

Working with Corpora: Increasing Students' Stylistic Awareness of English Academic Writing

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Abstract

This study attempts to show that working with corpora may help students writing their theses individually and more independently. The objectives are to describe the process of working with own corpora and the benefits by referring to information related to corpus analysis, stylistic analysis, and language awareness, within the context of English academic writing. This study reveals that introducing students to corpus and stylistic analyses helps students to be more aware of academic English commonly used in academic articles with more independent efforts. To gain this, they started the process by choosing their own preferred article source, then collecting, at least, three sample articles related to the field being discussed, and comparing the text structure and the discourse specifically used in the texts. To gather and process texts automatically, they were introduced to Antconc program and, to inspect the language uses in the academic texts manually, they were also introduced to basic stylistic analysis skill. From the study, it can be seen that introducing students to the work and uses of corpora does not only help them write more independently but also make them more attentive and motivated to learn English usages since showing student to works with model writings and allowing them to experiment with the chosen models decrease the writing pressures which are usually caused by the lack of knowledge about various helps to write thesis more effectively.

Key words: *language corpora, stylistics, language awareness, academic writing*

Introduction

Corpus generally refers to “a collection” of the language use examples (Hunston, 2002:2). It was commonly related to the idea of the focused collection of linguistic use examples for research purpose and used limitedly for certain research topic. Corpus is more common than the electronic “stored and accessed” collections of texts (Hunston, 2002:2; Richards and Schmidt, 2002:126-127). However, since both of them are built from the authentic language uses, corpora are valuable language learning sources because either teacher or learner can use them to learn the actual uses of language that may increase language awareness. This study particularly reveals the combined use of manual and electronic corpora to improve students’ work of thesis writing. Since revision is closely related to understanding on language usages, stylistic analysis is required to support the process.

Research related to the use of corpora and stylistic analysis in improving students’ awareness on English Academic Writing (EAW) has shown that corpus and stylistic analyses help at the initial stage, identifying students’ writing problems, and for the implementation stages, applying the analyses to overcome the problems. In the beginning research to the students’ thesis writing, the application of corpus and stylistic analyses help identifying the students’ writing linguistic preferences and writing styles that inform why certain erroneous forms occur regularly (Martin, 2012a). Following the first research, the information were then extended in the next discusses about particular efforts to make students able to improve their academic writing style independently (Martin, 2012b). Albeit the limited information on how corpus and stylistics are implemented in writing supervision, the current study describes a simpler description of how teacher and student may combine the manual and electronic corpus analyses in thesis writing process, in particular relation to awareness rising.

Language awareness is gained whenever learners already come to “a conscious attention to the “explicit knowledge” of language forms, works and effects (Schmidt 1995:1; Skehan 1998:139). As Schmidt said, the students notice the different target language behavior first then proceed to awareness as the noticing leads to the specific attention to the rules work in the particular language. This idea underlines the importance of bringing students to stylistic awareness in thesis supervision since students usually have less attention to the aspects of academic language resulted from the burden of the thesis content. Applying stylistic analysis (Gower, 1986; Malkmajær, 2004; Culpeper and Semino 2011) to the corpora, both the model texts and students’ writing, helps students identify the specific language behavior of academic writing. In other words, leading them to the comparison of the academic discourse and language between their writings and the experienced writers’ texts helps them to improve their academic writing standard on the EAW’s discourse and linguistic features.

Discussion

The discussion on electronic corpora for English language teaching is usually presented in the complex issues to consider since teacher should take into account the role, use context, genre, and size of a corpus for language teaching (Adolphs, 2002:98-99). However, since the subjects of research were the undergraduate students under advisory for thesis completion, simpler implementation for corpus was designed to suite their needs. The forthcoming guides of writing improvement focused on two domains: the EAW’s discourse and linguistic features. The awareness on the discourse features was improved later by working with the corpora manually and on the language features by the help of automatic corpora. The detail steps of the students’ works can be seen in the table.

In the table, it is seen that there are four main steps, each containing certain target, linguistic and non-linguistic. In every step, specific guideline was also provided to lead students work within the frame as well as to avoid confusion. The first two steps are related to text gathering and selection in which certain requirements should be followed, and the last two are the analysis parts.

No	Step	Linguistic Target	Non-linguistic target	Guideline
1.	Source decision	EAW’s discourse	Knowledge on field sources	Journal list and source
2.	Article collection	EAW’s discourse	Knowledge on subject/content area	Linguistic coverage
3.	Manual analysis	EAW’s discourse	Rhetorical structure	1. Academic writing format 2. Students’ common rhetorical problems
4.	Electronic analysis	EAW’s language	Error analysis	Students’ language errors

The information can be explained as follows:

First, the students were asked to decide the preferred source for their corpora. For instance, student A decided, and was responsible for, to choose sources from the articles in Applied Linguistics Journal, student B was interested in the articles from Language and Literature, etc. It was suggested to choose the sources from only one publisher with the consideration that each has its own writing culture. Therefore, it was also considered that having more than one source types might confuse the students in the analysis later. This step made students more active to find the sources since they could see that working with their own chosen and related articles is more applicative to their writing needs. In addition, the activities required

at this step helped the students to find more sources in their related subject. Here, other than relied on their own goggling effort, they could be helped by providing links to and the requirements for academically accepted sources for thesis writing.

Second, the students collected, at least, three sample articles related to their thesis topic, preferably those from their own search. Most students used the articles described in their review of the previous studies. When the articles were less in number, the students still could collect the texts from the same publisher, but under the same area of study, like student who found difficulty to find article about overlap still might collect others similarly discussing about turn taking, or text analysis. Some adjustments were done, especially when students could not find enough articles. In that condition, they could be helped. In addition, consideration to the year of publication and/or the origin of the writers was also necessary. This step also increased the students' knowledge related to their content subject. To help them, a guideline about linguistic coverage was shared to the students.

Finally, the students analyzed the text manually and electronically. Here, more described and detailed task guide was provided because the students did not only analyze the model texts but also imitate the way the experienced writers work with their academic articles. Here is the description for the manual steps:

1. The students were provided with a worksheet that guided them to find several discourse features in the source texts. The task guide was designed based on the parts of students' writings that needed improvements, like forming an objective statement, strong argument, idea directness, cause-effect relation, and reducing repetition, indirectness, personalized judgment and extended uses of apology (Martin, 2012a and 2012b).
2. They kept all records based on each category in a specific file folder, the first folder of manual corpus.
3. After comprehending what a proper academic discourse look like, the students were guided to find their errors in their own writings.
4. They also kept all errors in a different file folder, the second folder of manual corpus.
5. They compared their products with the model texts on the similar discourse features. Here, they made a corpus consisting of the parallel features collected from the model and their own discourse features.
6. They constructed the revised features by referring to the models.

Finishing the manual steps, the students moved to the electronic corpus analysis in order to improve their language choices, following these steps:

1. The students were introduced to the work of Antconc program.
2. Using the program, they built their own corpora; the simple corpus from the model texts, the first electronic corpus.
3. They saved the concordance lines.
4. The students received the marked language errors produced in the thesis drafts. They were also given the possible **Key words**.
5. They searched the words in their concordance lines. When they were not found, the students compared the search to other friends' corpora.
6. As all texts from all students had collected and put into a bigger electronic corpus, the second electronic corpus, by the advisor, the students might also access it.
7. The students reported the common errors which they had committed and the appropriate choices replacing the forms derived from the first and the second corpora.
8. The students were also introduced to the use of the online corpora in order to let them had more sources for checking erroneous and/or doubtful linguistic choices.

Conclusion

Introducing students to corpus and stylistic analyses helps students to be more aware of academic English commonly used in academic articles with more active, contributive, and

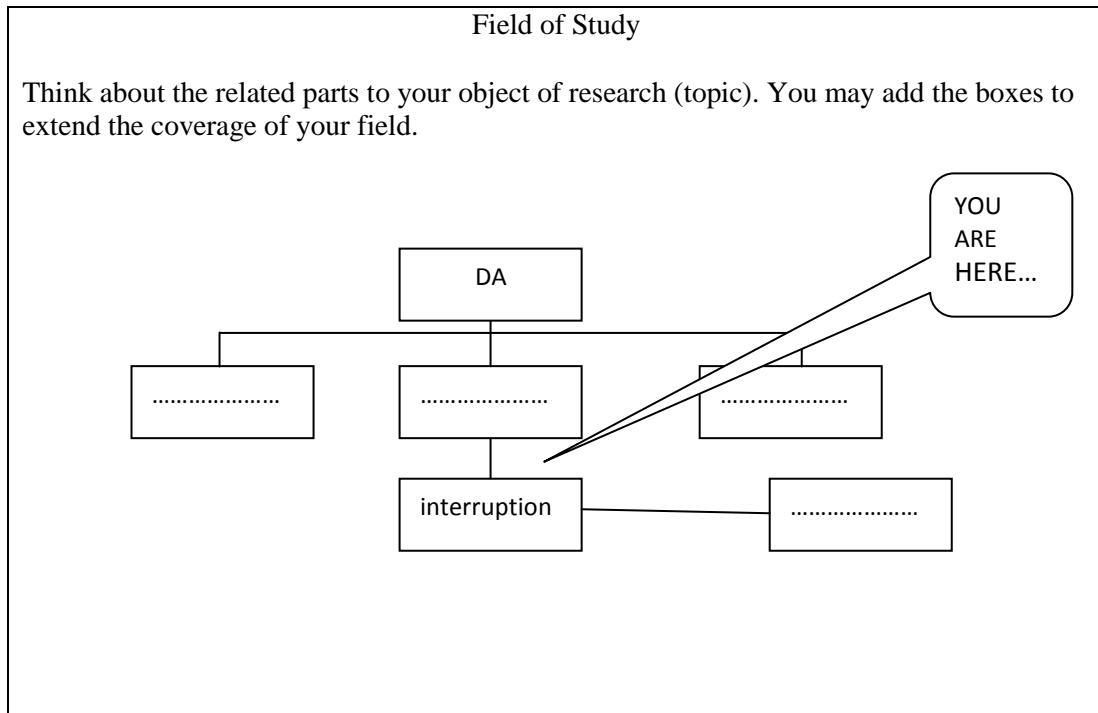
independent efforts for thesis revision. However, there are three components need to underline here; the use of guided task, model texts, and students' writings. Guided task derived from the 'structured materials' (Skehan 1998:56) is needed to keep students working on tract in order to focus on the target stylistic awareness. In that case, in order to make students progress writing properly and effectively, and to reduce their reliance to thesis advisor by working more independently, it is necessary that the supervisor provides the guidelines.

Then, related to the model texts, and students' writings, this study shows that awareness on the EAW discourse; the format and features, gives students idea on the appropriate pattern used in EAW. On the other hand, awareness on the linguistic choices gives the fills to the discourse. Both of the awareness derive from the analysis to two kinds of corpora; the model texts and the students' corpora. The first is rich in information on the more proper English academic language; the later is equally important informing writing problems.

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Appendices
Appendix 1 Sample Guideline



Appendix 2 Sample Manual Notes

Put the expressions the way writers say contradiction in the first column, and the way you did the same thing in the second column.

Contradiction

No	Source Texts	Students' Texts
1.
2.
3.
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
etc		

Appendix 3 Sample Concordance Lines

1. Take one word in boxes from your draft. Search them in your corpus of the target texts.

As the last step in method of the research, I use the form of narratives for the explanation of analysis the data analysis and diagram to explain the step of sign analysis.

1 and the discussion in descriptions of context of use. This emphasis means that the linguistic data bec applying 1.txt
2 9. together and plan a role play together () and use ((inaudible)) 10. [11. Trainer: is being able to applying 1.txt
3 han propositional content. That is, interlocutors use it when they wish to contradict ‘expectations abo applying 1.txt
4 and nuanced accounts of talk in their contexts of use. This article has shown that linguistic ethnograp applying 1.txt
5 then it will not do, for a variety of reasons, to use features of linguistic form as sole, or even inva applying 2.txt
6 ity appear to take for granted although they make use of these on an ongoing basis. The meaning of a tu applying 2.txt
7 al’ apparently to verify the student’s ability to use the word appropriately. The next question is intrappling 2.txt
8 llows word-initial /z/, especially that he cannot use the communicative strategy of avoidance (Schachte applying 2.txt
9 through which this is accomplished does not make use of interrogative syntax. These turns are sometime applying 2.txt
10 ning. In line 3, the tutor corrects the student’s use of ‘come back’ instead of ‘go back.’ After that, applying 2.txt
11 To summarize, tutors and students make extensive use of QA sequences to attend to the students’ lingui applying 2.txt
12 the ability of L2 speakers to make sophisticated use of the linguistic and cognitive processes they ha applying 2.txt
13 epertoire of request strategies, more target-like use and more specific addressee design. Other studies applying 3.txt
14 learners’ ability to compliment (Billmyer 1990), use sentence final particles (Sawyer 1992), and perfo applying 3.txt
15 earch, Kobayashi and Rinnert (2003) found greater use of pre-request strategies among high-proficiency applying 3.txt
16 ncy levels were similar to native speakers in the use of conventionally indirect strategies, but lower applying 3.txt
17 to see systematic differences in how interactants use interactional devices, only in how often they use applying 3.txt
18 use interactional devices, only in how often they use them. Being originally designed for DCT data, spe applying 3.txt
19 lso means that CA is traditionally disinclined to use features of the physical context, the social rela applying 3.txt
20 vels of L2 proficiency differ systematically. Our use of role play data and a trained interlocutor consa applying 3.txt
21 uncover procedures that interactants demonstrably use in co-constructing their request sequences. We wi applying 3.txt
22 ove to treat all participants equally but did not use static scripts and adapted to the participants as applying 3.txt

23 as the target of the interaction, and the initial use of ‘actually’ as a
disalignment token projecting applying 3.txt
24 Brasdefer 2007b) that higher proficiency learners use more supportive
moves, presumably because their g applying 3.txt
25 situational variation but found very little. The use of pre-expansions was
similar across situations f applying 3.txt
26 of sequences in our data, and to describe how the use of preliminary moves
changed with proficiency. It applying 3.txt
27 y the overall structure of the talk. Overall, the use of CA methods
highlighted how proficiency affects applying 3.txt
etc

2. Do you find it? Now, search it in your friends’ corpora.
3. Compare how it is used in the source texts.
4. When it is not found in your corpora, and/or when you want to validate more, Let’s find it together in the online corpora. ☺

Students' Grammatical Problems in Writing Simple Paragraphs: Lack of Grammatical Competency or Language Carelessness?

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Abstract

The real language condition in Indonesia is that most learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) have already had and communicated in their own mother tongues and *bahasa Indonesia* as the national language. For many reasons, the grammar instruction of EFL is essential to build grammatical competency, language awareness, and communicative ability. Therefore, the instructional processes of English grammar have an important role in order to provide the learners with sufficient grammatical competency and language awareness on English. The grammatical problems made by the students in written communication are not relatively allowed, then. The students' grammatical problems in writing should be initially corrected and academically improved. This paper, developed based on a part of research results conducted in 2013/2014 academic year at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta, Padang, discusses *the forms and types of students' grammatical problems in writing simple paragraphs*. In addition, *the discussion continues to analyze whether the grammatical problems found in the learners' simple paragraphs can be academically assigned as lack of grammatical competency and/or their own language carelessness*. The data are students' grammatical problems found in their written simple paragraphs. The data analysis may reasonably come to the conclusion that most of the grammatical problems belong to student's lack of grammatical competency and the others to their language carelessness.

Keywords/phrases: *grammatical problems, writing, paragraph, grammatical competency, language carelessness*

A. Introduction

Academically, the learning outcomes of EFL learning are the result of the interactions between the teaching and learning processes, the context of the instructional programs, and the students' factors. The teaching context, on one side, is the environment set by the teacher and the institution through the course structure, curriculum content, methods of teaching and assessment. The student factors, on another side, may include prior knowledge, ways of learning, motivation, expectation, etc. Both student and teaching presage factors interact in particular and complex ways to produce an approach to learning, which produces its characteristic outcome (Biggs, 1989; and see also Refnita, 2013a, b). In accordance with this, learning outcomes are resulted from instructional programs and practical executions, in general.

It is highly believed that there are many components needed in any instructional programs and learning processes. One important thing, among the others, to build linguistic competence and language awareness on EFL is the grammar instruction. Well-programmed of grammatical instructions and professional execution at classrooms may build better linguistic competence and language awareness on the foreign language. Moreover, the success of EFL learning becomes higher if it is supported by appropriate assessments and school's facilities. It is sure that the ideal outcomes are not always easy to be obtained as they are orally mentioned.

Based on pre-observation and writer's experience as a lecturer of *English Grammar* and *Writing II* subjects at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta, it has been found that there are a lot of grammatical problems (may be errors and/or mistakes) made by the learners in writing simple paragraphs. Many grammatical problems can be assigned as their carelessness because those should not have been problems anymore; the grammatical features

are academically believed as the basic ones, in fact. The problems frequently appeared in the students' writings and they are easily found in their spoken language.

Some students told that they did not know the correct grammatical features due to lack of knowledge and grammatical competency or they had already forgotten. The unexpected reality is not good for academic condition of EFL learning in Indonesia as many students of English Department of the teacher-training and education faculty do not have sufficient language awareness and linguistic competence. The students cannot integrate the knowledge of grammar learnt in *Grammar subjects* into writing skill as they are learning *Writing subjects*. Purposely, the offering of *Grammar subjects* in line with appropriate *Writing subjects* at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta is to enable learners to integrate the grammatical competence and language awareness into language skills.

As it has already been known, writing skill belongs to a complex-integrated skill since it needs grammatical competence, language awareness, and ideas to be communicated. As the candidates of EFL teachers, the English Department students should have sufficient grammatical competence and language awareness in order to support their language skills, particularly writing skill. These all need well-planned programs, curriculum, and learning facilities.

In addition, it should be better understood that teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Indonesia has academic and socio-grammatical specifications. The real language condition in Indonesia is that most EFL learners have already had and communicated in their own mother tongues and *bahasa Indonesia* as the national language. Therefore, English is academically and practically taught for multilingual learners. The unique socio-grammatical conditions need serious-academic attention in order to have better results of EFL learning in this country. Among the others, the grammar instruction of the foreign language is fundamental to build grammatical competency, language awareness, and communicative ability, as well. In accordance with this, the instructional processes of English grammar at university level, particularly at the study programs of English education, have academic and important roles in order to provide the learners with sufficient grammatical competency and language awareness on English.

Although the grammatical problems made by the students in oral-direct verbal communication are sometimes permissible, but they are not relatively allowed in written one; grammatical problems should be avoided in written language, in fact. Thus, it is highly reasonable to state that the students' grammatical problems in writing should be initially corrected and academically improved in appropriate ways.

This paper, developed based on a part of research results conducted in 2013/2014 academic year at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta, Padang, discusses *the forms and types of students' grammatical problems in writing simple paragraphs*. In addition, *the discussion continues to analyze whether the grammatical problems found in the learners' simple paragraphs can be academically assigned as lack of grammatical competency and/or their own language carelessness*. The data are students' grammatical problems found in their written simple paragraphs. The data were collected during the teaching-learning processes of *Writing II class* at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta in 2013. The data analysis presented in this paper is still preliminary which for a while focuses on the forms and types of students' grammatical problems and how they came to the problems.

B. Brief Review of Related Theories

1. Learning English Grammar for Indonesian Learners: Is it Necessary?

As linguistically known, the nature of English grammar and structure is concerned with the rules and systems on the level of sounds, words or lexicons, clauses and sentences, and meaning (see Lyons, 1990; Song, 2001). The nature is tied to a variety of features either universal or unique. If English grammar and the grammar of *bahasa Indonesia* are compared, for example, some differences as well as similarities are easily found. One of important

differences is that English is a *tensed language*, while *bahasa Indonesia* (and the majority of Malayan languages) are *tenseless language* (see Lyons, 1987; Jufrizal, 2010; Refnita, 2013a, b). Another difference can be seen on aspect, modality, and phrase structure. In English, aspect and modality are expressed in predicate; while in *bahasa Indonesia* they are simply expressed by means of lexical items. In addition, English phrase structure is arranged by having the modifier precede the modified items, while in *bahasa Indonesia* the modified item precedes the modifier (see further Lyons, 1990; Saeed, 1997; Jufrizal, 2010). Such grammatical differences may be parts of important reasons to say that learning EFL grammar is necessary for Indonesian learners.

In addition, Williams in Bygate et. al. (eds.) (1994:109–110) argues that there is a considerable difference between teaching grammar to non-native speakers and that to native speakers. Native speakers are already competent in their language varieties. They know the forms and the meanings of language; there is a form-function fusion for them. In teaching grammar to a native speaker of English, then, this communicative rule would not have to be taught – unless one wished to ensure awareness of it. The position of non-native speaker, however, is different. They would have to be taught the meaning associated with the structures. If learners are not taught or given the opportunity to learn, they will never know because the relationship between syntactic form and meaning is as arbitrary as that between lexis and meaning. Knowledge about the difference between *She didn't go* and *She doesn't go* needs to be possessed by non-native speakers because it is an important rule in communicative grammar. The possession of such knowledge helps people 'to say what they mean'.

Another important idea on the significance of teaching grammar in any language learning program, including the EFL learning in Indonesia, is presented by Tonkyn (in Bygate et.al (eds.), 1994:6). According to him, it is widely believed that a formal grammar instruction can help to prevent the premature fossilization which an excessive emphasis on the performance of communicative tasks may bring. Besides, it can assist learners, especially adults, to learn more rapidly and efficiently. It may happen because adults can better understand **Abstract** rules and draw logical conclusion for communicative purpose. This is really necessary for the English Department students of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta as they are trained to be professional EFL teachers.

Many similar reasons and psychological argumentations have been argued by linguists and learning methodologists saying that EFL learners, and of course Indonesian learners, cannot avoid the programs of grammar instructions. It becomes more necessary and academically needed for the students of the English teacher training and education, such the English Department of Bung Hatta University (see Refnita, 2013a). It is almost impossible for the students to have better English language skills if they do not have the grammatical competence and language awareness. The communicative competence and language skills are normally supported by good grammatical competence and language awareness, then.

2. The Language Awareness and Grammatical Competence in Writing

It is ideally and practically believed that grammar instructions (whatever the names for subject offered at the EFL learning at particular institutions) build the linguistic-grammatical competence and language awareness, as well to support the communicative competence performed in four language skills. Therefore, the instructional programs of English grammar, for instance, must have something to do with listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Well-planned grammatical instructions will give academic effects to better language awareness and performance in the four language skills. Among the four skills, grammar may have direct and close contribution to writing skill (see Uso-Juan et.al in Uso-Juan and Martinez-Flor (eds.), 2006:391; Frodesen in Celce-Murcia (ed.), 2001:233 – 239).

According to Leech (in Bygate et.al. (eds.), 1994:18), knowledge of language, especially grammar, needs to be possessed by a good language teacher. Accordingly, a 'model' teacher of languages ideally should: (i) be capable of putting across a sense of how grammar interacts with the lexicon as a communicative-cultural system (both 'communicativeness' and 'system' will