



## The Use of Academic Words amongst Sanata Dharma Univeristy's ELESP Students Batch 2020

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### ABSTRACT

Understanding how to use academic words is crucial and essential for university students. This is intended so that students can communicate their thoughts effectively by utilizing accurate academic words that fit the context. However, analyzing written work can be one technique to measure students' proficiency with academic words. In this article, the author goes over percentages as well as examples of how academic words have been used in an academic writing by the students of the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) by using a software called Ant Word Profiller as a vocabulary profiler tool for this corpus-based analysis study. The study's findings indicated that on average, students' academic writing covered 10% of the total AWL, which means that the academic writing have employed a good amount of academic words. This research also adds to the understanding of how non-native English language learners use academic words in their academic writing.

**Keywords:** Academic Language, Academic Vocabulary, Academic Word List (AWL)

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### ABSTRAK

Memahami bagaimana menggunakan kata-kata akademis sangat penting dan penting bagi mahasiswa. Hal ini dimaksudkan agar siswa dapat mengkomunikasikan pemikirannya secara efektif dengan memanfaatkan kata-kata akademis yang akurat dan sesuai dengan konteks. Namun, menganalisis karya tulis dapat menjadi salah satu teknik untuk mengukur kemahiran siswa dalam menggunakan kata-kata akademis. Pada artikel kali ini, penulis akan membahas persentase serta contoh penggunaan kata-kata akademis dalam sebuah penulisan akademik oleh mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris (ELESP) dengan menggunakan perangkat lunak bernama Ant Word Profiller sebagai alat profiler kosakata. Untuk studi analisis berbasis korpus ini. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa rata-rata, tulisan akademis siswa mencakup 10% dari total AWL, yang berarti bahwa tulisan akademis tersebut telah menggunakan banyak kata akademis. Penelitian ini juga menambah pemahaman tentang bagaimana pembelajar bahasa Inggris non-pribumi menggunakan kata-kata akademis dalam tulisan akademis mereka.

**Kata Kunci:** Bahasa Akademik, Kosakata Akademik, Daftar Kata Akademik (DKA)



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### 1. Introduction

It often goes unnoticed that the language we use on a daily basis is flexible. This is evidenced by the tendency to switch language styles based on the condition or place a person is located. Consider a college campus as an example. It is inevitable that students will use more formal and "advanced" language than typical when writing a scientific report. This occurs because academic language, rather than common language (conversational language), is the one used in the academic setting. According to Velliari (Velliari, 2019), academic language is a language that is often used when learning in class, in books, on tests, or on assignments. He also considers this language important to learn and master because it can help students gain knowledge and academic abilities. This statement is in accordance with what Herrell & Jordan (Herrell & Jordan, 2008) said that academic

language *"is the language necessary for success in school"*. They also added that academic language is not limited to one field of study, but includes several content areas such as science, mathematics, social sciences, and English language arts. Furthermore, the use of academic language can be distinguished from its vocabulary. We know that vocabulary is part of a language, so is academic vocabulary (Velliaris, 2019). A clear definition of this term is stated by Chamot and O'Malley (Mukoroli, 2011) saying that *"academic vocabulary is the language that is used by teachers and students for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and skills which includes learning new information, describing abstract ideas and developing student's conceptual understanding"*. From here, it can be concluded that academic vocabulary refers to the formal academic language used in academic settings (universities, scholarly publications, institutions of research) and is commonly used by students, teachers, lecturers, and researchers.

Apart from this understanding, academic vocabulary also plays an important role in the student's learning process. This is because academic vocabulary helps with analyzing, predicting, explaining, and justifying problems in academic contexts using a higher level of English, which is crucial for understanding discipline-specific content taught at the tertiary level (Zwiers, 2014). To succeed academically, participate in academic conversations, and conduct research in a variety of academic subjects, one must have a solid academic vocabulary.

Realizing the importance of academic vocabulary, a list namely AWL (Academic Word List) is made. According to Coxhead (Coxhead, 2000), the Academic Word List is a list that *"includes 570-word families that constitute a specialized vocabulary with good coverage of academic texts, regardless of the subject area"*. The utilization of AWL in academic settings is universal for every student in college, regardless of their field of study (Csomay & Prades, 2018; Youngblood & Folse, 2017). The use of AWL is considered to help students communicate and engage in academic discourse effectively. Apart from that, Lailiyah & Setiyaningsih (Lailiyah & Setiyaningsih, 2021) explained that the use of AWL *"to identify the frequency of those words that appear in students' writing"* is commonly used by researchers. So it does not rule out the possibility that academics other than lecturers and students can use AWL in their studies.

There are some advantages students can get from understanding the use of the academic word list. Knowing that academic words are part of the English language and required for reading, writing, speaking, and listening in subject areas (Herrell & Jordan, 2008), it is true that the English academic word *"...is vital for the overall academic performance of students"* (Choo et al., 2017). From the explanations, it can be concluded that the Academic Word List matters to college students and is critical for their learning comprehension. Furthermore, when they need to comprehend specific content of disciplines taught at the higher education level, AWL aids in analyzing, predicting, explaining, and justifying issues in an academic context using a higher level of English (Choo et al., 2017).

Apart from that, one of the determining factors whether a student's writing falls into the academic writing genre or not is the level of use of academic vocabulary. The more the amount of academic vocabulary used by students approaches the AWL percentage, the more likely the student's text is to be classified as an academic text type. Several studies state that the overall level of academic vocabulary use covers 10% of the entire text (Coxhead, 2000), it could also be between 8.5% to 10% (Coxhead & Nation, 2001) or 9% and above (Sari, 2018). A higher total was stated by Gardner & Davies (Gardner & Davies, 2014), namely 14%. As additional information, these numbers show the frequency of the appearance of academic vocabulary in academic writing. According to Charles & Pecorari (Charles & Pecorari, 2015), what differentiates these 'academic' words is the relative frequency of appearance of these words in academic and non-academic texts. For example, the word "gender" appears 3 times more often in academic texts than in other types of writing, even though this word is also found in both types of texts. Thus, the use of academic vocabulary can be used as a benchmark to determine whether a particular text is an academic text or not.

Since the words used in an academic setting are different from those in casual communication, students may frequently encounter discourse that contains academic words. However, these words might be difficult for them to understand, leading them to believe that academic vocabulary could become a barrier to their teaching and learning process (Lailiyah & Setiyaningsih, 2021). There are two possible reasons for this issue; first, according to Coxhead (Coxhead, 2000), academic language is unfamiliar to students because it is used less often than ordinary vocabulary. Second, compared to casual conversational English, academic words are sometimes more abstract and more specific (Sibold, 2011). As a consequence, for students to become

accustomed to using academic words, effort and inducement are required. This is in accordance with Lailiyah & Setiyaningsih (Lailiyah & Setiyaningsih, 2021) statement, saying that for language learners to increase their academic vocabulary, it is necessary to provide them with essential instruction. They also added that selecting the proper materials and designing appropriate learning activities are crucial steps in achieving this goal.

However, understanding the use of academic language will be very useful for students in making final assignments which are usually in the form of written work. Using academic language will also be very beneficial to final-semester students while they are composing their final assignment reports. Despite the fact that academic words are often found in academic writing, previous studies have found that the use of academic words is still relatively minimal in academic texts/articles. In response to this, the author wants to know:

1. To what extent do ELESP students at Sanata Dharma University use academic words in their prospectus?
2. How are these academic words used in the form of sentences or paragraphs as a whole? Is it appropriate to the context and grammatically correct?

Answering these questions, therefore, this research intends to observe the extent to which Sanata Dharma University's ELESP batch 2020 students utilized academic words in their prospectus. Apart from that, to determine whether words have been used appropriately in context and whether sentences they have been used in are grammatically accurate. To learn how students organize sentences or paragraphs in their writing using particular academic words.

Finally, the results of this research are expected to provide insight into how academic words are used in academic writings written by ELESP students. For students, this research can provide an understanding of the importance of AWL in writing, particularly when it comes to explaining complex ideas/thoughts, theories/concepts. It is also hoped that this study will inspire them to improve their academic vocabulary. For lecturers or teachers, this research can be used as a reference or consideration if teaching academic vocabulary to students is necessary. It can also be used as a component of writing assessment (e.g., the percentage level of academic words in student writing affects grades). For other researchers, this research can be used as a source of information and reference.

## 2. Methods

In this study, the frequency of academic words was counted and measured using a quantitative approach. First of all, the author collects the corpus to be analyzed. The corpus used is a research prospectus created by the students batch 2020 from the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) at Sanata Dharma University. However, in order to reduce the possibility of bias, the author carried out random sampling. Thus, thirty seven texts were gathered for analysis.

Even though the research prospectus has been collected, not all parts of the research prospectus have been analyzed. This alludes to the statement made by Khair et al., (Khair et al., 2019) that “*shorter texts alleviate bias which commonly exists in longer texts because of the influence of word accounts*”. As a result, only the first section of the prospectus, which is the introduction part, was selected.

For the corpus analysis, a vocabulary profiler called *AppWordProfiler* is utilized. According to Lailiyah & Setiyaningsih (Lailiyah & Setiyaningsih, 2021), *AppWordProfiler* is a freeware multiplatform application used for corpus linguistic research related to vocabulary profiling. Furthermore, using this software significantly eases the process of analyzing the academic words encountered in the corpus in just a matter of seconds. Eventually, the collected data was provided in the form of two tables. The first one is the table of *AppWordProfiler*'s analysis results. This includes the percentage of AWL used in the prospectus, while the other table contains the twelve most frequently used academic words.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### Academic Word Usage Frequency as Determined by *AntWordProfiler*

From the analysis, it can be concluded that the corpus has 13673 tokens (running words), including the total words from the General Service List, Academic Word List, and words that are out of both lists. When talking about the Academic Word List, it is found that there are 1355 tokens (running words) in it. This indicates that the academic words was found in the corpus 1355 times, which still includes some of the same words being used repeatedly. However, with "Type," though, it's different. "Type" refers to the quantity of unique or distinct words in the text or corpus rather than counting the number of repetitions (Turner, 2015). Additionally, Coxhead (Coxhead, 2000) also indirectly defines "types" as individual words. Thus, it can be said that all of the students' work contains 454 different word variations. When combined, academic words make up 10% of all running words. For more detailed results, see Table 1 below.

Table 1. AntWordProfiler Tools analysis result

GSL/AWL	Token	Token (%)	Type	Type (%)	Group (%)
GSL_1st (1000)	10309	75	998	45%	554 (37%)
GSL_2nd (1000)	778	6%	239	11%	155 (10%)
AWL (570)	1355	10%	454	20%	256 (17%)
out of list	1231	9%	542	24%	542 (36%)
total	13673	100%	2233	100%	1507 (100%)

On average, the number of AWL tokens found in each student's work is 37, with the average total of running words being 369. This indicates that, out of the 37 student works, the average amount of AWL usage in the prospectuses has already hit 10%. This leads one to the conclusion that the student prospectus falls under the category of academic writing. This is reinforced by Coxhead's (Coxhead, 2000) statement, which concluded that AWL "...accounts for 10% of the total tokens in the Academic Corpus". However, according to Coxhead and Nation (Coxhead & Nation, 2001) between 8.5% and 10% of the vocabulary in academic books was covered by AWL. For the same reason, a "text could be regarded as academic text if the percent of Academic Word List (AWL) reached 9% or more" (Sari, 2018).

Above them all, here are the 12 most frequently used academic words by students in their prospectus writing.

Table 2. The 12 frequently used AWL items

No	Group	Frequency
1	research	43
2	technology	41
3	process	41
4	role	38
5	strategies	26
6	researcher	21
7	motivation	19
8	thesis	16

9	communication	15
10	project	14
11	impact	14
12	approach	14

Since the prospectus mainly talks about research that the author would like to propose, the word “*research*” is often used in this case. The second most frequent word is technology. On average, the research was mainly focused on the topic of technology, like utilizing a variety of tools like *Grammarly*, *Canva*, *Google Translate*, and so on. On the next tier, it has the words “*process*”, “*role*”, “*strategies*,” and so on.

### AWL utilization in student prospectuses

Furthermore, when it comes time for students to write, it is evident how they construct their paragraphs using AWL. Such as in the following example:

#### Example 1

In the current era of **globalization**, English is one of the **communication** tools needed in various fields, including education. In the world of education, students of the English Language Education study program at Sanata Dharma University must be able to master English well. One of the skills that must be possessed is the ability to write because as a graduation **requirement** students are **required** to write a **thesis**. However, in the **process** of writing their **thesis**, students often experience difficulties in writing their **thesis** because their English skills are limited. So to overcome this, students take advantage of **technology**. In recent years, **technology** has played a very important **role** in supporting the **process** of language learning and writing **assignments**. One of the **technological** tools used by students to support the **thesis** writing **process** is Google Translate. According to (Lubna Abd Rahman, & Arnida A. Bakar 2018) **quoted** from (Mulyadi, M., & Hidayati, D. 2021) google translate is a translator that is very popular among everyone, including college students. However, the **potential** of google translate does not **guarantee** that the results of the **thesis** writing of English Language Education Batch 20 students at Sanata Dharma University will be perfect. Students as users of Google Translate must be careful and should not **rely** too much on Google Translate as a translator in the **process** of writing a **thesis**. The ability to understand English independently and vocabulary **structure** is also a must for students. So to provide **insight** into the **role** of google translate as a supporter of the student **thesis** writing **process**, a study is needed. Therefore, this study aims to **investigate** the effectiveness of google translate in supporting the **thesis** writing **process** of batch 20 English Language Education Students at Sanata Dharma University.

Figure 1. Example 1

#### Example of student’s writing

From the example above, it can be seen that the student applies AWL to explain the effectiveness of using *Google Translate* in students’ thesis writing process. From the example above, it can be seen that the AWL is already being used properly, whether in terms of its verb tense, word order and use as modifiers. For instance, the writer uses the academic word “*required*” instead of “*require*” or “*requires*” because it is used to deliver

a passive sentence. Moreover, the writer also appropriately used the academic term "technological" in order to modify the noun "tools" that comes after it. Throughout this part of the prospectus, 10.84% AWL was utilized by the students. This indicates that this writing is classified as an academic text. Here is another example of student's writing:

#### Example 2

English is usually used as a way of **communication** between one person to the other person from other countries who do not speak the same language. Now days, English is frequently become the preferred language to engage and exchange ideas during international events, meetings and **conferences**. **Furthermore**, for people who are able to speak in English and master it As an International congregation the Congregation of FICP brothers **consists** of twenty-six different countries from all over the world. So, to know and able to speak in English is one of the necessities that the member of the congregation needs to master it. **Furthermore**, English can be **benefit** in the future as a part of doing the mission as a missionary in different countries. Here by knowing and able speak fluently in English can help a missionary to do his mission in the foreign countries. However, there are still some obstacles that prevents the candidates of the FICP brother congregation in the postulate house to express themselves in English fluently. Not only that English language is become the difficult subject and the most boring class for them. In dealing with those difficulties the **researcher** wanted to **conduct a research** by using the **role play technique** as a way to improve the speaking skill of the postulants of the FICP brothers, in wisma la Mennais, Yogyakarta.

Figure 2. Example 1

Example of another student's writing

In the next example, there is one mistake made by the writer, and that is the usage of the academic word "benefit". In the sentence, the writer writes "*English can be benefit in the future...*". This is grammatically incorrect because, after the part "*can be*," it should be followed by either a noun or an adjective, not a verb. Even though the word "*benefit*" can be classified as a noun as well, however, it needs an additional article "*a*" to make it clearer and more understandable. On the other side, it can be changed to "*beneficial*" as an adjective, so that the result would be, "*English can be beneficial in the future...*". As a result, even if this prospectus only contains 4.9% AWL, it does not yet meet the requirements to be regarded as academic work. However, "*furthermore*" is the writer's most often-used academic word, indicating that AWL can also be employed as a transitional word.

#### 4. Conclusion

Since academic words are only found and utilized in academic contexts, we can determine if a text qualifies as academic based on the AWL level that it contains. Through the analysis of prospectuses created by Sanata Dharma University students enrolled in the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP), it can be inferred that the typical student prospectus belongs to the academic text type category, with up to 10% of the running words listed being academic terms.

In addition, there is a big difference in the academic vocabulary utilized. This is proved by the fact that up to 20% of AWL types—individual words—are listed in the student prospectus. Still, there are misuse problems with this word that might negatively impact the text's quality or meaning. Thus, double-checking is still necessary to reduce the number of inaccuracies in academic word usage that could lead to reader misinterpretation, although there has been much improvement in the analysis of AWL use at the university level—particularly at Sanata Dharma University.

Apart from that, considering that this research still has shortcomings, this research can be used as material for further research. The author suggests that future studies can analyze academic texts that have similar topics.

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