A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF VERBS IN NEWS SECTION OF *THE JAKARTA POST*: HOW FREQUENCY IS RELATED TO TEXT CHARACTERISTICS

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Abstract

Verb is one of the most important word classes in linguistic construction due to its prominent role and dynamic nature. Interestingly, the use of verbs in different linguistic contexts might be various because the context can limit or allow certain verbs to occur more frequently than other verbs. It is compelling to study further the use of verbs in a particular linguistic context. This paper thus aims at examining the use of verbs in news section in *The Jakarta Post* to figure out the frequency of verbs and how it relates to the characteristics of news text. This study compiled *The Jakarta Post* corpus comprising news articles belong to the category of hard news from October to December 2018 with total size of 21.682 words. The verb types used in this study refer to those compiled by Scheibmann (combining Halliday's verb taxonomy and Dixon's verb types). Based on the analysis, it is obvious that *verbal* type is the most frequent verb type, followed by *material* and *existential.* As for the least frequent ones, there are *corporeal* and *perception/relational* types. It is plausible that *verbal* type occupies the most frequent position because the nature of news text is to deliver information and thus it needs to use *verbal* verbs quite often. Likewise, *material* verb is frequent because it states concrete action and *existential* verb denotes existence; both are vital in constructing news text. Meanwhile, *corporeal* and *perception/relational* types are least frequent because *corporeal* deals with bodily gestures actions and *perception/relational* shows subjectivity. Both verb types are rather insignificant concepts in news writing. Based on the results of analysis, it is obvious that there is a firm relation between frequency of verbs used in news text and the characteristics of the text: linguistic units that are not in accordance with the function of the text are not really needed and thus infrequently used.

Keywords: *corpus, news, frequency, text characteristics*

INTRODUCTION

Verb is one of the most prominent linguistic units in all languages, along with noun and adjective in lexical category group. As stated by Chafe (1970), verb holds crucial role as it determines the arguments of the clauses, including the types and the number of arguments. In addition, verbs—in some languages—are the linguistic units where tenses and other grammatical categories are attached to (Comrie, 2000). In English, if there is no tense, the clause is ungrammatical, and by which it emphasizes the importance of verb. Compared to noun, verb is more dynamic because naturally it states actions, events, states, while noun refers to static entities (Clackson, 2007). However, statistically, noun is more frequent than verb in a way that noun labels objects and concepts of the world. Thus, in terms of number, nouns are more significantly important, but in terms of function, verbs determine the noun possible to occur in the clause/sentence. As an empirical evidence, the observation of verb frequencies in *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) (Davies, 2008) and *British National Corpus* (BNC) (Davies, 2004) proves that verbs occupy the second most frequent word class following noun or 10% of the total size of the corpora, as is mentioned in table 1.

Table 1. Absolute frequency of lexical categories in COCA and BNC

Word Class	COCA	BNC
Nouns	114.644.292 (20%)	19.451.274 (20%)
Verbs	61.188.902 (10%)	9.827.956 (10%)
Adjectives	38.314.634 (7%)	6.826.047 (7%)

Talking about the use of verbs, it might be influenced by the context where the verbs are used. It is assumed that the use of linguistic units might differ in different linguistic context, e.g., different text categories, different medium, different dialects (Bybee & Hopper, 2001; Oktavianti, 2016, 2019). Scheibmann in Bybee and Hopper (2001) finds out that the use of certain verbs (e.g., feel, believe) tend to follow first person singular (*I*) subject. Oktavianti (2019) investigates that modal verbs *be going to* is more frequent in spoken language than in written language. It shows that the medium of language use determines which linguistic unit is more appropriate to be used. It means that certain medium or certain linguistic context has its own characteristics that enable certain linguistic unit to occur more frequently than others. It is intriguing to further study the use of verbs in a particular linguistic context of which this study focuses on written medium of language use represented by newspaper.

As one of written media of language use, newspaper has gained its popularity compared with fiction and academic from the same written medium. Considering that each text category has its own characteristics, this study focuses on studying newspaper or news text, especially on how the

verbs are used in the text. It is crucial to study language use in news text since the language used in newspapers is the closest to language used in daily life (Bell, 1991; Conboy, 2010). In fiction, the language is manipulatively used (Leech & Short, 2007) and academic texts require standard form of language use (Biber & Gray, 2016). Thus, to depict actual language use, studying language in media, including newspaper, is the best option to enable comprehensive analysis. Talking about news texts, based on the nature, they can be classified into *hard news* and *soft news* (Bell, 1991). To limit the focus, this study analyses hard news in news section of *The Jakarta Post.* The selection of the newspaper is not a difficult task since *The Jakarta Post* is the most well-established and also the oldest English newspaper in Indonesia. Hence it is easier for the access and the compilation of the corpus and it provides rich and various data because of the enormous contents of the newspaper.

This study uses corpus linguistics and text analysis as the framework of analysis. Using corpus enables more empirical approach and provides richer data to the analysis. Besides, using corpus can lead to faster and more accurate analysis of frequency of use in which frequency is the key analysis of corpus linguistics (Biber & Quirk, 2012). Besides, by using corpus and focusing the analysis on frequency of linguistic units, it is plausible to find what is actually important. As stated by Baker (2010: 125), frequency indicates markedness; it indicates that something that frequently occurs is an important concept. Related to linguistic analysis, linguistic unit that frequently occurs in a particular text marks the unit as a typical feature of the text.

In analyzing the use of a linguistic unit, it is necessary to consider the medium of the language use and the characteristics of the texts. Halliday (1990: 93) argues that spoken language differs from written language due to its own distinct characteristics. Spoken language uses prosodic and paralinguistic features to assist message delivery, while written language does not have such tools. Moreover, written language allows revision, yet spoken language is more spontaneous (Biber & Conrad, 2009). Talking about written language, it has various text categories, e.g., news, fiction, academic, etc. News texts and academic texts have similar purpose that is to deliver information. They differ, however, in terms of the depth of the information delivery and types of information being delivered. Academic texts discuss the information profoundly and develop arguments scientifically (Biber & Conrad, 2009). Meanwhile, fiction is easily distinguished from two other text categories since it manipulates language use beautifully to build imaginary story and characters (Leech & Short, 2007). Based on the differences, it is believed that different text categories might enable different linguistic units

to occur more frequently; or else they might limit the use of certain linguistic units/features so they occur less frequently.

This study focuses on the analysis of newspaper as one of mass media to represent everyday language. The purpose of media is to deliver information, to give entertainment and to educate (Thomas et al., 2004). Thus the language use in media should be as close as possible to their viewers or readers. In newspaper context, the language used in the newspaper is the language used in the society (Bell, 1991: 3). The language used in newspaper is pretty much close and similar to what people use in everyday life. Besides, it emphasizes on the updated information delivered daily so the language used needs to be as effective and efficient as possible. In line with Bell, because it is read on daily basis by people in the society, language of newspaper is adapting to the existence of contemporary communication flow (Conboy, 2010: 3). Regarding the object of this study, there is some tendencies related to the use of verbs in news text. Verbs in news text tend to be in the form of present tense, and active voice is chosen more intensely over passive voice to cover some purposes (Bednarek & Caple, 2012; Biber & Conrad, 2009; Biber & Quirk, 2012).

Previous studies on language use in newspaper focused on the linguistic features that are typical to the text category (Bednarek & Caple, 2012; Biber & Quirk, 2012). Moreover, language in newspaper has been analyzed using corpus-based analysis (Deng & Li, 2017; Moon, 2016; Wang, 2015). In relation to verbs, some corpus studies have been done to analyze verbs, such as how verbs are acquired (Nordlund, 2008), the use of verbs in legal context (Denyer, 2003), the use of reporting verbs by native and non-native speakers (Yilmaz & Ertürk, 2017), and also critical review on phrasal verbs (Zarifi & Mukundan, 2013). Nonetheless, specific discussions on verbs used in newspaper are mainly limited to types of tenses, voice choice, and transitivity (Bednarek & Caple, 2012; Biber & Quirk, 2012; Conrad & Biber, 2001). The use of verbs in news section, especially in *The Jakarta Post,* using corpus-based analysis has not been widely discussed. Therefore this corpus-based study is expected to describe verb frequency and how it is related to text characteristics. In addition, this study can give empirical evidence on the importance of *frequency* as a concept and key analysis in linguistics, especially text analysis.

METHODS

This study employs corpus-based approach so it compiled data from news section of *The Jakarta Post* from October−December 2018 comprising 21.682 words. The compiled corpus was then analyzed by identifying the verbs used as well as the absolute frequencies of the verbs. The first investigation was done using *Lancsbox* corpus tool (Brezina, Timperley, & McEnery, 2018).

In *Lancsbox*, *Words* feature is used to count the frequency validly. Using *Words* in *Lancsbox,* it is easier to identify all verbs used in the corpus by sorting the type into *lemma* and filtering the result box by inserting [*_v] to limit the results for verb word class only. The corpus tool also arranges the frequency based on the order from the highest to the smallest ones so it is no need to manually arrange the frequency. The next investigation of frequency was carried out by classifying the verbs into verb types as compiled by Scheibmann (in Bybee and Hopper, 2001) in which she compiled verb taxonomy of Halliday (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) and verb types of Dixon (Dixon, 2005). The verb types are as follows.

Table 2. Verb types compiled by Scheibmann (in Bybee and Hopper, 2001)

Verb Type	Description
Cognition	cognitive activity
Corporeal	bodily gesture, bodily interaction
Existential	exist, happen
Feeling	emotion, wanting
Material	concrete and abstract doings and happenings
Perception	perception, attention
Perception/Relational	perception (subject not senser)
Possessive/Relational	possession
Relational	process of being
Verbal	saying, symbolic exchange of meaning

There is, however, the tendency of ambiguity for some words, e.g. *look* that can be classified into either *perception* or *perception/relational.* To solve this problem, this study used *Lancsbox* concordance feature, *KWIC,* to distinguish which *look* belongs to which type. As for the second problem proposed in this study, quantitative procedure is not relevant. To relate frequency and characteristics of text, this study modified the concept of *thick description* proposed by Geertz (Stake, 2010) to interpret the relationship as shown by the data, findings, and the theory. In interpreting, this study profoundly relates the available findings with the relevant theory, i.e. the theory of news text characteristics.

FINDINGS

This section discusses frequency of verb types and what are the most and the least frequent verb types in the corpus. To begin with, there is the discussion on verb type frequencies investigated based on Scheibmann's compilation of verb types. Below is the list of the frequency of the verbs found in the corpus of news section in *The Jakarta Post.*

Table 3. Frequency of verb types

Verb Type	Frequency
Verbal	327 (43.4%)
Material	146 (19.4%)
Existential	121 (16%)

Verb Type	Frequency
Perception	45 (6%)
Feeling	39 (5.2%)
Possessive/Relational	28 (3.73%)
Cognition	26 (3.47%)
Relational	17 (2.26%)
Corporeal	3 (0.4%)
Perception/Relational	1 (0.14%)

Table 3 clearly shows that that *verbal* type is the most frequent verb type found in the corpus of *The Jakarta Post* news section. This verb type dominates the whole corpus by occurring 43.4% of all verbs found. Table 3 also presents the other most frequent verb types, namely *material* and *existential* types. As for the less frequent verb types, there are *perception* (6%), *feeling* (5.2%)*, possessive/relational* (3.73%)*, cognition* (3.47%), and *relational* (2.26%) respectively. Meanwhile, the other two types, *corporeal* and *perception/relational* belong to the least frequent verb types found in news section in *The Jakarta Post.* The detailed description of verb type frequencies is listed in table 4 below.

Table 4. Detailed display of verb frequencies

Rank	Verb Type	Verb	Token Frequency	Total Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Verbal	say	273	327	43.4
		tell	38		
		ask	14		
2	Material	take	39	146	19.4
		do	36		
		go	22		
		come	22		
		use	14		
		work	8		
		play	5		
3	Existential	have	109	121	16
		happen	12		
4	Perception	see	20	45	6
		find	20		
		hear	5		
5	Feeling	want	17	39	5.2
		need	15		
		feel	7		
6	Possessive/Relational	have	28	28	3.73
7	Cognition	know	14	26	3.47
		describe	7		
		think	5		
8	Relational	become	10	17	2.26
		get	7		

Rank	Verb Type	Verb	Token Frequency	Total Frequency	Percentage (%)
9	Corporeal	live	3	3	0.4
10	Perception/Relational	look	1	1	0.14

Table 4 shows that for the most frequent verb type, *verbal,* the most frequent verb is *say* (including the inflected forms, *says, saying, said*). In the subsequent order, there are *tell* and *ask* that also belong to *verbal* type, although *tell* (237 occurrences) is more frequent than *ask* (14 occurrences). For *material* type, there are several verbs included, such as *take, do, go, come, use, work,* and *play* (including the inflected forms), while *existential* type covers *have* and *happen.* Those are the three most frequent verb types found in the corpus. According to the verbs, however, verb *say* and *have* occupy the highest ranks in the corpus.

As for the less frequent verb types, *perception, feeling, possessive/relational, cognition,* and *relational,* they also comprise several verbs as is displayed in table 4. The most interesting part to notice is the least frequent verb types, i.e. *corporeal* and *perception/relational.* In *corporeal* verb type, it only comprises of one verb, *live* (3 occurrences) and so do *perception/relational* type. It consists of one verb, *look,* in which the subject is not the senser. It is evident that table 4 shows empirical evidence that there are some verbs used more frequently than other verbs; in this case, it is in news text category.

DISCUSSION

In this section, the discussion focuses on how frequency of verbs is related to the characteristics of news text. As a text category, news obviously differs from other text categories. This is due to the main role of news section, e.g., hard news, is to deliver information or factual events happened in the society. Hard news contains report of accidents, conflicts, crimes, announcements, discoveries and other events that has occurred since the previous issue of their paper (Bell, 1991: 14). To achieve this function, news texts should use certain linguistic features to assist the message delivery. Bednarek & Caple (2012) states that the use of present tense verbs is slightly more often than past tense verbs. This is in accordance with the relevant information delivered in news, such as ongoing relevant process (e.g., *is comparing*), laws (e.g., *allows*), and timeless truth (e.g., *The Earth revolves around the sun*). Bednarek & Caple (2012) also states that the use of past tense, although it is less frequent than present tense, is necessary to provide information (i.e., temporal information) of the events that happened.

Related to verb types compiled by Scheibmann, *verbal* type holds important role since it is related to message delivery. Verb like *say* means

'utter words so as to convey information, an opinion, a feeling or intention, or an instruction' and belongs to reporting verb (*Oxford Dictionary of English*). It means that this verb is one of the main lexical elements in news writing as it corresponds to what news text is about. Likewise, other *verbal* verbs (e.g., *tell* and *ask*) can be found in the corpus and especially verb *tell* has pretty high frequency. The next most frequent verbs are *material* verbs that occupy 19.4% of the corpus size. Verbs belong to *material* type express concrete actions (Scheibmann in Bybee & Hopper, 2001) in which these are needed in the description of the event reporting. To complete the writing of the events (e.g., the description of conflicts, crimes, accidents, etc.), the journalists need to elaborate the details of the events, including the actions happened; hence this type is also frequent in the corpus. Without the description of the actions concretely, the reporting of the events will not be satisfactory. Following *verbal* and *material*, *existential* verb type holds the third most frequent type (16% of the total verb frequencies in the corpus) since it is crucial to state the existence (e.g., using *happen*) in describing events. This sort of verb assists the portrayal of time and place of the events being described by the news text. As defined by *Oxford Dictionary of English*, existence means 'the fact or state of living or having objective reality', verbs expressing existence thus are important in news writing to report the event objectively by stating the fact or state of the events.

Verbs belong to *perception, feeling, possessive/relational, cognition,* and *relational* occur rarely in the corpus (although not the least ones) due to the nature and function of news text. According to their nature, *perception* and *feeling* tend to be more subjective and personal; those are avoided in writing news, especially hard news. Meanwhile, *cognition* verbs show someone's assumption or understanding, something that is likely important in the proper context, but not quite prominent in writing hard news. The use of them hence is not frequent enough compared to *verbal, material,* and *existential* verbs. Still discussing the less frequent ones, *possessive/relation* also belongs to this classification because it occurs 3.73% of all verbs found in the corpus. It is the case since *possessive/relational* denotes possession and it tends to be more personal so it is unsurprising if the use of *possessive/relational* verb is negligible. The last verb type that is said to be less frequent is *relational* type. As mentioned by Scheibmann (in Bybee & Hopper, 2001), *relational* type states process of being and this kind of verb nature is quite unimportant in constructing news so it occupies the category of less frequent one.

The relationship of text characteristics and the least frequent verbs can also be analyzed. As is described previously, there are *corporeal* and *perception/relational* having the smallest number of frequencies among all other verb types in the corpus. This is probably because of the irrelevance of

the nature of the verbs and the function of news text. *Corporeal* verbs denote bodily gestures or bodily states that are too specific to some extent so that this type is rather unnecessary in writing news. Besides *corporeal* type, *perception* is of little importance in writing news—as proven by the empirical evidence from the corpus. This is likely related to the subjectivity embodied by the verb. As defined by *Oxford Dictionary of English,* perception is related to sense and/or interpretation so it tends to be subjective. News text, however, attempts to be as objective as possible, thus it focuses on the description of the events objectively. Therefore linguistic features that are not in accordance with the task of news text to report factual events are not pretty much needed, even though they are still used infrequently.

To summarize the relationship between frequency of verb types and characteristics of news text, below is table 5 presenting the highlighted points in regard to the most frequent verb types.

Table 5. Summary of relationship between frequency and text characteristics (most frequent types)

Most frequent verb types	The nature of the verb types	Why the verb types are needed in news text
verbal	to deliver message	to assist the portrayal of information or factual events
material	to state concrete actions	to describe the events concretely
existential	to state existence	to state the existence of the events (e.g., the time, the place)

As for the least frequent verb types, *corporeal* and *perception/relational,* table 6 below shows the summary of the relationship.

Table 6. Summary of relationship between frequency and text characteristics (least frequent types)

Least frequent verb types	The nature of the verb types	Why the verb types are least needed in news text
corporeal	to express bodily gestures or bodily state	it is not quite necessary to state bodily gestures in writing news text
perception/relational	to express perception of thing	news text consists of factual events description and attempts to be as objective as possible so the use of perception/relational verb is insignificant

Less frequent verb types are basically less important in assisting the delivery of report, but they are occasionally needed to add some details in news writing, so the use is obviously infrequent. In short, the verb types found to be the most frequent types are those needed the most in news

writing. The three most frequent types, *verbal, material,* and *existential* are prominent in writing news and are related to news text characteristics because they can be used to refer to the events described in the news text, especially related to the reporting, the concrete actions, and the existence of the events in regard to time and place. As described by Leitner (1986: 189), linguistic features belong to the main components of news are those that can be used to refer to the details of news writing, such as actors, times, places, and relate to at least some of basic facts on reporting. Meanwhile, linguistic features (including verbs) that are irrelevant with the function of news text and do not correspond to what news text is trying to convey are rarely used.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies that there are three most frequent verb types; they are *verbal, material,* and *existential* in the corpus of news section of *The Jakarta Post.* Among several verbs in *verbal* type, verb *say* is the most frequent one. *Verbal* type occupies the most frequent position since the nature of news is to deliver information of factual events. In other words, news text reports what has happened or what is happening and thus it needs *verbal* verbs to convey the information. Alike *verbal* type, *material* verb is used quite often because it denotes concrete actions that are related to the events being reported and *existential* verb denotes the existence of the events. Both are definitely important in constructing news texts so that the text can fulfill its role. Besides the most frequent verb types, there are some less frequent ones including *perception, feeling, cognition, possessive/relational,* and *relational* types and the least ones are *corporeal* and *perception/relational* verb types. It is also evident that *corporeal* and *perception/relational* types are least frequent because *corporeal* deals with bodily gestures and *perception/relational* expresses the impression of things of which both are two unimportant, irrelevant concepts in news writing. To sum up, it is clear that frequency and text characteristics are strongly related; and that frequency is important to take into consideration in linguistic analysis, including in text analysis.

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