

THE LEXICAL PHRASES EMPLOYED IN THE THESIS ABSTRACTS OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS

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Abstract.

Lexical phrases employed in the thesis abstracts of English Department students is the focus of the present study. The sources of the data were randomly selected from the thesis abstracts of the English Department students writing thesis for one of the requirements for the Bachelor degree. There are four kinds of lexical phrases employed :in students' thesis abstracts; (a) verbal phrases, (c) noun phrases, (c) prepositional phrases, and others, typically longer clausal structures. The functions of those lexical phrases are (a) Reporting what other say, (b) Describing problems (c) Describing situation (d) Presenting results (e) Research and study aims (f) Expressing points of view (g) Expressing degrees of certainty (h) Presenting argument (i) connectors (j) Comparing and contrasting (k) Summering and (l) conclusion

Keyword: *lexical phrases, thesis abstract*

Introduction

Academic discourse are sometimes referred to as research or documented papers especially written with a purpose of either acquitting oneself with important sources of facts in a particular field or simply shedding light on an event, a person, or a current issue through published sources and sometimes unpublished ones. In this respect, researchers look at new evidence and ask new questions; they review these earlier findings and how their own research provides new understanding of the subject (Levin 1987:538).

In college or university, academic essays are written by lecturers for publication in scientific journals. A university student may write a term paper, a thesis or dissertation to be submitted for assessment by the advisor(s) as one of the requirements for joining the next term or obtaining a degree. In writing academic essays (scientific journals, term papers, theses or dissertations) one has to adopt particular formats that have been outlined by the board of editors (scientific journals) and the faculty board (theses or dissertation).

Studies on abstracts (Samraj, 2002: 42) have focused on both the rhetorical moves and linguistic features. Bhatia (1993) suggests abstracts provide a summary of the research article and uses the overall

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organization of the research article to arrive at the rhetorical move found in abstract introduction (purpose), method, results, and conclusion. These same moves have also been used in the analysis of abstracts by other researchers such as Salager-Mayer (1990), who uses the four rhetorical moves to evaluate the quality of Medical English abstracts. In another study, also of Medical English abstracts (salvager-Mayer, 1992), she identifies the presence of other moves, such as case presentation in abstracts that accompany case reports and data synthesis in review article abstracts. Melander et.al's (1997) study of abstracts from different disciplines and produced in different languages identifies some moves that are similar to the ones previously discussed but also notes a problem-recommendation rhetorical structure in Swedish medical abstracts. Another recent study done by Santos (1996) focuses only on linguistics abstracts and postulates five moves to account for the overall organization. In addition to the four discussed in previous studies such as Bhatia (1993) and Salagar-Mayer (1992), he also postulates a move called-"Situating the research", where the writers presents current knowledge in the field and can optionally delineate a problem in the research area. He maintains that these moves serve the function of attracting a readership and is found in a little less than half the text analyzed in his study.

A variety of linguistic features have been the subject of previous studies on abstracts. Most common among these are tense, modality, negation, and passive voice. In addition to analyzing the frequency of occurrences of different linguistic features in abstracts, at least one study has attempted to explicitly relate them to function. So far the lexical phrases employed in the abstracts of students thesis have not been investigated. This study is therefore dedicated to learn the lexical phases employed in the students' thesis abstracts. The study thus tries to answer the following questions. What kinds of lexical prophases ae employed in the abstracts of the thesis written by English Department students in an EFL setting?

- (a) What types of lexical phrases are employed in the students' thesis abstract?
- (b) What are the functions of those lexical phrases?

Review of Related Literature

1. Rules and Convention of Academic Discourse

There are six main principles form the basis of academic discourse, whether a book, a long paper, or a theme assigned to a writer: (1) adequate subject matter, (2) appropriate organization of the whole paper, (3) appropriate organization and development of paragraphs, (4) mature and effective sentence composition, (5) effective diction, and correct usage (Hal, 2000; Willis, 1965:3-7,). The first of these six principles has to do with what to write and the rest five principles have to

do with how to write. To write a good theme, one must – consciously or unconsciously- apply all six.

Principle 1 -adequate subject matter- is the most important of the six, for the purpose of academic composition is to explain facts, opinion, and ideas. The range of the subject matter is adequate when the writer has covered all the pertinent material directly related to the topic so that the reader will feel a sense of completeness as he finishes the paper. The ideas sound when everything presented in the paper is truth and reliable, or at least is based on open-minded investigation and reasonable supposition. Otherwise the reader will be felt with a feeling of skepticism. The ideas presented in the paper will be appropriate when everything written pertains to the announced topic. Then the reader will not feel the reader has wandered around from his topic or deceived him as to the writer's purpose.

Principles 2 and 3 – organization and paragraphing – have to do with the structure of an academic paper. The first requisite of a good paper is that the topic be proper focus. There should be no doubt in the readers' mind as to what the exact topic is. The boundaries of the whole topic and each of its main points should be sharply etched. Paper focus in an academic essay is achieved when the main points of a paper are clearly distinguished, logically arranged, suitably divided into paragraphs, and coherently welded together.

Just as an orderly of paragraphs gives focus and structure to the whole paper, an orderly arrangement of sentences gives focus and structure to each paragraph. Contrary to what one may expect, the structure of a paragraph is usually more complex than the structure of the whole paper.

Principle 4 and 5 – sentence composition and diction- are the ones that have to do with that have most to do with what is called style. Whether a paper is smooth or awkward, precise or vague, lively or dull, fresh or trite, terse or rambling, colorful or drab, sharp or bland, vivid or abstract clear or ambiguous, appropriate or offensive, flowery or simple, pretentious or unassuming – whether a paper reflects one or the other of these characteristics, or a degree between any two depends primarily on the quality of the sentence composition and its diction.

Principle 6 – correct usage – has to do with the social acceptability of writing. Included under this principle are such as spelling, capitalization, the use of apostrophes, word forms, pronoun forms, modifier forms, agreement, and punctuation. These aspects of writing (except punctuation for clarity) have little to do with the clarity, truthfulness, and interest of what to write, but they have a great deal to do with how educated readers accept the composition.

In summary then, principles 1, 2, and 3 have to do with the subject matter of a paper and its structure, principles 4 and 5 with clarity and that complex of elements called style, and principle 6 with the social acceptability of writing or usage.

2. Thesis Abstract

The term abstract is used loosely to refer to almost any brief accounts of a longer paper (Davis, 2005: 112). St. Cloud University (w.w.w.jeo.stcloudstate.edu: 2004) defines abstract as a self-contained, short, and powerful statement that describes a large work. It is not a review, nor does it evaluate the work being abstracted. It is a condensed version of a longer piece of writing that highlights the major points covered, consciously describes the content and scope of the writing, and reviews the writing's contents in abbreviated form. An abstract summarizes the major aspects of the entire paper.

It provides the reader with a brief preview of the study based on information from the other sections of the report. Rather reading a large writing, readers rely on abstracts to decide quickly if writing is interesting. An abstract helps readers decide whether they want to read the rest of the paper. According to Weissburg and Buker (1990: 185), many readers depend on the abstracts to give them enough information about the study to decide if they want to read the entire report or not. Abstracts allow readers who may be interested in the longer work quickly decide whether it is worth their time to read it. Therefore, abstracts should contain key words and phrases that allow for easy searching. Even Koopmen (1997) states that abstracts should always serve the function of "selling" our work.

There are two main approaches to writing research paper abstract (Swales and Feak, 2004: 282). One is called the results-drive-abstract. This kind of abstract concentrates on the research findings and what might be concluded from them. The other approach is to offer a research paper summary abstract. In this kind of abstract the writer provides one-or two sentence synopsis of the four sections.

Two types of abstracts are typically used: (1) descriptive and (2) informative in academic writing (Davis, 2005: 112). A descriptive abstract (a) tells readers what information the report, article, or paper contains, (b) include the purpose, methods, and scope of the report, article, or paper, (c) does not provide results, conclusions, or recommendations, (d) are always very short, usually under 100 words, (e) introduce the subject to readers, who must then read the report, article, or paper to find out the author's results, conclusions, or recommendations. Thus a descriptive abstract outlines the topics covered in a piece of writing so that the reader can decide whether to read the entire document. In many ways, a descriptive abstract is like a table of contents in a paragraph form. Unlike reading an informative abstract, reading a descriptive abstract cannot substitute for reading the document because it does not capture the content of the piece. Nor does a descriptive abstract fulfill the other main goals of abstracts as well as informative abstracts do. For all reasons, descriptive abstracts are less and less common.

While they do not critique or evaluate, informative abstracts do more than descriptive abstracts. A good informative abstract acts as a

surrogate for the work itself. That is, the writer presents and explains all the main arguments and the important results and evidence in the complete article. An informative abstract includes the information that can be found in the descriptive abstracts but also includes the results, conclusions of the research and the recommendation. Thus, an informative abstract should (a) communicate specific information from the report, article, or paper, (b) include the purpose, methods, and scope of the report, article, or paper, (c) provide the report, article, or paper's results, conclusions, and recommendations. An informative abstract should be short – from a paragraph to a page or two, depending upon the length of the original work being abstracted. Usually informative abstracts are 10% or less of the length of the original piece. In addition, an informative abstract should allow readers to decide whether they want to read the report, article, or paper.

Swales and Feak (2004) suggest that most research paper abstracts should be informative rather than indicative or descriptive. They should include the main findings. A research-based essay abstract as proposed by Weisberg and Buker (1990: 186) and Swales and Feak (2004:282), thus should consist of the following parts: (1) B = Background, (2) A/P = Aim or purpose of the study and scope, (3) M = Method, (4) R = Results and (5) C = Conclusion.

Abstract from almost all fields of study are written in a very the same way. The types of information included and their order are very conventional. The box that follows shows the typical information format of an abstract.

**ORDER OF TYPICAL ELEMENTS INCLUDED
IN AN ABSTRACT**

B = some background information
P = the principal activity (or purpose) of the study
and its scope
M = some information about the methodology used in
the study
R = the most important results of the study
C = a statement of conclusion or recommendation

In line with Swales and Feak, Davis (2005: 112) state that most scientific journal articles use informative abstracts. According to Davis, 2005: 113) those abstracts must serve several purposes.

1. To show the reader very quickly whether the full reports for further study;
2. To extract (abstracted) from the full report for separate publication;

3. To furnish terminology to help in literature searches by individuals or by literature retrieval specialists in indexes and electronic data bases.

To serve those purposes, the abstract must be short, concise, but completely self-explanatory report on a scientific investigation. Like the report itself, the abstract must include (1) the research objectives, and rationale for conducting the investigation, (2) the basic methods used, and (3) the results and significant conclusions that can be drawn.

Sometimes an abstract can be shortened in order to make limitations that the writer cannot exceed. It can eliminate or combine some of the information shown in the previous list. The reduced abstract typically focuses on only two or three elements, with the emphasis placed on the results of the study: P+M =purpose and method of the study, R = results, C = conclusions, and recommendation.

An effective abstract, according to Weisberg and Buker (1990: 186) and Swales and Feak (2004:282), has the following qualities: (1) uses one or more well developed paragraphs: these are unified, coherent, concise, and able to stand alone, (2) uses an introduction/body/conclusion structure which presents the article, paper, or report's purpose, results, conclusions, and recommendations in that order, (3) follows strictly the chronology of the article, paper, or report, (4) provides logical connections (or transitions) between the information included, (5) adds **no** new information, but simply summarizes the report, (7) is understandable to a wide audience, (8) oftentimes uses passive verbs to downplay the author and emphasize the information

3. Lexical Phrases

“Lexical phrases are multi-word phenomena that exist somewhere between the traditional poles of lexicon and syntax, conventionalized form/function composites that occur more frequently and have more idiomatically determined meanings than language that is put together each time”(Nattinger & Decarrico, 1992:1), for e.g. let me give you an example, let's have a look at, take for an example,. Lexical phrases are chunks of language varying length in the phrases such as on the other hand, as it were, as X would have us believe, and so on (Nattinger and DeCarrico, 1992). They occur frequently and idiomatically determine meaning than language that is put together each time. These phrases include short, relatively fixed phrases such as “a...ago”, or longer phrases or clauses such as “if I X, then I Y”, “the ...er X, the ...er Y” in which each of those is a fixed basic frame, with slots for various fillers (a year ago, a month ago, the higher X, the higher Y, the longer you wait, the sleepier you get). Each is associated with a particular discourse function, such as expressing time, a month ago, or relationships among ideas, the higher X, the higher Y.

Further, the groups of lexical phrases according to function in a way are spoken and written language. This study deals with theses which are written language. It is important to go deeper to the lexical phrases in written language. In the groups, there are categories including “social

interactions”, “necessary topics”, and “discourse devices”. Focusing on discourse devices, they are types of lexical phrases that connect the meaning and structure of the discourse. Lexical phrases are parts of language that often have clearly defined roles in guiding the overall discourse. In particular, they are primary markers which signal the direction of discourse, whether spoken or written. When they serve as discourse devices, their function is to signal, for instance, whether the information to follow is in contrast to, is in addition to, or is an example of, information that has preceded. Among others, markers like “on the other hand”, “I contrast to...”, “however”, “nevertheless”, “but look at X”, “but how about X”, signal contrast; “in addition”, “moreover”, “another thing is X” signal addition; signal exemplification”, and so on. Discourse devices are phrases that connect the meaning any structure of the discourse. The discourse devices in written language tend to be more formal than spoken language. In written language, discourse devices include:

- Logical connectors: as a result (of X); nevertheless; because (of) X; in spite of X, therefore; moreover; however
- Temporal connectors: the day/week/month/year before/after....; and then; after X then; the next is Y; to begin; and next; a final/last point
- Spatial connectors: around here; over there; at/on the corner
- Fluency devices: it seems that; by and large; at any rate; and so on; as a matter of fact
- Exemplifiers: on other words; it’s like X; for example
- Relators: the (other) thing X is Y; X has (a lot)/ does not have (much) to do with Y; not only X but also Y
- Qualifiers: it depends on X; the catch is X; it’s only in X that Y
- Evaluators: as far as I know/can tell; there is no doubt that X; at least; at all
- Summarizers: to make a long story short; my point (here) is that X; in summary; in conclusion

The Materials

The sources of the data of this study were randomly selected from the students’ thesis abstracts written over a period of fourteen years (1997-2011). The Thesis abstracts (TAs) were collected solely from the English Department of Widya Mandala Chatolic University. In this institution the writing of a thesis is an essential and compulsory requirement for students to obtain their end-of-course diploma, which qualifies them as teachers of English in secondary and high schools as a foreign language in Indonesia. Because these theses were defended in front of examiners consisting of four to five lecturers, students considered writing theses as an exercise in academic achievement

Since these texts are culturally and situational highly bound, the investigation relied not only on the sociolinguistic approach generally

used in such analysis, but also on the culturally-based approach and Grice's Co-cooperative principle. The data were analyzed on the basis of on the basis of theory of contrastive rhetorical analysis.

The Results

1. Types of Lexical Phrases

There are three types of lexical phrases employed in the thesis abstracts under study, (a) verbal phrases components, which can include passive voice, anticipatory it and dependent clause fragment , (b) noun phrases elements followed by a part of a modifier, often an of-prepositional phrases, (c) prepositional phrases, and (c) others, typically longer clauses which often functions as politeness formulaic. Each of those kinds of lexical phrases are exemplified in the following table.

There are three typical verbal construction found in the abstracts under study, i.e (a) passive fragment construction followed by prepositional phrase, (b) present participle plus object construction, (c) anticipatory it followed by passive construction, and (d) in the form of dependent clauses. The noun phrases appear in three typical constructions: (a) noun followed by multi word modifiers, (b) noun followed by prepositional phrase, (c) a noun followed by a sub clause. The prepositional phrases appear in four typical construction, i.1 (a) preposition plus noun phrase, (b) preposition gerund, (c) preposition plus infinitive verb, and (d) preposition plus clausal elements. The miscellaneous type of lexical phrases typically appear in the form of longer clauses.

Table 1
Types of Lexical Phrases employed in the thesis abstracts

No	Types	Examples
1	Verbal phrases which include: a. Passive voice b. Present participle c. Anticipatory it d. V+ NP e. Dependent clause	Based on this statement Based on the above condition Realizing that It can be concluded that. It is possible that Based on the research findings
2	Noun phrases, a. N + a part of modifier b. N + prep + NP	The subjects of. The analysis of the findings The figure of speech.

	c. N+ passive clause	The score obtained by The results of the study The theories underlying Directive forms used by teachers Students who
3	Prepositional phrase followed by a prepositional or clausal elements, often an of prepositional phrases a. Prep + NP b. Prep + N +PP c. Prep + Gerund d. Prep + infinitive e. Prep + Clausal elements	Through deeper analysis On the basis of the data analyzed In line with the findings of By looking at this problem To prove this statement In applying critical reading technique In the research of
4	Others, typically longer clausal structures which often function as politeness formulaic	The writer hopes that As a conclusion As a result As we know Some of the senders of...

2. Functions of lexical phrases

a. The Functions of Lexical Phrases employed in the Background section

The lexical phrases employed in the background section, as presented in the table below, are used (a) to express researchers' points of view, (b) to report what other researchers have done, (c) to describe the problems to be solved, (d) to describe the existing situation and (e) to give the reasons for doing the research, as presented in the following table.

Table 2
The Functions of Lexical Phrases employed in the Background section

No	Function	Examples
1	Expressing researchers' points of view	a. The most important language skill in teaching of English as a foreign language, b. of the most crucial skill,

		c. realizing its important, d. the main function of literature, e. (e) English as a foreign language in Indonesia
2	Reporting what other say	a. Husbands (1961: 51) state that b. (b)Christine Wallace (1993:19) says c. © as Finocchiaro said ...
3	Describing problems	
4	Describing situation	a. Communication occurs when b. (b)This condition
5	Expressing reasons	a. Because of that reasons... b. Based on the reason above c. © Due to the vital role of guessing ability in reading comprehension process d. By virtue of this e. As we know that f. Based on the way communication occurs

b. The Functions of Lexical Phrases employed in the Purpose Section

As presented in the following table the functions of the lexical phrases employed in the purpose section are (a) pressing the aims, objective and intentions, (b) answering research questions.

Table 3

The Functions of Lexical Phrases employed in the Purpose Section

No	Function	Examples
1	Expression aims/objectives	(a)It is aimed to..., (b) This study aims at answering... (c) the objective of the study (d)
2	Answering research questions	At answering
3	Describing the scope of the study	The foremost and ultimate goal of

c. The Lexical Phrases employed in the Method Section

The functions of the lexical phrases employed in the method section, as presented in the table below are describe (a) the design selected, (b) the subjects of the study, (c) the instruments used to collect the intended data, (d) the technique of data analysis and (e) the data found.

Table 4
The Lexical Phrases employed in the Method Section

No	Function	Examples
1	Describing the design selected	a. The observation was done by b. In conducting this study
2	Describing the subjects	a. The subjects of her analysis b. The subjects for the try out c. The population of this research
3	Describing the instruments used	a. With the guessing ability test b. In collecting and analyzing the data
4	Describing\data analysis procedure	By reading and analyzing the details of

d. The Lexical Phrases employed in the Result Section

The lexical phrases employed in the result section are to show the results of the analysis to the readers. the head words employed are calculation, analysis, findings, show, and found. the kinds of phrases employed are noun phrases only., consisting of noun as the head and prepositional phrases as the modifier.

Table 5
The Lexical Phrases employed in the Result Section

No	Functions	Samples
1	Showing major results	a. The analysis of the findings showed b. The over all calculation results c. The students' overall reading skill d. The writer found e. The results is that f. The results indicate that g. The study shows that h. The analysis brings about i. The study reveals that j. Results of the data analysis k. The afore mentioned facts l. The study reveals that

e. The Lexical Phrases Employed in the Conclusion section

The functions of the lexical phrases employed in the conclusion section are provided in table below (a) to summarize, and (b) to provide conclusion. The lexical phrases commonly used to summarize are: to summarize, in summary, to sum up. The lexical phrases to provide conclusion are: to conclude, as a conclusion, it can be concluded.

Table 6
The Lexical Phrases Employed in the Conclusion section

No	Functions	Examples
1	Giving summary	To sum up In summary
2	Concluding	As a conclusion It can be concluded that the following conclusion it can be said that

f. The Lexical Phrases employed in the suggestion section

The lexical phrases employed in the suggestion section are commonly expressing suggestions and expectations. Not many variations of phrases are used.

Table 7
The Lexical Phrases employed in the suggestion section

No	Function	Examples
1	Giving suggestions	the writer suggests that Some suggestion for the following researchers
2	Expressing expectations	The writer hopes it is hoped that

Conclusion

As this investigation into the use of lexical phrases in S1 students' thesis abstracts by non-native speakers has evidenced, the acquisition of lexical bundles is a long process in which learners have to master both the type or structure and the functional specialization of lexical bundles typical of expert academic discourse. An important pedagogical implication of this study is that exposure of university students to a high frequency of occurrence of lexical phrases through academic reading.. One of the reasons for this is that lexical phrases are very frequent but not perceptually salient. According to Ellis (2002) frequency is a key factor in language acquisition and therefore one would expect language learners to acquire lexical phrases successfully. However, due to the lack of perceptual salience learners may experience some problems in noticing lexical phrases. Thus it may be helpful to deliberately focus the attention of learners on lexical phrases (cf. Cortes 2004, Biber and Barbieri 2007).

Overt instruction in lexical bundles should account for variation in academic discourse and address the identification of discipline- and genre-specific bundles. Such an overt instruction should focus both on structure or type and the functions of lexical phrases..

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