

Text Selection: A Neglected Area

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AIM

- **THE MAIN STUDY:** investigating the academic reading activities and problems of students in their first-year of study at a British University, and comparing the emerging model of academic reading with an analysis of the reading construct as tested in the IELTS Reading Module.
- **THE PRESENT PART:** Designing a ‘contextual parameters scheme’ to investigate the textual features of the texts used in target situation and to make a comparison with the performance conditions for reading activities in the IELTS test.

Context Validity (Weir, 2005)

Contextual Parameters in Reading

Task Setting:

- Response format
- Text length
- Time Constraints

Linguistic Demands:

- Purpose of text
- Writer-reader relationship
- Lexical resources
- Structural resources
- Discourse mode
- Functional resources
- Content knowledge

Enright et al (2000): text material features

Grammatical/Discourse Features:

syntax (does not provide a definitive list of features)

vocabulary; vocabulary indices (different meanings of a word), formality measures (register or word length), type-token ratio, percentage of uncommon words (uncommon type-token ratio), collocability, syntactic behaviour (parts of speech, transitivity, etc.), basic forms and derivational possibilities, degree of abstractness

discourse features; theme-rheme structuring, given-new information, definiteness-indefiniteness, noun-predicate density in texts, the positions of main idea and topic sentences in texts

Pragmatic/Rhetorical Features:

pragmatic; exposition, argumentation/persuasion/evaluation, historical biographical/autobiographical narrative

rhetorical features; definition, illustration, classification, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, problem/solution, analysis

Alderson et al (2004)

text source, authenticity, discourse type, domain, topic, nature of content, text length, vocabulary and grammar

Khalifa and Weir (forthcoming): text model comprehension variables

text model building (linguistic structure of the text and its meaning), **text structuring, discourse organisation** (style, register, purpose for text, genre), **signalling of discourse structure, information structuring** (given-new relations, foregrounding main information-backgrounding secondary information)

Masi (2002)

- linguistic and quantitative factors
word and sentence complexity
- other semantic and syntactic factors
structural embedding
content
background knowledge of the reader
the type and genre of text

for a more reliable and predictive measure of text complexity.

GRAMMATICAL FEATURES		
Length	number of words	
Vocabulary	character s/word type -token ratio frequency levels K-level evaluation lexical density	
Grammar	words/sentence sentence/paragraph % passive	The sentences in the text are: 1. mainly simple sentences 2. a balance of simple and compound sentences 3. mostly compound sentences 4. a balance of compound and complex sentences 5. mostly complex sentences
Cohesion		Throughout the text, are relations between the ideas explicitly marked through reference, conjunctions and connectors or are such relations not explicit? 1 (explicit) 2 3 4 5 (not explicit)
Readability	Flesch Reading Ease Flesch -Kincaid Grade Level	

DISCOURSE FEATURES		
Genre		Identify the most appropriate category. 1. text book. 2. magazine/newspaper article 3. research/academic journal article 4. report
Rhetorical task		Identify the most appropriate category. 1. exposition 2. argumentation/persuasion/evaluation 3. historical biographical/autobiographical narrative
Pattern of exposition		Identify the pattern(s) used in the text. 1. define 2. describe 3. elaborate 4. illustrate 5. compare/contrast 6. classify 7. cause/effect 8. problem/solution 9. justify
Rhetorical organisation		Does the text have an explicit organisational structure? 1 (explicit) 2 3 4 5 (not explicit)

CONTENT KNOWLEDGE		
Subject area		Education, business, science & technology etc.
Subject specificity	% of AWL words % of off -list words	Is the topic of the text of general interest or does it require subject specific knowledge on the part of the reader? 1 (general) 2 3 4 5 (specific)
Text abstractness		Is the text concrete or abstract? 1 (concrete) 2 3 4 5 (abstract)
CULTURAL SPECIFICITY		
		Is the topic of the text culture -neutral or is it loaded with specific cultural content? 1 (culture neutral) 2 3 4 5 (culture specific)

IELTS and Undergraduate Reading

Areas where large numbers (3000+) of international students are studying in Britain according to the most recent HESA student record data (2004/5)

Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations

Biology and Biomedical Sciences

Business and Finance

Computing and Information Systems

Criminology

Education Studies

Healthcare (Nursing and Midwifery)

Human Resource Management

Language and Communication (EFL and TEFL)

Law

Leisure, Tourism and Sports Management

Media Arts

Psychology

Social Sciences and Social Work

- most reservations made in last 3 years
- taken out most in current academic year
- confirmation by course leaders of key books for each area
- books students considered to be the most important

IELTS and Undergraduate Reading

- 42 IELTS texts taken from 14 published test versions
- 42 UG texts – sections extracted from beginning middle and end of the 14 selected UG books

Text characteristics

Analysis of text at word, sentence and discourse levels

Mix of *practical* qualitative and quantitative measures (easily replicated by IELTS test developers)

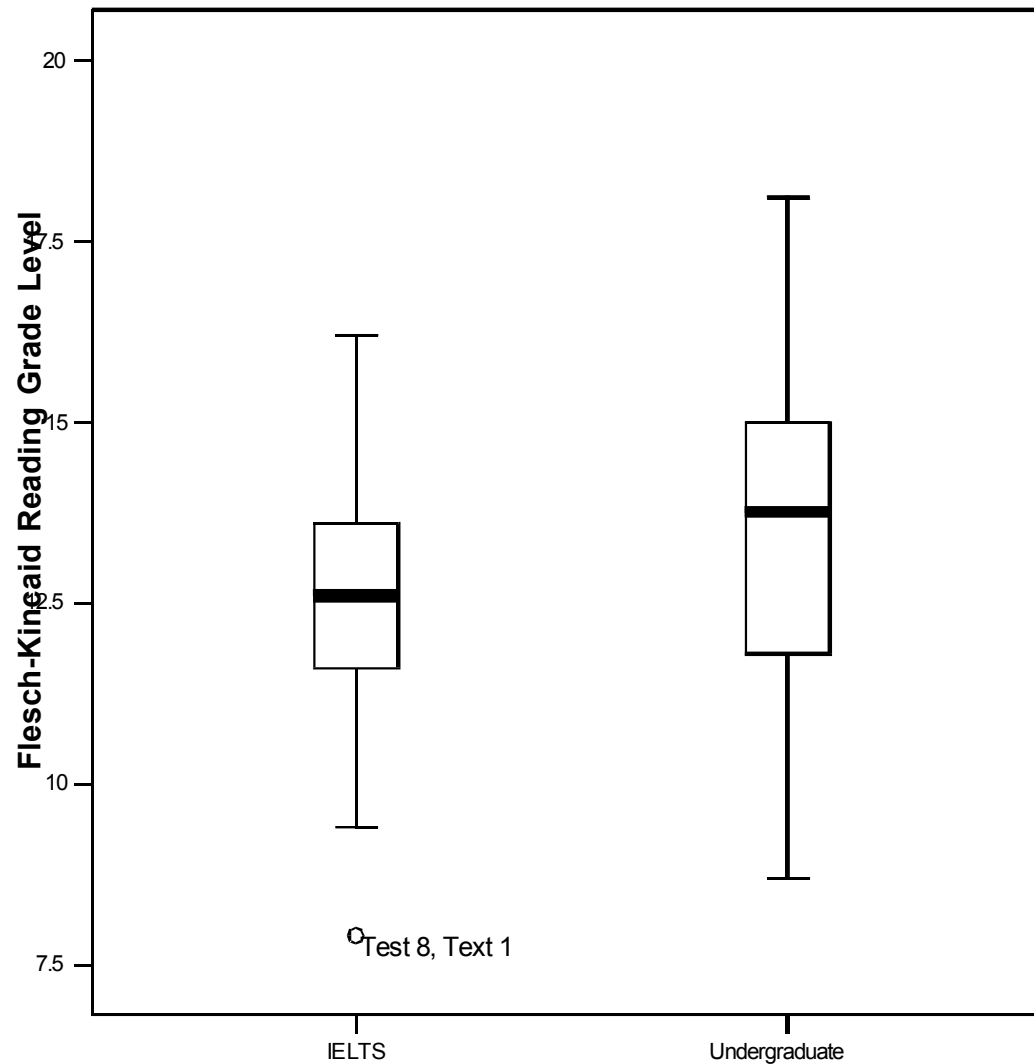
<http://www.lex tutor.ca/>

WordSmith Tools (Scott, 2006)

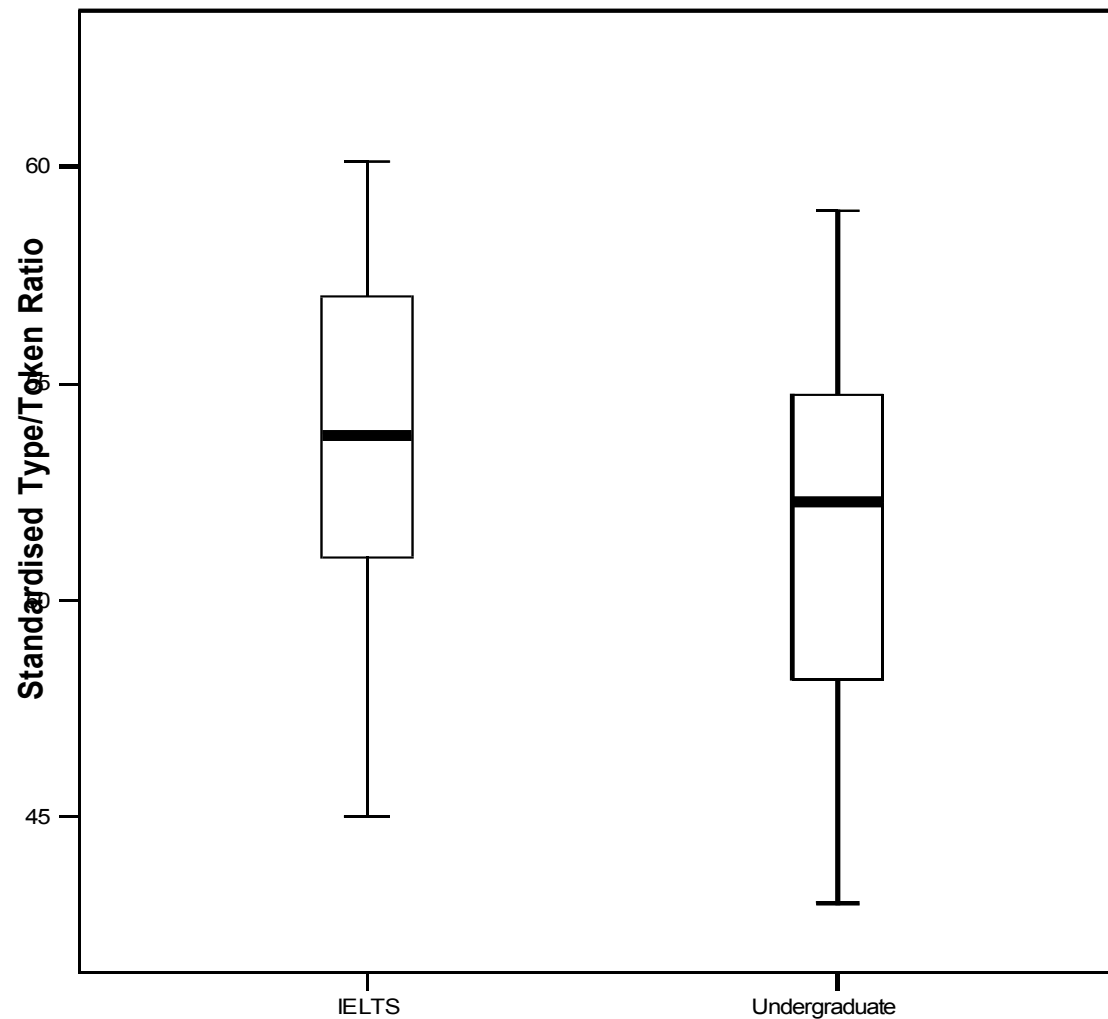
Quantitative measures

<u>Feature</u>	<u>Sig. $p < .05$</u>
Characters per word	0.101
Flesch reading ease	0.030
Flesch-Kincaid reading level	0.026
Lexical density	0.263
Proportion of passive sentences	0.686
Proportion of words on AWL	0.000
Proportion of words within 1,000 word frequency level	0.032
Proportion of words within 2,000 word frequency level	0.410
Proportion of words within 3,000 word frequency level	0.037
Proportion of words outside 15,000 word frequency level	0.000
Sentences per paragraph	0.862
Standardized type-token ratio	0.024
Words per sentence	0.139

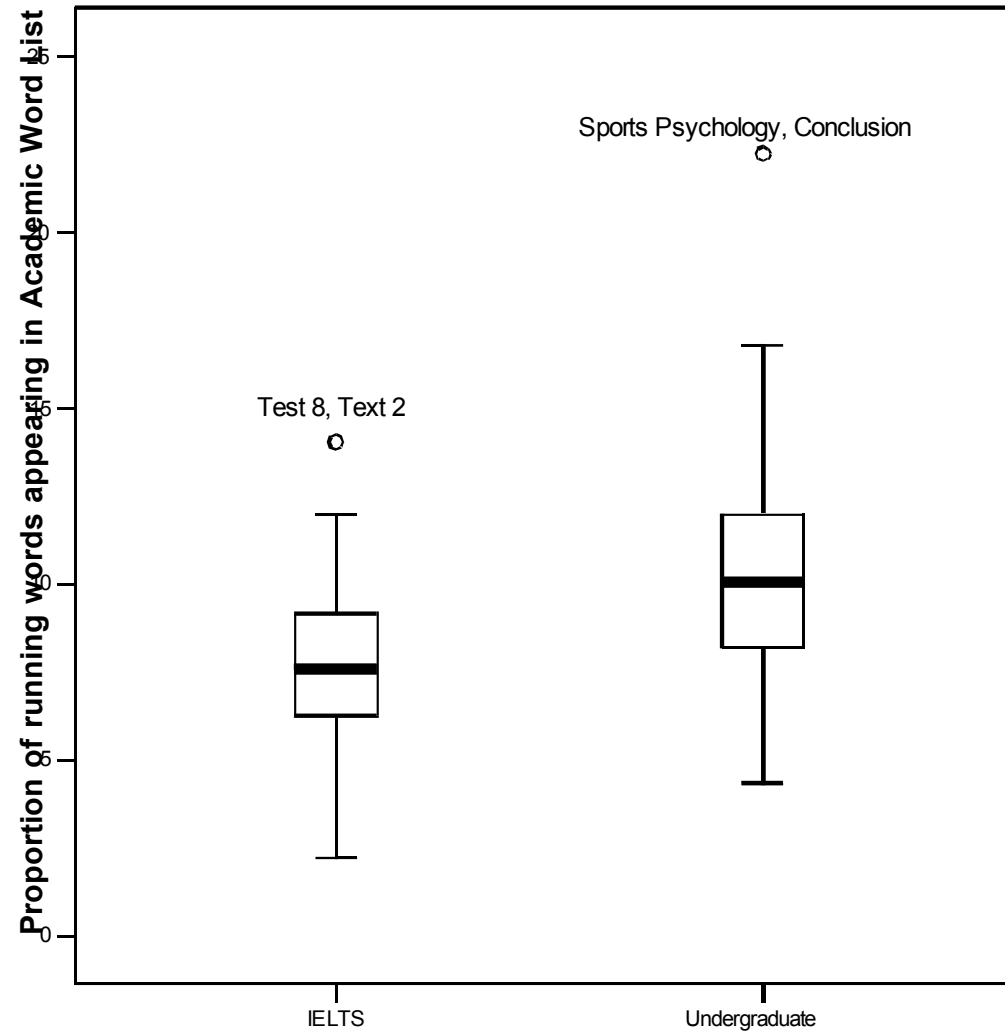
Flesch-Kincaid Reading Grade levels of IELTS and undergraduate texts



Standardized Type-Token Ratio of IELTS and undergraduate texts



Comparison between proportion of running words appearing on the AWL in IELTS and undergraduate texts



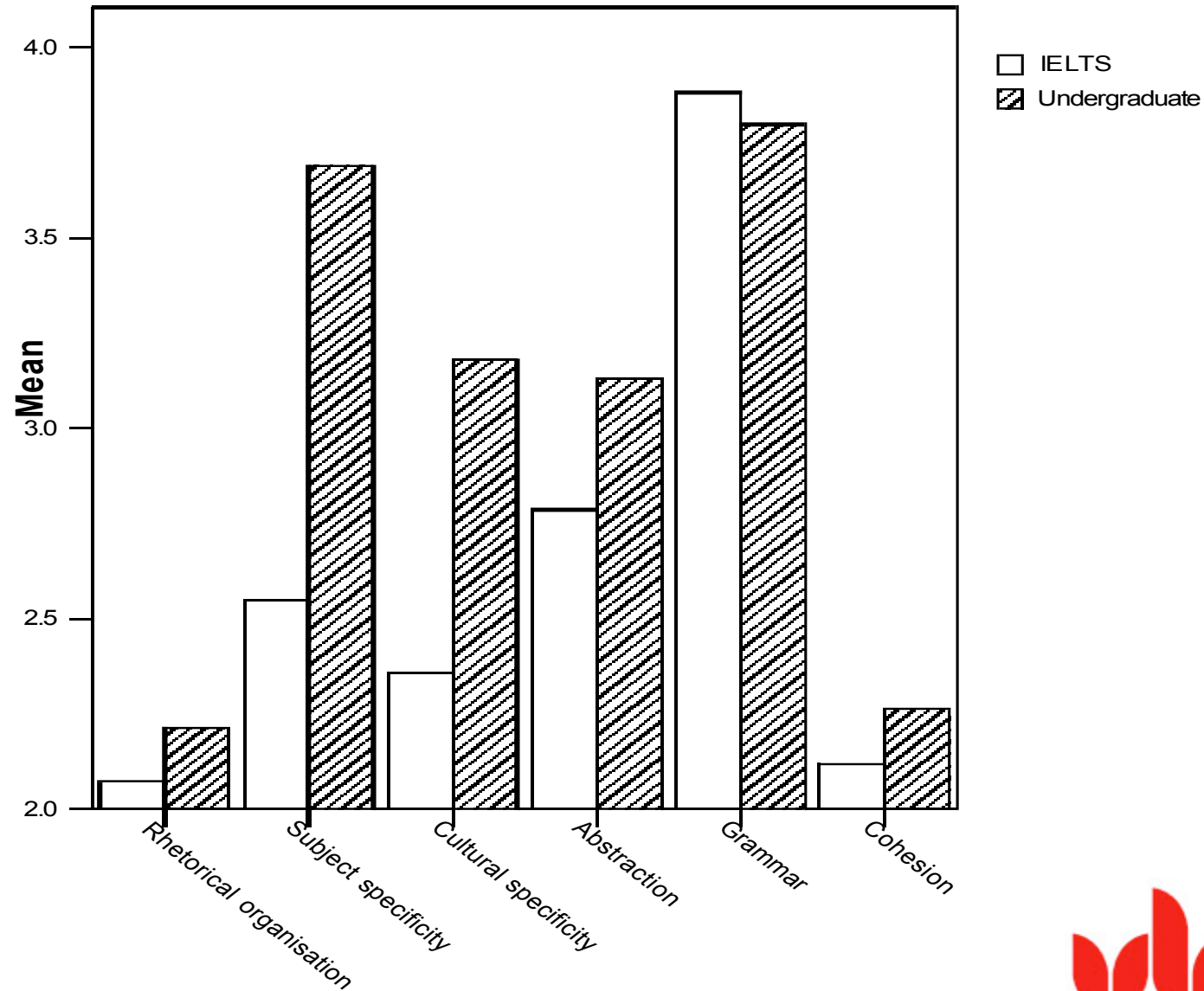
Qualitative measures

<u><i>Feature</i></u>	<u><i>Sig. p<.05</i></u>
Rhetorical organisation	0.229
Grammar	0.361
Cohesion	0.109
Subject specificity	0.000
Cultural specificity	0.000
Abstraction	0.075

Rates of agreement between the two judges on textual features

Criteria	Exact	+/-1
Rhetorical organisation	52%	93%
Grammar	52%	94%
Cohesion	49%	92%
Subject specificity	31%	87%
Cultural specificity	33%	89%
Abstraction	29%	79%

Qualitative measures



Genre		Text book	Magazine/ newspaper article	Journal article	Research/ academic	Report
IELTS	Text book	7				
	Magazine/ newspaper article	9	17		7	
	Research/ academic journal article				1	
	Report				1	
UG	Text book	42				

Rhetorical task		Exposition	Argumentation	Historical/ biographical
IELTS	Exposition	30	2	1
	Argumentation	3	2	
	Historical/ biographical	1		3
Undergraduate	Exposition	27		1
	Argumentation	5	2	
	Historical/ biographical	3	1	3

Pattern of exposition

		Define/ Describe/ Elaborate	Illustrate	Compare	Classify	Cause/effect	Problem/ solution	Justify
IELTS	Define/ Describe/ Elaborate	17						
	Illustrate			1				
	Compare							
	Classify							
	Cause/ effect					7		1
	Problem/ solution	2				1	11	2
	Justify							
UG	Define/ Describe/ Elaborate	25	1			1	4	2
	Illustrate	1	1					
	Compare	1						
	Classify	2						
	Problem/ solution	1	1					1
	Justify	1						

Subject area

- 24% of IELTS texts identified as 'social studies'
- 12% engineering & technology
- 10% business & admin. studies

THANK YOU
Happy Testing!!