjectives and verbs. It was assumed that by looking into the nature of the adjectives and verbs used in this way, a better sense of the richness of language would arise.

There is no objective measure (like number of syllables) or existing standard to determine the dividing line between an advanced word, a less advanced word, and a non-advanced word. The selections of advanced words in Tables 6 and 7 are based on (a) the intuition of the first author, (b) length of the adjective, and (c) knowledge of the words in the Academic Word List (www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist/information), which consists of words typical for (English) academic communication.

Speakers' Evaluation

To put the results of the corpus analyses into perspective, we concluded the study by asking the lecturers themselves which differences in richness of language they themselves experienced between their L2 English and their L1 Dutch language. The questions were asked in informal settings.

¹⁴Mauranen.

Results

Results Overview

To gain an impression of the richness of the spoken English of the nine lecturers, three approaches have been applied. First, the TTRs of both the L1 Dutch and the L2 English of the lecturers are presented. Second, the relative use of adjectives and verbs in the lecturers' L1 Dutch and L2 English is presented. Third, the use of both “common” and “advanced” adjectives and verbs of their L2 English is looked at. Finally, some informal yet insightful reviews by the speakers themselves on their own English are presented.

1. Type/Token Ratios

The results for the nine lecturers for both languages are shown in [Figure 1](#). The figure shows per lecturer (L1–L9; horizontal) the TTR scores (vertical) of their Dutch (black line) and their English (grey line) lecture, based on randomly selected samples of 1,000 words per lecture transcription.

The lecturers consistently show a higher TTR when they lecture in Dutch, their native tongue. The mean TTR score of the Dutch lectures is 35.9 and that of the English equivalents is 31.5. An independent samples *T*-test shows that the difference between those averages is significant (two-tailed, $p < .01$).

[Figure 1](#) does not tell us what a “normal” TTR distribution is for Dutch lecturers speaking their native tongue. However, if we take the data of Biber *et al.* as a point of reference, then the TTR values found in the L1 Dutch spoken lecture samples show a lexical richness that can be regarded as “normal”. Biber *et al.* studied the mean TTRs of conversation and academic writing, which showed a mean TTR of 30 and 40, respectively. If we assume that spoken academic language will show a mean TTR between the mean TTR of regular conversation and the mean TTR of academic writing, which is what we hypothesised above, then academic spoken language should show a mean TTR between 30 and 40, which it does both in the L1 and in the L2 corpus.

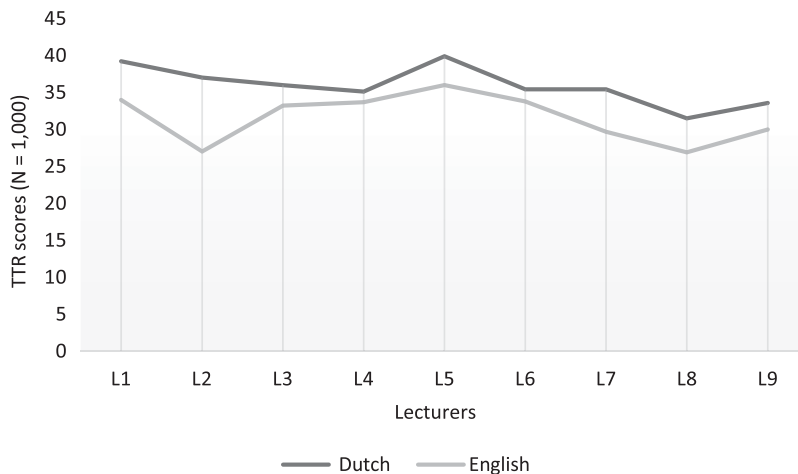


Figure 1. The type/token ratio of the English and the Dutch lecture by the nine lecturers.

So, although the differences between the average TTRs is significant, one might conclude that both the mean TTR of the lectures in Dutch, and the mean TTR of the lectures in English show a “normal” variation in the language used in lectures.

2. Relative Adjective and Verb Use

Another way to measure richness of language use is by looking at the variation of adjectives and verbs used. Figures 2 and 3 show the average number of different adjective types and verb types used per 1,000 words. The black lines represent Dutch.

Figure 2 reveals that all except one of the lecturers used a higher number of different adjectives in their L2 English compared to their L1 Dutch. Figure 3 shows that the number of different verbs used by all speakers is slightly higher in their Dutch compared to their English. The difference between the two languages across speakers, however, is not significant for adjectives or for verbs (two-tailed, $p > .01$).

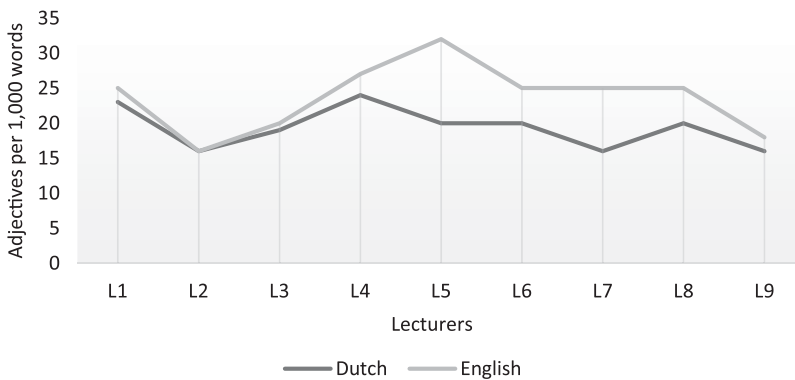


Figure 2. Average number of different adjectives used per 1,000 words in the Dutch and English lectures.

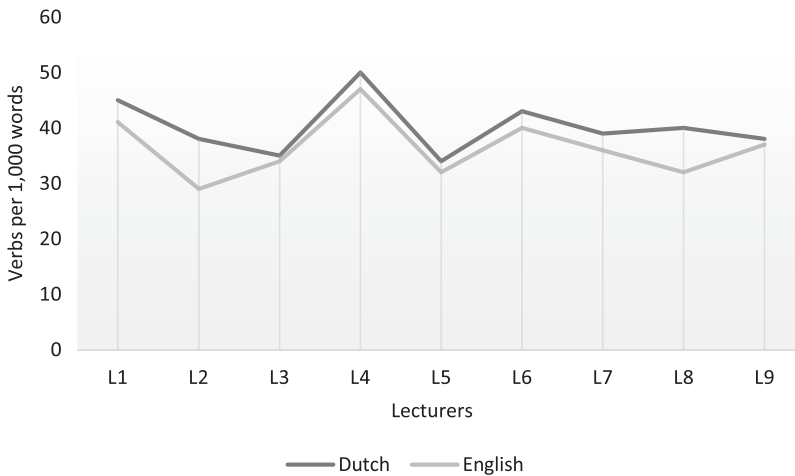


Figure 3. Average number of different verbs used per 1,000 words in the Dutch and English lectures.

3. Use of “Common” Language

This section is based on the definition of “common” language use as given in the introduction. Although there is as yet no way of definitively calculating this quality, the approaches below will give a reliable impression of the use of “common” language in the L1 and L2 of the lecturers and its contribution to richness of language.

Common Word Use. Table 3 shows the twenty-five most frequently used words across all Dutch and all English lectures separately. Frequent words can also be referred to as “common” words. In the table, the most obvious translation of the words in Dutch is given, bearing in mind that in some cases the words were used in idiomatic constructions, which affected their meaning. It is safe to say that in most cases the translated meaning is correct.

Although the actual word categories or meanings of words vary in both languages, a closer inspection shows that the overlap between the most commonly used words is striking. In fact, the top ten words in both languages are strikingly similar. This is an indication that when it comes to “common”, highly frequent words, the lecturers’ L1 and L2 are quite similar.

Common Adjective and Verb Use. Let us now look at the specific use of adjectives and verbs in the two languages by our speakers. Tables 4 and 5 present the five most frequent adjectives and verbs in the L1 and L2 of the lecturers.

Table 4 shows that the three most frequent, “common” adjectives are identical for both languages. No clear conclusions as to obvious differences between the two languages in this respect can be drawn. Table 5 shows that the five most “common” verbs in Dutch

Table 3. The twenty-five most common words in the Dutch and English lectures ($N = 63,000$).

Ranking	Dutch		English Word
	Word	Meaning	
1	<i>de</i>	the	the
2	<i>dat</i>	that	is
3	<i>het</i>	the	and
4	<i>een</i>	a	of
5	<i>en</i>	and	that
6	<i>je</i>	you	a
7	<i>is</i>	is	you
8	<i>die</i>	which, that	to
9	<i>in</i>	in	in
10	<i>van</i>	of	it
11	<i>dan</i>	then, than	so
12	<i>maar</i>	but	I
13	<i>wat</i>	what	this
14	<i>niet</i>	not	we
15	<i>ik</i>	I	what
16	<i>zijn</i>	to be, his	are
17	<i>te</i>	too, at	have
18	<i>er</i>	there	not
19	<i>ook</i>	also	but
20	<i>dus</i>	so	there
21	<i>op</i>	at, on	can
22	<i>als</i>	if, as	he
23	<i>ja</i>	yes	for
24	<i>of</i>	or	they
25	<i>we</i>	we	be

Table 4. The most frequent adjectives in the L1 Dutch and the L2 English spoken lectures compared.

Dutch adjective	English translation	English adjectives
<i>verschillend</i>	"different"	different
<i>belangrijk</i>	"important"	important
<i>nieuwe</i>	"new"	new
<i>grote</i>	"large"/"big"	little
<i>hele</i>	"complete"	good

Table 5. The most frequent verbs in the L1 Dutch and the L2 English spoken lectures compared.

Dutch verb	English translation	English verb
<i>zijn</i>	"to be"	to be
<i>hebben</i>	"to have"	to have
<i>doen</i>	"to do"	to do
<i>kunnen</i>	"can"	can
<i>zullen</i>	"will"	will

and English are identical. In other words, in using common adjectives and verbs, the speakers do not seem to speak very differently when speaking their native tongue or not.

4. Use of "Advanced" Language

Less frequently used adjectives and verbs are most likely to be "advanced" adjectives and verbs.¹⁵ Tables 6 and 7 contain a selection of "advanced" adjectives and verbs in L1 Dutch and L2 English across the speakers. The selection method is described in the Method section. The selection itself gives a good impression of the "advanced" word usage by the lecturers. The selected words are only occasionally used, by one, two, or at the most three lecturers. Examples are given of the use of the words in question in an actual sentence from a lecture.

The lecturers are clearly capable of using less "common" English academic vocabulary for both adjectives and verbs. It should be noted though that some of the sentences with "advanced" word choices were less idiomatic, as some of the examples show. For verbs, this was the case more often than for the adjectives. The difficulty of determining the nature of idiomaticness of people's L1 and L2 is that speakers produce less idiomatic sentences in their native tongue as well. For native speakers, such sentences would count as idiosyncratic, slips of the tongue, or laziness, perhaps. For L2 speakers, they are more likely to be qualified as errors.

5. Lecturers' Evaluation

The nine speakers were interviewed about their views and experiences in speaking two different languages in their lectures. It proved to be difficult to talk about words. As one lecturer expressed: "praten op woordniveau, dat is lastig" ("talking about specific words, that is tricky"). However, they all had interesting things to mention about the differences between lecturing in L2 English and L1 Dutch. The lecturers' perspectives on lecturing in L2 English varied considerably. Some lecturers considered it easier to lecture

¹⁵See, e.g., Laufer and Nation.

Table 6. Advanced adjectives used by the speakers and an example of the context in which the word was used.

	Advanced English word	Context
1	ascending	in ascending order
2	arbitrary	that is kind of arbitrary
3	coincidental	this is a coincidental order
4	conclusive	there is a more conclusive way to prove that he was right
5	consistent	a more consistent way of looking at
6	homogeneous	in the long run networks become homogeneous
7	pervasive	pervasive connections
8	prefabricated	they represent prefabricated formulae
9	susceptible	we become susceptible for harm
10	tentative	a tentative interpretation

Table 7. Advanced verbs used by the speakers and an example of the context in which the word was used.

	Advanced verbs	Context
1	accommodate	the organisation is informally working to accommodate all sorts of interests
2	conform	conforming to what the outside world is expecting of you
3	disentangle	difficult to disentangle these elements
4	equip	the resources that are available to equip such a school
5	exhaust	now we have exhausted the topic of
6	forestall	lingers and forestalls and postpones
7	permeate	it is permeated by language
8	infer	they can be inferred from the context
9	imply	what does that imply for the interpretation?
10	provoke	which can provoke another question

in L2 English, arguing that immersion in the English language is easier and convenient when doing their research and in all the relevant discussions in English as well. Some were neutral, considering it an obligation to use English, and some expressed that they found it more difficult to use English. The latter group explained their strategies to cope with the situation, which mainly came down to good preparation. Other lecturers referred to the changing context of lecturing, in particular the increasingly culturally and linguistically diversified audience, in which effective communication is increasingly becoming an added challenge. One of them said that they avoided difficult words or words that were difficult to pronounce, because they did not want to make mistakes in front of their audience. Several lecturers implicitly mentioned the role of normativity in the interaction with their students by talking about the expectation of “perfect” English.

Conclusion

Research Question 1: The TTR analyses (Figure 1) revealed that the L1 lectures were significantly richer than the L2 English lectures. Research Question 2: There were no significant differences in the use of adjectives and verbs in the L1 Dutch and L2 English lectures. Research Question 3: As for the use of common words, Tables 3–5 showed that the top ten most frequent words as well as the most frequently used adjectives and verbs in the L1 Dutch and the L2 English were similar while the five most frequently

used verbs were identical on the surface. There was varied use of advanced words in both languages. Research Question 4: The lecturers found it difficult to reflect on their own word choice, as it is a subconscious and unmonitored process. They indicated avoiding difficult words at times. Furthermore, there was variation in the degree to which they felt comfortable and able to teach in English. They referred to the pressures of having to teach English, namely student expectations and the internationalisation of education.

Discussion

The benchmark set by Biber *et al.* regarding lexical richness required in academic lecturing is met by all lecturers in our research. In this respect, there is no problem, despite some indication of differences in the TTRs of L1 Dutch and L2 English. So, the criticism that academic lecturers' lexicon is too restricted to express nuance or is otherwise insufficient to teach adequately in L2 English is not confirmed by this research.

Although traditional measures of lexical richness are attractive (easy to apply), they are also rather crude measures of linguistic variation. They measure the linguistic variety of words, but do not delve deeper into precision of meaning and nuance. They also do not look at variation within word categories. Paul Lennon argues that advanced users may have “a broad outline of verb meaning” but that their lexical knowledge is “hazy concerning polysemy, contextual and collocational restriction, phrasal verb combinations, grammatical environment”.¹⁶ To get a better idea of the issue, we took a brief look at the L1 Dutch of the speakers. The most common Dutch verbs were quite obviously used in more elaborate and complicated idiomatic contexts. The following phrases, in which the common verb word is underlined, illustrate this: “dan komen we er wel uit” (“in that case, we will work it out”), “dan zal die jongen z'n geliefde weer niet weten te bereiken” (“again, the boy will probably not manage to reach his beloved then”), and “dat laat zich niet zo gemakkelijk beschrijven” (“that does not lend itself to description very easily”). These uses are highly advanced and indicative of native competence. The comparable most common L2 English verbs were used in far less elaborate contexts. By way of illustration: “they come from ...” (“ze komen uit ...”), “we don't know ...” (“we weten niet ...”), and “let's go” (“laten we gaan”).

Besides looking in detail at meaning and nuance, future research should also look at the type and nature of errors that lecturers produce, both in their L1 and L2. It may be that in both a degree of error occurs but that L2 errors are judged more severely. Another point of attention is that aspects that are not related to content are important in the assessments students make of the English proficiency of lecturers. Pronunciation and prosodic features in particular deserve attention in this respect.

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¹⁶Lennon, 35.

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