

LEXICAL DENSITY AND NOMINALIZATION ON THE STUDENTS' ENGLISH PARAGRAPHS

Sri Mulatsih
English Department
Universitas Dian Nuswantoro
sri.mulatsih@dsn.dinus.ac.id

Abstract

In writing English paragraphs, the students should consider several things to make their paragraphs well accepted. One of them is their lexical density and nominal groups that support them. Lexical density (LD) is a measure of the density of information in any passage of a text, according to how tightly the lexical items (content words) have been packed into the grammatical structure. It can be measured, in English, as the number of lexical words per clause (Halliday and Martin, 1983). This study is aimed at describing the lexical density of the students' English paragraphs and figuring out the nominal groups that support them. The data of this study are in the form of 25 English paragraphs written by the second semester students of English Department, Universitas Dian Nuswantoro. This descriptive qualitative study was conducted by using the following steps: reading the students' paragraph, measuring the lexical density of the paragraphs, identifying the nominal groups on the paragraphs, interpreting and drawing conclusion. The result showed that the average lexical density of the students' paragraphs is still low (ranging from 2 to 3.5). It tends to be caused by the lack of nominal groups used by the students in their paragraphs. Based on the findings, it is suggested that the lecturers should have strategies to enhance the lexical density of the students' paragraphs. One of them is by applying nominalization in their sentences.

Keywords: Lexical density, nominalization, students' English paragraph

INTRODUCTION

Teaching how to write effectively is one of the most important life-long skills the teachers/lecturers impart to their students. When teaching writing, they must be sure to select resources and support materials that not only aid them in teaching how to write, but that will also be the most effective in helping their students learn to write. Learning to write can be started from sentences or paragraph. Paragraph is a group of words that share the same ideas. Teaching to write a paragraph is not as easy as the one of other skills such as listening, reading, or speaking because in teaching writing, the lecturers should make the students be able to write a good paragraph. A good paragraph should fulfil several criteria such as grammatical, cohesive, coherent, and lexically dense. A paragraph is called lexically dense since it has high lexical density.

Lexical density is one of the characteristic features of the written language. Written language is not the same language with the spoken language. There are several features that make the spoken and written language differ each other. The term 'written language' does not only refer to language which is written down. Likewise, the term 'spoken language' does not only refers to language which is said aloud. For instance, if someone reads an academic paper aloud the features of the language are more like those of written language than spoken language. Gerot and Wignell (1994:161) point out that "spoken language tends to be grammatically complex and written language tends to be lexically complex. Spoken language tends to be grammatically intricate, whereas written language tends to be lexically dense."

Halliday (2002:329) says, “The lexical density is the proportion of lexical items (content words) to the total discourse.” It can be measured in various ways: the ratio of lexical items either to the total running words or to some higher grammatical unit, most obviously the clause; with or without weighing for relative frequency (in the language) of the lexical items themselves. Content words consist of words such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. These words carry many of the experiential contents of the clause. They are also words which come from open sets of options. For instance, there is theoretically no limit to the number of nouns but the number of, say, prepositions is finite. New nouns crop up every day but it is a while since anyone has come up with a new preposition. Grammatical words, on the other hand, come from closed sets of options. These are words such as preposition, conjunction, auxiliary verbs, modal verbs, pronouns, and articles. The meanings they encode tend to support the experiential content of the clause. Gerot and Wignell (1994:163) point out that “lexical density is calculated by dividing the number of content words in clause complex by the number of clauses in the complex. One way to make a paragraph lexically dense is nominalization.

Nominalization refers to the use of a verb or an adjective into a noun, with or without morphological transformation, so that the word can now act as the head of a noun phrase (nominal groups). Gerot and Wignell (1994:141) point out that “a nominal group is a group of words which has a noun (a word which names a person, place or thing) as its head word and includes all additional information related to that noun.” Eggins (2004:96) says, “The nominal group is the part of the clause that contains noun and the words that can accompany nouns.” As a means of representing experience, nominal group has a number of functional components (Gerot and Wignell, 1994):

Thing, the noun itself that is subject to further modification and specification;

Deictic, specifying how the Thing in question can be identified in relation to its context;

Post-deictic, identifying a subset of the class of Thing by referring to its fame or familiarity, its status in the text, or its similarity or dissimilarity to some other designated subset;

Numerative, indicating some numerical feature of the subset: either quantity or order, either exact or inexact.

Epithet, indicating some quality of the subset, which may be either objective (experiential) or subjective (attitudinal/interpersonal);

Classifier, telling ‘what kind’ or ‘what type’; and

Qualifier, providing additional defining or circumstantial information (post-modification) about the Thing.

Based on the problem above, this study is focused on the lexical density on the students’ English paragraphs, and nominal groups that support them.

METHOD

This study is a descriptive qualitative one that is aimed at the describing the lexical density of the students’ English paragraphs and the nominal groups that support them. The data are in the form of 25 English paragraphs written by the second semester students of English department, Dian Nuswantoro University in academic year of 2016-2017. The students’ English paragraphs under study are those that are developed using comparison and contrast.

To get the lexical density of the students' English paragraph and the nominal groups, the framework proposed by Gerot and Wignell was applied. The lexical density is achieved by calculating the number of content word per clause and the nominal groups is achieved by identifying the noun (Thing) as the head and all additional information (functional elements) related to the noun. Those are *deictic* (D), *post deictic* (PD), *numerative* (N), *Epithet* (Epi), *Classifier* (C), and *Qualifier* (Q).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Lexical Density on the Students' English Paragraphs

The lexical density of the students' English paragraphs can be seen on table 1 below.

Table 1 Lexical Density of the Students' English Paragraphs

NO	LEXICAL DENSITY	Σ	%
1	≤ 1.9	3	12
2	2.0 - 3.5	13	52
3	3.6 - 5.0	6	24
4	5.1 - 6.4	3	12
		25	100

Table 1 shows that the average lexical density of the students' English paragraphs is 2.0 - 3.5. This can be categorized as the low one. It is based on Halliday (1985:80), who points out that "a typical average lexical density for spoken English is between 1.5 and 2, whereas the figure for written English settles down somewhere between 3 and 6, depending on the level of formality in the writing." These low lexically dense paragraphs are caused by the number of short clauses that do not contain sufficient content words. Among 25 paragraphs there are only 9 (36 %) that fulfill the criteria of written text.

In this study, two examples of paragraphs are presented. One paragraph is considered to fulfill the criteria of written text, while the second is not.

Text 1.

Yogyakarta and Semarang have several differences. When we come to Central Java, there are two famous cities located there. They are Yogyakarta and Semarang. Although geographically Yogyakarta is located in Central Java, it does not include in Central Java. Semarang is famous for its industrial activity, while Jogja is famous for its beautiful amazing tourist resorts. Most of the people in Yogyakarta use 'Krama Inggil' language, but Semarang people prefer to use 'Ngoko' in their daily conversation. Although they have differences, Yogyakarta and Semarang also have some similarities. Both Semarang and Yogyakarta have the same sweet taste food. Both of them have monuments. Semarang has Tugumuda and Yogyakarta has Monumen Jogja Kembali. They both have the same tradition and culture too. Semarang and Yogyakarta are also famous for their traditional clothes.

Text 1 fulfills the criteria of written text because the idea is given in a packed paragraph with high lexical density and low grammatical intricacy. It has 68 content words and 14 clauses. So its lexical density is $68/14=4.8$.

Text 2

I live in Semarang since I was child. And I was born here at Semarang. But I always go to Solo when holiday. 3 years ago Semarang only have 3 cinema with an expensive cost, and Solo have 5 cinemas with cheap cost. But in this year Semarang have 6 cinema although still with expensive. But it is no problem with us. At kuliner side, semarang have favorite food, bandeng presto and Solo have serabi notosuman. All of the food is yummy and I like it too. About the tourist object, semarang have Water blaster and Solo have Pandawa waterpark. All of them is so fun. Their facilities are almost the same. Cost and ticket is the same too. Semarang have 7 malls and solo have 7 malls too.

Text 2 is considered not to fulfill the criteria of written text because it is like the spoken language that is written down. The grammar of the text is also poor. The lexical density of the text is low, that is $50/18=2.7$. The student prefers to use short clauses containing few content words.

Nominal Groups on the Students' English Paragraphs

The elements and the number of nominal groups written by the students can be seen on table 2 below.

Table 2. Elements of Nominal groups on the Students' English Paragraphs

NO	ELEMENTS OF NOMINAL GROUPS	Σ	%
1	D+T	155	26.8
2	D+T+Q	53	9.1
3	D+C+T	111	19.1
4	D+ Epi +T	174	30.1
5	C+T+Q	72	12.4
6	D+C+T+Q	15	2.5
		580	100

Table 2 shows that the elements of nominal groups the students mostly used is Deictic (D)+Epithet (Epi)+Thing (T). It reaches 174 or 30.1 % of 580 nominal groups written by the students. The second preferred is Deictic (D)+ Thing. The two elements are mostly used since they are considered easier compared to the others. The examples of those elements are as follows:

D+T

The	ticket
Deictic	Thing

D+T+Q

The	city	in Central Java
Deictic	Thing	Qualifer

D+C+T

A	student	city
Deictic	classifier	Thing

D+ Epi +T

The	expensive	cinema
Deictic	Epithet	Thing

C+T+Q

industrial	city	For tourists
Classifier	Thing	Qualifier

D+C+T+Q

Some	American	restaurant	in Semarang
Deictic	Qlassifier	Thing	Quantifier

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the more than 50 % of the students' paragraphs written by the students not yet fulfill the criteria of written texts since their lexical density is ranging from 2 to 3.5. This is caused by the evidence that the students prefer to use many short clauses with few content words rather than short lexically dense clauses. This is also caused by the lack of nominal groups in their paragraphs.

The elements of the nominal groups the students prefer to write are *Deictic+Epithet+Thing* and *Deictic + Thing*. The two elements are mostly written by the students in their paragraphs since they are easier compared to the others. To improve the lexical density of the paragraphs written by the students, it is suggested that the lecturers should teach the students to make the long nominal groups contained in every clause or to apply nominalization in their paragraphs.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Eggin, Suzzane. 1994. *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*. London: Printer.
- Gerot, L. and P. Wignel. 1994. *Making Sense of Functional Grammar*. Cammeray, New South Wales: Antipodean Educational Enterprises.
- Halliday, M.A.K. 1994. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.(2nd ed). London: Arnold.

_____. 1985. *Spoken and Written Language*. Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University Press.

Halliday, M.A.K. and Hasan, Ruqaiya. 1985. *Language, Context, and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective*. Victoria: Deakin University Press.

Oshima, Alice and Hogue, Ann. 1999. *Writing Academic English*. NY: Addison Wesley Longman.