

Frequency of Selected Linguistic Features Used in Certain Parts of Teacher Education Students' Theses

Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research
Vol. 3 No.5, 83-89
December 2015 Part I
P-ISSN 2350-7756
E-ISSN 2350-8442
www.apjmr.com

Romel M. Acheron

Batangas State University-JPLPC Campus, College of Industrial Technology, Malvar, Batangas, Philippines
arcelomme@yahoo.com

Date Received: November 10, 2015; Date Revised: December 8, 2015

Abstract – *Writing is one of the macro-skills that can be developed through practice and enough exposures of individuals to the field of their interests. This skill can also be identified in the so-called theses as outputs presented by the authors—either students or practitioners of any field. According to Bitchener [1], “Writing an empirically based thesis requires a clear understanding of what is expected or required for each part or section” (p.1). However, there are still some unpublished theses under criticism as manifested in the negative feedback or reactions of both general and specialized audience based on the quality in general, and on the clarity of thoughts in particular.*

In thesis, a good facility of the English language is indeed significant which makes the individual reader easily understand the flow of the ideas of any topic covered in the study. This paper aims to determine and analyze the linguistic features frequently used in theses of teacher education students at Batangas State University-JPLPC Campus, Malvar, Batangas in the academic year 2013-2014. The linguistic features used in any of the parts of theses have been observed to determine its clarity in terms of form, use, and meaning, namely: present and past tenses, present perfect tense, passive and active voices, citations and qualifications, and commentary have been the main focus of this study.

Based on the analysis and interpretation of the data coded and classified, results reveal that almost all of the concepts in the introduction of theses are certainly lifted and copied as indicated in the authors' incorrect and improper citations. Theses read and coded appear to be a little more one percent use of qualifications which denotes discredits of points regarding the issue or concepts reviewed as reflected in the students' strong claim for the said concepts. There is also a little amount of commentary to the theories or concepts and even to some findings reviewed. Therefore, the theses read and reviewed based on the sections can be improved and edited for clarity and viability, if possible for publication purposes.

Keywords – *Linguistic features, and theses*

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge of the use of language has great importance for writing theses. Writing is one of the macro-skills that can be developed through practice and enough exposures of individuals to the field of their interests. This skills can also be identified in the so-called theses as outputs presented by the authors -- either students or practitioners of any field. However, there are still some unpublished theses under criticism as manifested in the negative feedback or reactions of both general and specialized audience based on the quality in general, and on the clarity of thoughts in particular. According to Swales and Feak [2], “Most instructors tolerate some small language errors in

papers written by nonnative speakers; however, errors that can be avoided by careful proofreading are generally considered less acceptable. Such common errors committed in writing are the use of present and past tense, present perfect tense, passive and active voices, citations, qualifications, and commentary. Consequently, Murcia [3] concluded that “successful written text is a complex task which requires simultaneous control over a number of language systems and other cultural considerations” (p.230).

In all academic institutions, theses have been considered the capstones of all the concepts learned. These can also be the bases to qualify students for graduation as these appear to be the partial

requirements in the program or degree. In this manner, the quality of the manuscripts seems to be emphasized to ensure its language use in the contexts and in the given fields. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman [4] stated that the “performance among four skills, specifically in writing, requires the knowledge of grammar and usage as it gives relevance in learning the elements of language such as sound, structure, and vocabulary, which are useful in communication” (p.23). They added that “knowledge in grammar develops one’s proficiency in both oral and written communication” (p.24). Consequently, Murcia [3] the “topics must be carefully designed, sequenced, and structured as another element of the theses or the paper” (p.225).

In theses, good facility of the English language is indeed significant which makes the individual reader easily understands the flow of the ideas as regards to topic covered in the study. The linguistic features used in any of the parts of theses have been observed to determine its clarity in terms of form, use, and meaning. Murcia [3] emphasized that if ‘language problems’ occur, then there are ‘appropriate ways or stage’ to correct them (p. 229). In this situation, “Editing as a form of ‘identifying errors is essential’ if not ‘to illuminate’ but to lessen ‘grammatical problems’”. In fact, ‘editing is certainly essential’ to the ‘production of good texts’ (theses) which seems to be complete having been shaped by content, organization, attention to the needs of the reader, and a consideration of its purpose” (p.229).

With the background expounded and internalized, this paper aims to determine and analyze the linguistic features frequently used in theses of teacher education students at Batangas State University-JPLPC Campus, Malvar, Batangas in the academic year 2013-2014. The linguistic features: present and past tenses, present perfect tense, passive and active voices, citations and qualifications, and commentary, had been coded and classified according to their relevance on the form, use, and meaning in selected sections of theses utilized.

To determine the ideas and its aspect, present tense, past tense, and present perfect tense are some of the linguistic features relevant in the identified sections of theses. The tenses of verbs seem to vary significantly as these may provide specific information and concepts. Serrano [5] pointed out that “present tense is used to express a general truth” (p.74), while “past tense is ordinarily used to express

something that happened at a specific time” (p.78). The present perfect tense refers to “an action that has its beginning in the past, but continues to the present moment” (p.86).

Giving distance to the statement or issue is also a good point. According to Finkelstein [6], the voice (passive and active) is identified whether the writers appear to be certain and responsible to something, or to “take credit for something” that is certain and good (p. 235). Active voice is “more direct and clearer--providing the most information with the fewest words, while passive voice may be useful when one wants to hide responsibility” (p.235).

In some inferences, citations and qualifications are necessary to have basis on drawing conclusion and on justifying the theoretical findings and inquiry. According to Connelly [7], “citing a source is an approach of supporting the evidence collected” (p.269). This appears to be the basis for all the data gathered or discovered. This may also be a justification of whether a result is congruent or in contrast to theory or concepts, or even some research findings cited. Apparently, it is necessary to consider the writers’ judgment on the data, issues, or theoretical inquiry. Swales and Feak [2] emphasized that “qualification is a technique in judging about the data. Good judgment and presentation are some of the requirements to determine whether the writers are certain or uncertain to the data stated and presented” (p.125).

As a support to the citation and qualification, another essential quality of the paper is the writers’ commentaries on the data gathered and presented. Writers’ commentaries are given position at examining the data, and perhaps at claiming the opportunities to give feedback on the greatest to less important ideas or data. Commentary, for Swales and Feak [2], is an “art of finding the right strength of claim for the data gathered, and then providing appropriate statements” (p.125), whether a contrast, description, prescription, or assessment towards them. Some types of commentary covered in the study are: Justifying the methodology, interpreting the results (cited), citing agreement with past studies, commenting on the data, admitting difficulties in interpretation, pointing out the discrepancies, and calling for further research.

The results of this paper will be of great help to the College of Teacher Education in particular, and to the university in general, in such a way that it can be

the channel of providing teachers, students, and other research enthusiasts an access to make presentable and publishable papers in the local, national, or international refereed journals.

This analysis is anchored on Connelly's concept or theory [7] which emphasizes that paragraphs function to introduce a subject, explain a point, tell a story, compare two ideas, support a thesis, or summarize a writers' main point" (p.112). Connelly describes that "writing is more than an act of a self-expression; it is an act of communication" (p.27). He added that "certain documents such as research papers, theses, and dissertations have unique style and format; however, writers who fail to follow the standard forms may alienate readers by appearing unprofessional" (p.35). He suggests that if there is "no formal directions or guidelines exist, review existing samples, or ask an instructor, or adviser, or panel members what is expected" (p.35).

Linguistic features are also anchored on the ideas of Reid [8] that "citations, qualifications, and commentary are necessary in a research paper or thesis" (p.640). In this situation, Reid added that the "knowledge of the literature or any source that has no references to other key works may simply be one writer's opinion and/or may contain erroneous information" (p.641). With its aims to provide an accurate description of the linguistic features, Tejero [9] emphasizes that the acceptable level of accuracy and reliability of the findings is based on critical and logical analysis of data" (p.36).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

With the background expounded and internalized, this paper aims to determine and analyze the linguistic features frequently used in theses of teacher education students at Batangas State University-JPLPC Campus, Malvar, Batangas in the academic year 2013-2014. The linguistic features: present and past tenses, present perfect tense, passive and active voices, citations and qualifications, and commentary, had been coded and classified according to their relevance on the form, use, and meaning in selected sections of theses utilized.

METHODS

Research Design

This paper used the descriptive and qualitative analysis to analyze the linguistic features frequently used in the theses of teacher education students at

Batangas State University-JPLPC Campus, Malvar, Batangas in the academic year 2013-2014.

This paper mainly investigated the teacher education students' theses because they are already available in the university library, unlike other theses of the other programs which are still under the keeping of each dean or associate dean.

The researcher conducted the study in 2014 as he can utilize the theses in the academic year 2013-2014. Apparently, this paper primarily focused on the linguistic features frequently used in certain parts of teacher education students' theses not because the theses of the said program have the problems. Another reason, on the other hand, was that teacher education students appeared to be more engaged in writing activities like essays, narratives, field study reports, exposition, reflection essays, and lesson planning. Finally, this study is limited to teacher education students' theses because the researcher believed that the results of the study can be more concrete, reliable, valid, and attained in a specific period or duration of the study as this paper considered the linguistic features such as present and past tenses, present perfect tense, passive and active voices, citations and qualifications, and commentary which are frequently used in certain parts of theses, namely: introduction, methods, results, and discussions (IMRD).

The Corpus

This linguistic analysis utilized 15 defended and approved undergraduate theses during the academic year 2013-2014. Purposively, out of the total number of 21 theses, 15 had been used for analysis, written by almost female students. The introduction sections of theses comprise more or less 3 to 5 pages; 2 pages only for the methods; and 2 pages for the results and discussion.

By the permission of the Associate Dean of the college and the university librarian, all sections covered by this analysis had been photocopied. Four copies of were made for me, and for my three inter-coders. A self-made instrument was utilized, comprising the observations (of both the author himself and his colleagues as inter-raters) on the linguistic features frequently used in theses based on the following parts: introduction, methods and materials, results and discussion. A paper-and-pencil approach has been employed to identify and

categorize the linguistic features frequently used in the following parts of every individual thesis.

Procedure

Request letter on the utilization of the teacher education students' undergraduate theses in 2013-2014 had been sent to the librarian with prior oral permission from the Associate Dean of the College of Teacher Education (CTE). In response to the request, the letter of permission and consideration had been issued for my access to the undergraduate theses in the library. After the issuance of the permit, photocopies of the sections or parts of theses needed in this analysis had been provided by the librarian for my easy access. Four copies had been prepared for my three inter-coders, and one for me. A self-made instrument had been made which was validated by my colleagues as inter-coders. Similarly, statisticians had been consulted to check and verify the coding process including the mode, percentage and percentage agreement. Finally, peer review had been employed for the maximum reliability and clarity of the coding process.

Data Analysis

Linguistic features coded and classified are present and past tenses, present perfect tense, passive and active voices, citations and qualifications, and commentary as they frequently appear in the identified sections of theses, i.e., introduction, methods, results, and discussions.

Inter-coding

Three language experts participated as inter-coders to establish the reliability of the coding process. There were two colleagues from BatStateU-Main Campus- one a PhD in Applied Linguistics, who is now retired yet a parttime professor at the Graduate Program handling all English language and literature, foreign language courses, and taught English for more than 30 years; the other is also a PhD in Applied Linguistics, a retired professor from De La Salle, Lipa, a part-time professor in both undergraduate and graduate programs teaching English language, foreign languages, and Literature courses, a prolific writer of several foreign language books like English as a second language, Japanese, and French, and an active editor of one of the leading and competing publishing companies in the Philippines. The third is a foreigner PhD student, major in English Language Studies

(ELS) at UST, who is already in his Dissertation Writing I.

The inter-coders mainly focused on the linguistic features of theses, namely: present and past tense, present perfect tense, passive and active voices, citations and qualifications, and commentary. The four of us coded and classified the sections based on the linguistic features independently using photocopies. After the coding process, our individual observation and remarks were then compared.

The observation and remarks of four of us were based on my self-made scale to determine the number of occurrences (frequency) of the linguistic features.

- 5 Most frequently found in all or almost sentences or paragraphs (Mo)
- 4 Often found in more than half of the paragraphs (O)
- 3 Sometimes found in a half of the whole paragraph (So)
- 2 Seldom found in sentences or paragraphs (Se)
- 1 Never found in sentences or paragraphs (N)

After the comparison and consolidation of remarks, the data gathered had been treated with the use of simple statistics, such as most frequent (mode), percentage and percent agreement. The *mode* refers to the most frequent item or unit which is known as the highest number of entity in a given set (number of occurrences). To determine the portion of the sampled population, percentage is used as expressed: Frequency divided by the total number of population, multiplied by one hundred $[(f/N)100]$, while the percentage agreement is used to determine the portion of the researcher and the inter-coders' agreement on their observations in terms of linguistic features used in theses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper presents the results of the study supported by series of points regarding the analysis of the linguistic features frequently used in theses of TES based on the following parts: introduction, methods, results and discussion, and conclusion. Specifically, this paper aims to analyze the identified linguistic features frequently used: present tense, past tense, present perfect tense, passive voice, active voice, citations, qualifications, and commentary. Table 1 shows the modal scores of linguistic features frequently used in theses sections.

Table 1. Modal Scores of Linguistic Features Frequently Used in Theses Sections

Linguistic Features	I		M		R		D	
	Mo	F	Mo	F	Mo	F	Mo	F
Present Tense	3	So	2	Se	3	So	3	So
Past Tense	3	So	4	O	1	Se	3	So
Present Perfect Tense	3	So	1	N	1	Se	1	N
Passive Voice	2	Se	2	Se	4	O	4	O
Active Voice	3	So	2	Se	1	N	1	N
Citations	2	Se	2	Se	1	N	2	Se
Qualifications	1	N	1	N	1	N	1	Se
Commentary	1	N	1	N	1	N	1	Se

Present Tense

In introduction section as can be seen in Table 1, there is a *sometimes* use of present tense with a modal score of 3. The result reveals that theses coded and evaluated seem to be in the average level. This means that there is balance or proportionate use of present tenses in theses sections. It can also be seen that in the method section, the use of present tense is *seldom* with a modal score of 2. The result shows that methodology section, as per institutional format is concerned, the use of past tense had been emphasized by the writers. This situation made the writers de-emphasized the use of present tenses in explaining or describing the design, respondents, instruments, procedure, data analysis or statistical tools. After the analysis and interpretation of data, results and discussion are found in the *sometimes* use of present tense as both of them have a modal score of 3. This means that there is an average use of present tense in the results and discussion sections. Few present tenses are found in all sections to indicate general truth in contrast to the idea of Serrano that using present tense indicates general truth.

Past Tense

In terms of past tense, it can be seen in the table above that there is a *sometimes* use in the introduction with a modal score of 3, as compared to the methods section which is found to be *often* with a modal score of 4. For the results section, it can be seen that there is a *never* use with a modal score of 1, while the discussion section there is *sometimes* use with a modal score of 3. Results reveal that the use of past tense in introduction is in the average level; above average use in the methods; limited use in the results section; and

average level in the discussion section. This means the use of past tenses in the identified sections probably vary according to the style and form of writing of the authors as recommended by the university or institution.

Present Perfect Tense

As can be seen in the table, the use of present perfect tense is *sometimes* in introduction section with a modal score of 3; while *never* used in methods, results, and discussion sections with modal score of 1. The results show that there is limited use of present perfect tense specifically in the methods, results, and discussions, unlike in introduction section which is in the average use. It means that there is a more appropriate use of present perfect tense in the introduction section as Serrano stated that present perfect tense is an action that has its beginning in the past, but continues to the present moment.

Passive and Active Voice

As presented in the table above the use of passive voice is *seldom* in the introduction section with a modal score of 2; while *sometimes* used in active voice of similar section with a modal score of 3. As to methods, both passive and active voices are *seldom* with a modal score of 2. Passive voice is *often* in the results section with a modal score of 4; while the active voice is *seldom* with a modal score of 1 similar to the discussion section. This means that the use of passive voice may be reflected to the style and form indicated in the Batangas State University's Research Manual. Another, perhaps, the point is that, undergraduate theses are really advised to use passive voice as per reliability of data is concerned. Finkelstein stated that the "voice is identified whether the 'writers appear to be certain and responsible to something', or to 'take credit for something' that is certain and good. The use of passive voice may be "useful when one wants to hide responsibility" (p.235).

Citations and Qualification

The use of citations is *seldom* in the introduction, method, and discussion sections with a modal score of 2; while *never* in the results section with a modal score of 1. This means that writers are may be not fully equipped in citing sources in their theses as reflected in a little use of citations. These results are little closer in the use of qualification as *never* with a

modal score of 1. Results reveal that may be some writers used citations but they lack qualifications as their position to the statement or data is concerned. In contrast, Swales and Feak [2] emphasized that qualification is a technique in judging about the data. They added that good judgment and presentation are some of the requirements to determine whether the writers are certain or uncertain to the data stated and presented.

Commentary

Table 2 shows the commentary found in theses sections. Out of 15 theses coded, in terms of justifying the methodology 3 has in the introduction section; 5 in the methods; 5 in the results; and 2 in the discussion.

Table 2 Commentary Found in Theses Sections

Type of Commentary	I	M	R	D
	N=15	N=15	N=15	N=15
Justifying the methodology	3	5	5	2
Interpreting the results (cited)	5	0	4	0
Citing agreement with past studies	3	0	3	0
Commenting on the data	0	0	2	0
Admitting difficulties in interpretation	0	2	0	0
Pointing out the discrepancies	0	2	0	0
Calling for further research	0	0	0	12

As to interpreting the results (cited), 5 used in the introduction; and 4 in the results. While in citing agreement with past studies 3 use in the introduction; and 3 in the results. On commenting on data, only 2 used in the results. In admitting difficulties in interpretation, only 2 used in the methods. While in pointing out the discrepancies, only 2 used in the methods. As to calling for further research, 12 used in the discussion section, which may be a university style and form of writing.

In general, as can be seen in Table 1, there is *very low* use of commentary in all identified sections of theses with a modal score of 1, which is in contrast to the idea of Swales and Feak [2], that commentary is an “art of finding the right strength of claim for the

data gathered, and then of providing appropriate statements” (p.125).

Self-coding vs. Inter-coders’ Evaluation

Findings on the possible relation and comparison between my evaluation and that of the inter-coders are classified into three types: a) perfect agreement, meaning my and the inter-coders’ evaluation are exactly the same; b) partial agreement, which indicates a difference of 2 exists between the four evaluations; and c) no agreement, indicates when the difference of three exists between the three inter-coders.

Table 3 Agreement Between the Researcher and the Inter-coders’ Assessment

Perfect Agreement		Partial Agreement		No Agreement	
F	%	f	%	f	%
10	66.67	5	33.33	0	0

Findings imply that there seem to be a close agreement in terms of coding the linguistic features of the sections of theses as indicated in the frequency of 10 or 66.67 percent. This means that there are 5 theses that had been given a partial agreement with a 33.33 percent. Most of my ideas and the inter-coders’ agree with one another, except some of the disparities in terms of institutional policy and guidelines they follow against my concepts.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the results of the analysis, the linguistic features frequently used in theses of the teacher education students in academic year 2013-2014 would have been more precise and concise if the individual advisers, panel members, editors, and the authors themselves had checked and revised some of the unrelated concepts as reflected in the poor facility of some other linguistic features. Almost all of the concepts in the introduction of the theses are certainly lifted and copied as indicated in the authors’ incorrect and improper citations. Theses read and coded sound so boring because there is a little more one percent use of qualifications which denotes discredits of points regarding the issue or concepts reviewed. There is also a little amount of commentary to the theories or concepts and even to some findings reviewed. Therefore, theses read and reviewed based on the

sections can be improved and edited for clarity and reliability, if possible for publication purposes.

As this paper is limited to the frequency of linguistic features such as present and past tenses, present perfect tense, passive and active voices, citations and qualifications, and commentary in certain parts or sections of the teacher education students' theses, the researcher calls for further analysis or investigation with regard to the grammatical correctness—structure, use, unity, coherence and cohesion, and variety, as well as the lexis and semantic features that can be found in the theses. Finally, the future investigation can consider the theses of the different programs in the campus or university.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bitchener, J. (2009). A genre approach to understanding empirically based thesis writing. *Good Practice Publication Grants*. AKO AOTEAROA National Center for Tertiary Teaching Excellence, 1-11.
- [2] Swales, J.M. & Feak, C.B. (2004). *Academic writing for graduate students: essential tasks and skills* (2nd Ed.). Michigan Series in English for Academic & Professional Purposes. The University of Michigan Press.
- [3] Murcia, M.C. (2006). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*. Thomson Learning.
- [4] Celce-Murcia, M. & Larsen-Freeman, D. (1983). *The grammar book: an ESL/EFL teachers course*. Newburg House Publisher, INC. Massachusetts.
- [5] Serrano, J.B. (1966). *Better English for philippine high schools*. Alemar-Phonix Publishing House, Inc.
- [6] Finkelstein, L. (2005). *Pocket book of technical writing for engineers and scientists* (2nd Ed.). Mc-Graw-Hill.
- [7] Connelly, M. (2007). *The sundance reader: a rhetoric, reader handbook* (3rd ed.). Michael Rosenberg, Thomson Wadsworth.
- [8] Reid, S. (2006). *The prentice hall guide for college writers* (7th ed.) Quebecor World Book Services.
- [9] Tejero, E.G. & Catchillar, G.C. (2006). *Thesis and dissertation writing: a modular approach*. National Book Store: Copyright 2004, Reprint.

Copyrights

Copyright of this article is retained by the author/s, with first publication rights granted to APJMR. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)