



# The Lexical Density and Experiential Structure of Nominal Groups of the Discussion Section of Skripsis and Research Articles

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#### Abstract

This research aimed to see the lexical density of the discussion section of three skripsis (SK) and three research articles (RA) and the experiential structure of its nominal groups. Halliday's lexical density measurement, which divides the number of lexical items by the number of clauses, was used. It was found that SK has a higher lexical density level than RA (8,5 compared to 6,8). The reason is that one of the SK texts repeats dozens of lexical items in one clause, giving it a high lexical density score. If the text were to be ignored, then SK's lexical density would be lower than RA (5,7 compared to 6,8). SK was found to have fewer nominal groups than RA (236 compared to 255). RA uses classifier and qualifier, which are realized by lexical items, more than SK, while SK leads in numerative, which is often realized by function words. It is concluded that SK, which has lower lexical density, also uses a more 'simple nominal group structure' i.e only having one premodifier or postmodifier, and utilizes lexical items in their nominal groups less frequently than RA did.

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of lexical density was defined by Halliday (1989) as the ratio of lexical items to the number of clauses in a text. Lexical items are words that carry lexical properties, which include nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Clause, meanwhile, is where the meaning of different kinds are mapped into an integrated grammatical structure (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 10). This definition of lexical density was a response to Ure (Ure, 1971) who coined the term. Ure proposed that lexical density is the proportion of words carrying lexical values to words carrying grammatical values, which includes but is not limited to, determiner, preposition, conjunction, article, and pronoun. Ure's lexical density is expressed in percentage. Halliday later proposed to look at the lexical item not on its own,



but on how it exists in a larger grammatical unit, that being a clause. A sentence is not the chosen grammatical unit as it is ambiguous in length. Therefore, his way to investigate lexical density is to count the ratio of lexical items to the total number of clauses, rather than words. Both parameters are still being used, and research using either seems to indicate that written text is more lexically dense than speech (To, Fan, & Thomas, 2013).

The lexical density of written language is higher than spoken language, as written text increases in complexity by being lexically dense. The term written text does not imply an invariant type of English that is associated with all forms of written discourse (Halliday, 1989). Informal and academic texts, for example, would have different choices in structuring their clauses, resulting in different levels of lexical density (Schleppegrell, 2004). Snow (2010) argued that academic writing should be concise and packed with information. In a lexically dense text, a writer could present scientific information efficiently and concisely.

In Indonesia, university final-year students are expected to produce a scientific text called skripsi, and it is a requirement to finish their undergraduate studies. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in their final year are expected to produce coherent and contributive texts to their field (Djiwandono, 2016). Lately, there has been a push for skripsis to be published in journals, so it is imperative for universities to ensure their undergraduate work is on par with internationally published articles. One way to do so is to see the lexical density of skripsis and research articles.

Lexical density is expressed as a numerical score, which might be insufficient in showing how a lexically dense text is written. This inquiry may be approached through Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar which is concerned with the study of grammar as a tool for meaning-making at the clause level as a representation tool. According to Halliday (Halliday, 1989, p. 72), the structure of language and the modern world, in general, forced written language into a lexically dense language with a strong tendency to have its lexical items in its nominal groups. Lexical meaning is generally represented in the clause in the nominal groups. The nominal group is the primary resource used by the grammar for packing in lexical items at high density (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 655).

One of the reasons why lexical meaning is found in the nominal group is the structure of the nominal group itself. The nominal group consists of a "head" that could be modified by the element of premodifier and/or postmodifier. The head, which represents the thing, classifier, and epithet often contains lexical information. If a qualifier, which itself may contain an epithet and/or classifier, is present, then it will further densely pack the lexical items in the nominal group. Therefore, this study is interested in the structure of the nominal group.

that	one	magnificent	new	electric	car
deictic	numerative	Epithet1	epithet2	classifier	thing
determiner	numeral	adjective	adjective	adjective	noun

Table 1. The Structure of a Nominal Group

Deictic indicates if a specific subset of the thing is intended or not, and if so, which. There are specific deictics (*the, their, his, her*) and non-specific deictics (*each, every, neither*). The Numerative element indicates some numerical feature of the particular subset of the Thing. The quantifying



numeratives specify either an exact number (*two* cars, *five* houses) or an inexact number (*some* people, *lots* of money), while the ordering numeratives specify either an exact place (*first* place, *second* train) or inexact place (*subsequent* entry). The Epithet indicates some quality of the subset, for example *old*, *long*, *blue*, *or fast*. This may be an objective property of the thing itself (experiential epithet); or it may be an expression of the speaker's subjective attitude towards it (interpersonal epithet), for example *splendid*, *silly*, *fantastic*. The main difference between the two is that the experiential epithet is potentially defining, unlike the interpersonal epithet. The Classifier indicates a particular subclass of the thing in question. Sometimes a word can function both as an epithet or classifier depending on the context. An important distinction is that, unlike epithets, classifiers do not accept degrees of comparison or intensity. So electric is a classifier because there is no such thing as the most electric train. The thing indicates the focus of the nominal group in the form of either a common noun, proper name, or personal pronoun. A qualifier is an element that follows the thing. Unlike premodifiers (elements that precede the things), qualifiers often took the form of a phrase or a clause. The most common form of the qualifier is a prepositional phrase, non-finite clause, or finite clause.

Lexical density and nominal group structure have been the subject of several types of research. One study looks into the lexical density of linguistic thesis abstracts (Hanafiah & Yusuf, 2016). They found the average lexical density score of the thesis abstracts to be 57%, and not one thesis abstract scored below 44%, conforming to Ure (1971)'s statement that written text have over 40% lexical density. Lexical density is also measured by Mayangsari, Fitriati, and Sutopo (2021) when they sought to discover the lexical complexity and readability of the introduction section of selected journals from the English Education Journal (EEJ), Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture (EduLite), and Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics (IJAL). Lexical complexity is revealed by measuring lexical density and lexical variation, and from that it is found that the journal's average lexical density score is 57,6%, indicating a higher number of content words than function words.

Research focusing on nominal groups was conducted by Eko (2012), who looked into the nominal groups of the headline news in Jakarta Post and the abstract texts in the Asian EFL Journal. It was found that the Jakarta post has 25 different nominal group structures, while the journal has 15. However, the journal leads in the frequency of structure that has a classifier or qualifier, such as deictic + thing + qualifier and deictic + classifier + thing + qualifier. In terms of research that investigated both lexical density and nominal group, Rini (2012) conducted research on the introduction section of skripsi. 31 different nominal group structure was found, but the most frequent was not specified. In addition, the introduction section of skripsi was found to have an average lexical density score of 4,63. Another research looked into the nominal group and lexical density of the introduction section of the TEFLIN journal (Khanifah, 2013). The researcher found that the most frequent nominal group structure is deictic + thing + qualifier, and the average nominal group of the journal is 7.8.

Results from previous studies seemed to indicate that research articles have a higher lexical density score, both in Ure's and Halliday's measurements. It also showed that the abstract and introduction section has been investigated, while the discussion section of skripsis and research articles has not been a focus of research on lexical density, nominal groups, or both. Discussion, the final major section of text in a report, consists of the analysis of the result. Writing study outcomes, although not easy, is the main task of an academician (Sanli, Erdem, & Tefik, 2013) In a scientific report, the



discussion section is where the researcher's writing ability is most noticeable as it is where they describe their findings.

Given the points above, an investigation on research articles (RA), which are often written by experienced academic writers who have honed their craft in writing efficient and concise—lexically dense—scientific reports, and skripsis (SK), which are written by novice writer who has a comparatively fewer experience in writing a scientific report, would be beneficial for higher education study program in developing curriculum on academic discourse. If skripsis were to be published online, then the quality of the writing must be improved to be on par with internationally published articles. Thus, this present research aims to answer the following two questions: (1) What are the lexical density levels of the discussion section of SK and RA? and (2) How does the experiential structure of the nominal groups of the discussion section of SK differ from that of RA?

#### **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study is qualitative research employing content analysis techniques. In qualitative research, the researcher played the roles of the designer, data collector, analyst, data interpreter, and eventually the reporter of the research findings ( (Moleong, 2007) cited in (Khairum, 2013)). A key instrument for this research was the researcher's knowledge of Halliday's lexical density and transitivity theory.

The data for this research were clauses and nominal groups that were found in the discussion section of 3 TESOL Quarterly articles and 3 skripsis. The data source is research articles, which include: Brief Report-When IDLE Hands Make an English Workshop (Lee & Dressman, 2018), Brief Report-Group Interaction Strategies and Students' Oral Performance (Xu & Kou, 2018), and Brief Report-Effects of Video-Based Interaction on the L2 Listening Comprehension Ability (Zhang & Curry, 2018), and skripsis, which includes: Students' Motivation in Small Group Discussion in Automotive Major SMKN 26 Jakarta (Arianto, 2019), Learning Strategies of ELESP Learners at Universitas Negeri Jakarta in Online Speaking Class (Sutondo, 2022), and The Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based-Activities for Meaningful Learning (A Descriptive Qualitative Study at SMP Islam Tugasku Jakarta Timur) (Hanipah, 2018).

A spreadsheet was utilized as a tool in the data collection and analysis. The first sheet would identify the clause and number of lexical items to answer the first research question. The total number of lexical items was ratioed with the number of clauses to obtain each text's lexical density level. A high score would indicate a lexically dense text. The average lexical density of the 3 RA and 3 SK texts was compared. To answer the second research question, the second sheet would first identify the nominal groups found in said clauses. The identified nominal groups will be underlined. Once the nominal groups were identified using the second sheet, their experiential structure would be analyzed using the third sheet. Before the transitivity structure of the nominal group is identified, first the occurrence of *deictic*, *numerative*, *epithet*, *classifier*, *thing*, and *qualifier* would be tallied. The thing represents the nominal group, as such the total number of things found in each text was used to see the total number of nominal groups found in said text.

The structure of each nominal group from each text was then identified, which were either premodier(s) + thing, premodifier + thing + qualifier, or thing + qualifier. Each nominal group's transitivity structure was coded using an abbreviation, for instance, a nominal group with a deictic +



classifier + thing + qualifier structure would be coded as DCTQ. Once the structure of every nominal group was identified, the occurrence of each structure on each text was counted and compared. A descriptive analysis was then conducted on the result.

# **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

## A. Lexical Density

The highest lexical density among Research Articles is 7,41, which is found in RA 2 with 284 lexical items among 48 clauses. The article with the second highest lexical density is RA 3, where 41 clauses and 356 lexical items are identified, giving it a score of 6,92. RA 1 has the lowest lexical density compared with the other two. 334 lexical items and 55 clauses are identified in RA 1, giving it a lexical density score of 6,09. Therefore, the average lexical density of the three articles is 6,8. This result is somewhat in line with Khanifah (2013), that found the lexical density of the introduction of research articles to be 7,8.

In the case of Skripsis, the highest lexical density occurred in SK 1 with 14,0, where 546 lexical items across 39 clauses are found. The second highest among the SK is SK 2, where 240 lexical items are found in 36 clauses, giving a lexical density score of 6,66. The skripsi with the lowest lexical density is SK 3, in which 36 clauses and 175 lexical items are identified, giving it a score of 4,8. The average lexical density of SK is 8,5. This finding is different from the findings of Rini (2012), that found the average lexical density of skripsi to be 4,63. See the table below for detail.

RA	clauses	Lexical	Lexical	SK	clauses	Lexical	Lexical
		items	density			items	density
RA 1	55	335	6,09	SK 1	39	546	14,0
RA 2`	48	356	7,41	SK 2	36	240	6,66
RA 3	41	284	6,92	SK 3	36	175	4,86
Total	144	995	20,42	Total	111	961	25,52
Average	48	331	6,8	Average	37	320	8,5

Table 2. Lexical Density of Research Articles and Skripsis

The data analysis revealed that the SK has a higher lexical density than the RAs. The average lexical density score of the articles is 6,8, while the SK is 8,5. However, by examining the clauses, the difference in how the two texts achieved their lexical density is revealed. For example, one of the highest lexical density levels among the texts is found in RA 3, specifically in RA 3-3. The sentence consists of 16 lexical items with very little repetition to be found, which reads as follows:

## "Engaging in diverse IDLE activities that involved both form-focused and meaningfocused language learning was found to significantly predict students' English speaking proficiency."

Meanwhile, the highest lexical density score among the analyzed texts in the Skripsis was attained by SK 1 at 14,0, almost doubled the second highest attained by RA 2 (7,41). However, the discussion section of SK 1 often contains repetition. For example, SK 1-30 reads:



"In terms of speaking like native speakers, students are doing activities such as are [sic] imitating a native speaker's speech when watching YouTube videos, studying about idioms and slang, improving your pace and clarity, imitating a native speaker's speech when listening to a podcast, making a note of new vocabulary and try to imitate native speech patterns that you hear when watching videos, thinking about English in chucks, watching some English movies and trying to speak the words in that movie, reading a book loudly and pretending that I was a native speaker, talking alone in English, using an English learning application named DuoLingo, doing a monologue; telling any stories to themselves using slang, chunks, imitating native speaker's speech, listening to native speakers a lot when watching YouTube videos, and watching YouTube videos play in the background while doing something else"

The sentence above consists of 85 lexical items. Despite its impressive number, this sentence in particular contains many repetitions of words or phrases. For instance, the clause "imitating a native speaker's speech when watching YouTube videos", "imitating a native speaker's speech when listening to a podcast", "try to imitate native speech patterns that you hear when watching videos", and "imitating native speaker's speech" are all very similar. If SK 1 is ignored, then the average Lexical density of skripsis will be down to 5,76, which is lower than RA at 6,8.

#### **B.** Nominal Groups

A total of 255 nominal groups were identified from RA, with 149 deictics, 10 numeratives, 13 epithets, 141 classifiers, and 79 qualifiers. In the case of SK, 236 nominal groups were identified, with 145 deictics, 21 numeratives, 25 epithets, 98 classifiers, and 50 qualifiers. The data showed that RA has more deictics, classifiers, and qualifiers, while SK has an advantage in numeratives and epithets.



Figure 1.Nominal Groups in Research Articles and Skripsis

The average number of deictics of RA and SK are nearly identical: 49,66 and 48,33 respectively. However, RA exhibits more variety in the choice of deictics in each type of deictics. SK uses numeratives 6,66 times per text, which is more than RAs at 3,33. In addition, SK uses more ordinative

numerative such as first, second, and third, while RA uses more quantitative numerative. SK's use of epithet is twice as much as SK on average, with SK clocking in at 8,33 epithet per text compared to RAs' 4,33 epithet per text. Another difference is that the RAs utilize comparatives (greater, better, more advanced) more, while in SKs superlatives (most, highest) are more common. On average, the RAs have more average number of classifiers (50,33) than SK (32,66). RA's use of classifiers is also more varied than SK's. The most reoccurring type of qualifier in both RA and SK is the prepositional phrase. The two texts have a similar number of non-finite and finite clauses.

The table below shows the nominal group structure identified in RA and SK. A total of 255 nominal groups were identified from RA, and 233 from SK. The analysis revealed that SK has 16 distinct nominal group structures, while RA has 14. The most frequent structure used on RA is classifier + thing (25,5%), followed by deictic + thing (19,6%), deictic + classifier + thing (18%), and Deictic + thing + Qualifier (12,2%). Pramono (2012) made a similar finding in examining the abstract of research articles, with deictic + thing being the highest (26,8%), followed by Deictic + Thing + Qualifier (19,59%) and Deictic + classifier + thing (12,37%). The most frequent nominal group on SK is similar to RA, the highest being deictic + thing (30%), classifier + thing (22,3%), deictic + thing + qualifier (13,7%), and deictic + classifier + thing (9,44%).

N			RA	SK	
No.	Structure	Total	Occurrence	Total	Occurrence
1	Deictic+Thing	50	19,6%	70	30%
2	Deictic+Thing+Qualifier	31	12,2%	32	13,7%
3	Numerative+Thing	1	0,39%	10	4,29%
4	Numerative+Thing+Qualifier	1	0,39%	0	0%
5	Epithet+Thing	3	1,18%	6	2,58%
6	Epithet+Thing+Qualifier	5	1,96%	2	0,85%
7	Classifier+Thing	65	25,5%	52	22,3%
8	Classifier+Thing+Qualifier	12	4,71%	6	2,58%
9	Thing+Qualifier	10	3,92%	5	2,15%
10	Deictic+Numerative+Thing	1	0,39%	5	2,15%
11	Deictic+Numerative+Thing+Qualifier	1	0,39%	0	0%
12	Deictic+Epithet+Thing	0	0%	6	2,6%
13	Deictic+Epithet+Thing+Qualifier	0	0%	3	1,28%
14	Deictic+Classifier+Thing	46	18%	22	9,44%
15	Deictic+classifier+Thing+Qualifier	19	7,4%	3	1,28%
16	Deictic+Numerative+Classifier+Thing	0	0%	3	1,28%
17	Deictic+Numerative+Claffier+Thing+Qualifer	0	0%	1	0,42%
18	Numerative+Classifer+Thing	5	1,96%	2	0,85%
19	Epithet+Classifier+Thing	4	1,57%	5	2,15%
	TOTAL	255	100%	233	100%

Table 3. The Structures of Nominal Groups in Research Articles and Skripsis



Even though the four most used nominal group structures in RA and SK are similar, the difference lies in the frequency. For instance, both RA and SK often use deictic + thing, but in RA the number is 19,6%, while in SK is 30%. Conversely, both were also found to use deictic + classifier + thing frequently. However, that structure is found in 18% of the nominal groups of RA, and only 9,44% in SK. The data also showed that RA uses structures with classifier or qualifier more than SK, such as thing + qualifier (3,92% compared to 2,15%), classifier + thing + qualifier (4,71% compared to 2,58%), and deictic + classifier + thing + qualifier (7,4% compared to 1,28%). Meanwhile, SK excels in a structure that utilizes numeratives or epithets, such as numeratives + thing (4,29% compared to 0,39%), epithet + thing (2,58% compared to 1,18%), and deictic + numerative + thing (2,15% compared to 0,39%). In addition, there are two structures that only appears in RA: numerative + thing + qualifier and deictic + numerative + thing + qualifier, and there are 4 nominal group structure that was only observed in SK: deictic + epithet + thing, deictic + epithet + thing + qualifier, deictic + numerative + classifier + thing, and deictic + numerative + classifier + thing + qualifier.

Deictic + thing is the second most common nominal group structure in RA and the most common in SK. Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) stated that deictic is determined by the system of determination, as it indicates whether or not some specific subset of the thing is intended, and if so, which. From the two excerpts above, the deictics in RA consist of articles (a and the), demonstrative (this), possessive pronouns (his or her), and post deictic (initial). Similarly, SK's deictics also consist of articles (a and the) and possessive pronoun (their). The difference, at least in the excerpt above, is the frequency of the word the and post deictic. "The" is a unique deictic (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 314) in that it is a specific, determinative deictic that does not reveal to the reader how to identify it. "The" in the nominal group "the train" does not specify what kind of train it is. This deictic is usually accompanied by other elements that supply that information, such as epithets like the long train, or qualifiers such as the train with the mural painting. If such information is not given, it's either because it is obvious from the situation, or already referred to beforehand in the discourse. The numerative + thing structure is more prominent in SK than in RA. The addition of a qualifier, however, is only found in RA. Numerative indicates any numerical feature of the thing, it could either express quantity or order, exact or inexact. The two examples from RA are exact and inexact quantitative respectively, with the former having a qualifier as well. examples of ordinative numerative are found in SK. the order in numerative does not always indicate the order of quality, for instance, SK 1-7-2 mentions 5 indicators, and later SK 1-9-2 specifies the first, second, and third. An example of exact and inexact numerative is found in SK 2-14-2 and S 2-15-1, the first nominal group mentions an inexact thing "several functions" and the next one specifies 'one of the'.

The nominal group analysis showed that the SK utilized structures that are realized by function words such as deictic and numerative (numerative + thing, deictic + numerative + thing) more than RA, which makes more use of classifier and qualifier (classifier + thing, classifier + thing + qualifier, deictic + classifier + thing, depicting + thing + qualifier) which are often realized by lexical items. SK was also found to have a simpler nominal group, i.e., having one premodifier + head, while RA has a more complex nominal group, which is indicated by multiple premodifiers and a qualifier.



#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The research found that the average lexical density of the SKs is actually higher than the RAs. However, this is due to one of the texts being filled with repeating words or phrases which increased the lexical items and subsequently, the lexical density score. Therefore, further research might need to take lexical variation into account. If the said text was ignored, then SK has a lower lexical density score than RA. In terms of the experiential structure of the nominal groups, it was found that SK has a lower nominal group count with fewer classifiers and qualifiers, and simpler structures than RA. This means that the nominal groups in RA, which have a higher lexical density, are complex and frequently realized with lexical items. Finally, this research is largely based on Halliday's statement that the reason why lexical meaning in English is found in the nominal group is due to the nominal group's structure of the nominal groups, future research could investigate the thematic structure of the clause in order to learn more about lexical meaning in English writing.

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