English Vocabulary Mastery of University Students
an Analysis Of Students' Essays Writing at Bina Bangsa Getsempena University

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Abstract. Without doubt, vocabulary is a crucial part in mastering English language skills. It is the basic element that helps to construct a well written or spoken text. These two production skills assist students to be communicative well. However, the range of vocabulary produced becomes a problem when the students have difficulties to deploy the words properly. This study, therefore, tried to examine the typical of vocabulary applied by the EFL students in their writing text. By analyzing those writing text, it is depicted the vocabularies they applied. This is a qualitative descriptive research. The researchers relied on the list of academic words by Averil Coxhead (2000) and new academic words by Dr. Charles Browne, Dr. Brent Culligan and Joseph Phillips (2013) in analyzing the vocabularies in the written text. The words in the written texts were highlighted and categorized based on the lists. The result showed that, the students' vocabularies had some characteristics: (1) low lexical density; (2) higher repetition of information; and (3) higher proportion of basic and frequently-used words and lower usage of academic words. Therefore, it is suggested that students need more exposure to AWL or NAWL, there is Vocabulary development assistance and vocabularies should be taught contextually.

Keywords: Vocabulary; academic word; new academic word

1. INTRODUCTION

Neither verbal nor written communication takes place without vocabs. Students' competency in a foreign language is first measured through their vocabulary mastery. The number of English words that they are familiar with determines their ability in understanding and/or use English both orally and in written. It is believed that every language requires vocabulary mastery as a requisite for a successful communication (BENRABAH, 2019). A supported outlook also argues that vocabulary is a thorough skill to comprehend the meaning of other languages (Utami, 2020). A similar opinion stressed that vocabulary plays an unavoidable role in acquiring a foreign language (Asyiah, 2017). No matter how well a person comprehends the structures of a language, he/she will not be able to even write a sentence without vocabularies in his/her mind. All four skills of a language involve vocabulary in them; we read words, we write words, we listen to words and we also speak words (Kurniawan, 2016). Therefore, vocabulary takes an essential crucial part in developing students' English proficiency.

Teaching English to university students is somewhat challenging as they come from various backgrounds. Their families, schools, origins, and proficiency in English are varied. There are students who come from monolingual family. There are also students who come from bilingual family. More and more, there are students who come from rural area schools where English is considered as a scary subject to be learned. Whereas there are also students who come from urban schools where they practice English well.

The lecturers at the college meanwhile have to demonstrate the lessons in accordance to the syllabus. Thus, the teaching learning process rarely run smoothly because most of the time the students have difficulties understanding the lessons, because the majority of the students come from rural area and their background knowledge does not support them to; therefore the lecturers often have to stop their explanations to deliberately teach the lessons which should have been learned in their middle schools. Not only in teaching structures do the lecturers found such problem but also in the students' vocabulary mastery. It is reasonable since English is their foreign language and they were not excessively exposed to the target language either at home or at their schools. As Hunt and Beglar (2002) suggested that teachers should provide extensive reading and listening for students in order to enrich their vocabulary (*Methodology_in_language_teaching_2002_scanned.Pdf*, n.d.).

What the writer found at Bina Bangsa Getsempena University is that most students do not even familiar with commonly used English words. Such as, names of things in the classroom; some of the students do not know the English vocabs of the simplest things like board marker, eraser, chair, desks, and so on. This fact obviously makes the lecturer start his/her English lesson really from the beginning. However, when the lesson is started at the very low level, it is impossible to meet the goal of the course.

Therefore, it is essential to measure students' vocabulary mastery in order for lecturers to be acknowledged of students' capabilities. Analyzing students' essay writings could be one of the ways to measure their vocabulary mastery. Further why teachers should know students' awareness of vocabulary is because by doing so the teachers will be able to evaluate their teaching strategies. If they found that the students have slightly little number of vocabularies, the teachers probably could add more vocabulary-building activities in class or even give them list of vocabularies to be memorized.

The availability of online dictionaries could be one of the reasons why students do not emphasize memorizing vocabularies, which lead them to have weakness in vocabulary awareness. They do not feel the demand for memorizing vocabulary because they can easily find the meanings of words just in seconds by clicking their fingers on gadgets. Not only students but also teachers use online translation tools frequently to support their works. However, it is too bad when the students rely too much on the online translation tools when they do their writing tasks, because their dependency on the tools indicates how low their vocabulary mastery is. A study found that a hundred percent of the students use online translation tools to ease their writing tasks (Fitriani et al., 2021). They have such confident and comfortable by relying a hundred percent on the tools for their writing. Even though online translation tools has helped us a lot in accomplishing our tasks, it is undoubtedly that

the translation output of the tools requires human's editing to make it truthful in terms of meaning and structure (Doherty, 2016). Unfortunately, the majority of the students recently copied their translated sentences from the tools without editing them before submitting the tasks. That behavior is triggered by the fact that the students have poor vocabulary mastery of the target language. They feel assured by the contents produced from the tools because they do not have capability to analyze the contents before using them.

Another problematic issues regarding vocabulary mastery is that students have difficulties determining parts of speech of words. Despite the fact that they use either printed or online dictionary, the students often use certain words incorrectly, therefore context is needed (Webb & Nation, 2008). For example, the word "beautiful" which is an adjective is sometimes used as a noun, or the word "competition" which is a noun is sometime used as a verb. The confusion about parts of speech is frequently appeared in students writing as words function as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions, or interjections (Of, n.d.); (Qamariah & Aini, 2021).

Academic words or new academic words are also confirmed as essential especially for English department students. As they have to write their final projects in English, those academic essays surely have to be written academically well. For that purpose, the students have to be aware of a number of academic word list (AWL) and new academic word list (NAWL). Through a fleeting observation however, the researchers found that many of the students have poor exposure to the AWL and NAWL.

For a concrete result of the level of students' vocabulary mastery, it is remarkable to analyze students' essays writing by looking at types of words they used in their essays. It is crucial to perceive whether the students have good exposure to academic words and /or new academic words. The essays were adopted from students' work of Advance Writing subject which is a compulsory course for semester four students of Bina Bangsa Getsempena University, Banda Aceh. The researchers used the academic word list suggested by Averil Coxhead (2000) and new academic words by Dr. Charles Browne, Dr. Brent Culligan and Joseph Phillips (2013) as the standards in analyzing the students' works.

2. METHOD

This is a qualitative study with a descriptive method. (Nassaji, 2015) argued that descriptive method is now used commonly in second language (L2) teaching and learning because it allows the researcher to do a depth investigation and apprehension of individual learners diversity in the classroom. Hence, the complexity and multiplicity of L2 learners could be addressed through descriptive studies. A qualitative study likewise is considered as a dynamic method of a research; it tolerates researchers to modify their research designs during the study (Maxwell, 2018). In other words, a qualitative study is not a fixed method but we can adjust it in accordance to the needs of our research circumstances. Based on the above elaboration, it is worth choosing the descriptive method in conducting this research.

Five students' essays were chosen randomly to be analyzed to examine the typical of vocabulary commonly the students used in their writing. In those five essays, the vocabularies were highlighted to find the academic word and new academic words. To obtain the data, the researcher used the Academic word list by Averil Coxhead (2000) and new academic word developed by Dr. Charles Browne, Dr. Brent Culligan and Joseph Phillips (2013) in order to know the range of vocabulary written by the students. Then, the writer listed the number of academic words and new academic words used by each student before being counted, compared and analyzed.

3. RESULT

Result

The study's objectives were to determine what lexical traits L2 students text-based analytical essays display and to assess how much lexical choices influence writing quality.

1. **Vocabulary analysis in students' essay**

In general, the text-based analytical essays in this study show some characteristics: (1) low lexical density; (2) higher repetition of information; and (3) higher proportion of basic and frequently-used words and lower usage of academic words.

Table. 1. The word list analyzed from the students' papers

Basic words	Academic words	New academic words
Make	Influential	Ordinance
Same	Favorite	Resilience
Happy	Entertain	Stability
Without	Adventure	Challenging
Share	Genre	Imposing
Today	Official	Awareness
Life	Promote	Involvement
Do	Maintain	Eliminated
Often	Pattern	Physical

Great	Nutritious	Rigorous
Need	Day-to-day	Survival
Daily	Perceived	Skydive
Health	Potential	Converted
Important	Barrier	Optional
Anything	Circumstances	Nutrients
Several	Impair	Brutally
Contain	Digest	
Most	Damages	
Like	Science	
Opinion	Match	
Feel	Plot	
Sad	Wonder	
About		
Because		
And		
nt		
Some		
People		
Other		
Will		
Feel		
Very		

2. Vocabulary are mostly basic or common

It is found that from the result of data analysis, most students produced more common words than academic words. To score more in academic writing paper, students need to alternate the use of more academic vocabularies. Otherwise, it is assessed lower for word ranges. The word like many, everybody, use, do, usually, good, etc. are mostly used interchangeably. It shows that the students are more familiar with those basic words than academic words. However, students still relate their writing topic with some collocation, even though it is hardly found in their writing.

3. AWL randomly found

As mentioned earlier, academic words are randomly found in the students writing text. When the paper checked, it was found that the academic words only come from the translation that they went through Google translation while they rarely used those words in their writing text. The academic vocabularies that they deploy in their writing commonly come from the writing prompt provided. The students with higher score tend to use academic words in describing the information in the essay. While those who score low, academic words are hardly found in their writing texts.

4. **More repetition of information words**

    According to the analysis conducted, it is illustrated that there is an issue in which the researchers found more repetition from similar vocabularies used. This is predicted that the students do not have more vocabularies to use interchangeably in their writing text. Their vocabulary ranges are limited. The students only focused on writing more basic words with more repetition words.

Discussion

The current research analyzed the typical vocabulary that the EFL university students deployed in their essay writing. The results of this study showed that the students' vocabulary in their writing paper have low density and variation and mostly basic compared to the AWL or NAWL. From the result of the analysis it can be revealed that there are several points that relate the students writing skill and their vocabulary mastery.

1. **Need further exposure to AWL and NAWL**

    In the essay analysis, it is found that students' lack of academic words applied on their writing is triggered by the limitation of exposure to the academic words. Students tended to use the similar basic words without exploring the academic ones. Those can be seen in their writing paper. Academic words are more often used by the expert or advance students. However, the condition of the EFL students at Bina Bangsa Getsempena, especially students at semester four are at pre intermediate or intermediate level in which they only master several basic or common words. When the students are given a prompt of writing, they actually followed the pattern and used more academic words in the prompt but after that when they are not assigned with the task in which a prompt is not provided, they will not deploy academic words in their writing paper.

    It therefore indicates that the students need further exposure to AWL and NAWL in order to increase and develop their vocabulary awareness. Extra exercises on vocabulary building could be added in the L2 teaching learning process for triggering the students' vocabulary mastery. Excessive reading activities could be considered as well to be implemented as it is believed that the students will unconsciously find new words, especially the AWL or NAWL through reading.

2. **Vocabulary development assistance**

    Having a rich vocabulary range is essential in writing skill. More often, students rely on their limited lexicon storage in writing English text, or even on speaking skill. However, it is not sufficient to produce a good piece of writing with a high score. Therefore, students need to be assisted with the teaching of vocabulary. In this case, the assistance in developing their vocabulary ranges is required. It is necessary for them to know part of words, prefix, suffix, collocation, synonym and antonym to build more advance vocabulary. It is of course with the assistance of the teacher and application.

Vocabulary assistance indeed crucial for EFL students since vocabulary serves as the main element of communication. People do not communicate without having any words in their minds. A sentence will never be written if the writer does not know the vocabs. Thus, EFL teachers should be aware of the low lexical exposure of students and put more emphasis on vocabulary building activities in the classroom. For that reason, effective strategies for acquiring vocabularies of the target language should be applied in EFL classrooms for long-term retention of the words in students' memory (Moeller & Masmaliyeva, 2009).

It is interesting to discuss about the number of vocabulary an EFL student should have to be able to communicate well in English. An adult native speaker of English has an estimation of 17.000 base words through two or three words acquisition per day (Goulden et al., 1990). Another study suggested that Indonesian EFL learners are expected to have about 4000 of English words as an entry pass to university (Siyanova-Chanturia & Webb, 2016). Based on that number it is obvious that exposing EFL students into vocabulary mastery is a central key in EFL classrooms.

3. Teaching vocabulary contextually

Learning vocabulary or teaching vocabulary should be done contextually, since it will help students to aggregate more the meaning of the words, otherwise, it is just a waste of time when you learn the words isolated. The benefits are various when the words are learned or taught contextually. They will know how to use the vocabulary in a sentence and it will give them more time to remember the words. Moreover, it will initiate an active way of learning vocabulary. Therefore, teacher can generate the learning vocabulary process in context and make it more meaningful as it is vital in supporting learning other skills. It is in line with the statement from Paul and Nation (2008) that if 98 percent of the words in a text are words that readers already know, their likelihood of acquiring new words by reading increases.

Current EFL researchers and practitioners offer high variety strategies for teaching vocabulary contextually. Extracurricular or outdoor activities are considered as efficient ways of teaching vocabulary in context (Siyanova-Chanturia & Webb, 2016). Thus, they proposed extensive reading and extensive viewing to enhance students' awareness of vocabulary in contextual English use.

4. Maintaining the AWL and NAWL

EFL students have to maintain their AWL and NAWL, otherwise all will go beyond their mind. The students might have acquired certain AWL or NAWL, but then forget them if they do not practice using them. Regular exercises on reading, listening, speaking and writing will obviously keep the AWL and NAWL. For example, the word "genre" (table 1), which is referred as an academic word acquired currently by the students of Bina Bangsa Getsempena University, can be forgotten by the students when they do not frequently use the word. Then, when the students need that word, they will just grab the basic word instead of the academic one. Therefore, regular and consistent practices could neither be neglected nor be stopped in order to maintain the AWL and NAWL.

4. CONCLUSION

Mastering different types of vocabulary is essential for EFL students to gain more proficiency in English language skills. Having good lexical skills will contribute to actively develop some other language skills. It is obvious that we have to understand words when we listen, as well as we have to comprehend words when we read. Additionally, we speak words and we write words. So, when a person has adequate vocabulary exposure, s/he must be capable to speak, write and comprehend the foreign language orally and in written. Hence, there is nothing we can do with a language without words in mind.

It is essential for EFL teachers to immerse students in texts and activities that have a rich academic words. Since our research demonstrates the analysis of the use of academic vocabulary is a significant aspect of writing quality and that EFL students, especially low-proficient writers, depend on basic, high-frequency words that are common in informal conversation and spoken interactions. We suggest that, in light of our findings, academic language instruction that encourages lexical variety and the acquisition of academic terms and phrases should be integrated into writing pedagogy in education settings.

Thanks to the technology that currently provides us variety of ready-to-use enhancing vocabulary activities on the net to be adopted by EFL teachers/lecturers all over the world. There are also numerous of online vocabulary exercises that can be accomplished by only a click to improve students' vocabulary mastery. When the students are probably bored with the exercises, there also uncountable academic reading resources that are given free to be downloaded to increase their AWL and NAWL.

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