

Comparing the use of idioms in academic writing steps used by Indonesian and native English writers

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Abstract. The background of this study is several studies highlighting unnatural or inaccurate academic English used by authors of the Indonesian language background. The issue here is how to help the authors to write more naturally, particularly in terms of academic writing steps (e.g., establishing background, stating aims, providing arguments, etc.). We argue that academic-writing-steps-related lexicogrammatical patterns and idioms from native English authors in Research Articles (RAs) can help. However, we need to first systematically identify differences in RAs written by native English and Indonesian authors, which is also the aim of this study. Methodologically, we replicate Prihantoro, Mudeng & Rahmah's (forthcoming) procedure to identify academic writing steps (Morley 2014) and idioms in RAs written by Indonesian authors. We randomly sampled 30% of the articles concerning Prihantoro & Mudeng's study. Our findings show that RAs written by native English authors are superior in frequency and quality of lexicogrammatical patterns and idioms. Our study here has at least two implications: 1) it confirms the observation of a number of second-language research scholars, and 2) we argue that the use of academic phrasebank, such as Morley's (2014) and a number of idiom databases can help improve learner's academic writing skills.

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1 Introduction

Academic writing has a pivotal role in facilitating advancements for education and science. In order to keep up with and enhance the quality of education, an effective academic writing is essential for researchers to communicate their ideas and findings accurately. However, authors with a background in English as second language face struggle in producing natural and accurate academic English, same with authors from Indonesia [1].

Therefore, the development of teaching materials is highly necessary. The development of teaching materials can provide content that promotes the expansion of language knowledge and familiarise learners with vocabulary expressions and idiomatic usage, enabling them to expand their expressive capabilities as non-native English learners, approaching the proficiency of native speakers. This can assist students in developing more specialised vocabulary and improving their comprehension of idiomatic expressions used in an academic context.

In contrast to previous studies that examined texts and disciplines holistically, this paper will analyse nineteen research articles in the field of linguistics and sociology from native English and Indonesian. Furthermore, this paper aims to determine the idiom usage in both English and Indonesian native. Consequently, this research is expected to contribute to discourse and assist in the development of teaching materials by providing empirical evidence from the conducted study.

1.1 Idioms

Idioms are a series of phrases that cannot be interpreted literally. A study conducted by Taha states that according to Moon [2], “an idiom is a particular lexical collocation or phrasal lexeme peculiar to a language.” It usually occurs in a particular order, and the meaning of the whole phrase cannot be predicted from its individual words. The characteristics of idioms include: 1) Idioms are colloquial or used in everyday interactions and informal conversations. 2) They are culture-specific, that the construction is related to a specific culture. 3) They are fixed, figurative, opaque, and metaphorical. 4) They may cover non-compositional polymorphemic words as well as collocations and constructions that are not freely formed. [3]

Although idioms are one of the characteristics shared by all languages [4] and are seen to be an essential component of human communication, they greatly perplex early and non-native learners [5].

Non-native speakers may experience language, cultural, and technological issues as a result, which might severely impact communication. Idioms are necessary for effective communication in all forms, including speaking, reading, writing, and listening [6]. The correct and proper use of idioms is a distinguishing characteristic of native-level command of the language, and it is a reliable indicator of the ability of foreign learners [7]. Idioms are frequently seen by language instructors and students as being too casual to be used in academic English. [8] Idioms should thus be avoided in academic English by researchers and students who speak English as a second language. However, idioms serve a variety of purposes in academic communication, including subject switching, emphasis, paraphrasing, building a feeling of group identification, and characterising and assessing.

1.2 Previous Research Related to the Use of Idioms in Academic Writing

While some research states that studying idioms is useful for language teaching, many of them only provide idioms as language learning objects or learning materials [9] [10] [11]. Some articles only discuss the impact of learning idioms. [12] [13] [14]

Thus, from the understanding and characteristics of idioms, people will draw the conclusion that the use of idioms in academic texts is exceedingly rare and is often avoided in making content in academic fields to avoid misunderstanding or misleading information for the readers, especially for those who are not native of that language or also the inappropriate use of non-natives trying to use idioms. However, in its application, idioms are not only limited to non-academic areas, because a native speaker sometimes use some idioms that can give some colour to his or her academic writing or speech, so that it can provide some data to be used as learning material in a language learning class, and there have been several researchers who can prove the idioms in some academic writing or speech and examine that matter.

In this paper, the discussion focuses on the idiom used in academic texts by English and Indonesian writers, especially in the form of research articles.

2 Result and Discussion

The total of 19 research articles, which consisted of fifteen RAs from MICUSP and four RAs in the linguistics and sociology domain, were analysed. The papers were mainly from the MICUSP corpus data (seven linguistic and eight sociology papers), and few RAs was from

research papers with native Indonesian authors (two papers for each field).

In the first stage, we began to collect and read the data from the MICUSP corpus to gain an initial understanding of the RAs and the framework needed to analyse it. At this stage, the deep reading strategy is used and Academic Phrasebank [15] is used as a guide in determining the steps in academic writing. In the second stage, after finding out about the steps used in linguistic and sociology research articles in MICUSP, we look for idioms used in the fifteen MICUSP research articles. It aims to analyse what idioms are used in the linguistic and in the sociology domain. In the third stage, the researcher began to examine the idioms used in each paper using the idiomatic phrases listed by BASE & OCAE's by Miller [8]. In the next stage, we look for the function of each idiom used, then examine at which step the idioms are found. After finishing with MICUSP data we process the next data from research articles made by Indonesians. In this step, the researcher repeats procedures 1-5 for the four data papers from Indonesia and describes the differences between English and Indonesian natives.

1.3 The Lexicogrammatical Patterns in RAs by Native English and Indonesian Authors

Before comparing idioms' use in the steps of academic writing used by Indonesian writers and native English writers, we first need to identify the differences between RA written by native English writers and Indonesian writers.

Using the same method as our previous research [16], we found differences in the frequency and quality of lexicogrammatical patterns in RAs by Native English and Indonesian Authors.

Considering the comparison between MICUSP RAs and the RAs written by Indonesian authors, the data reveals notable differences in the usage of certain steps within the sociology and linguistic domains. Indonesian articles use more C4, C3, C5, and C2 steps in the sociology domain. Meanwhile, MICUSP uses more C6 and C1 than Indonesia. In linguistic papers, Indonesian papers use more C4, C5, C6, C3, and C1 than MICUSP papers, while they use less C2 than MICUSP papers. These findings show distinct patterns in the distribution of step usage between Indonesian-authored RAs and MICUSP RAs in the respective domains of sociology and linguistics.

1.4 The Frequency of Idiomatic Expressions in RAs by Native English and Indonesian Authors

Table 1. and Table 2. gives the result of analysing idioms applied in written academic texts. Out of all MICUSP papers, five of eight sociology papers use idioms, whereas none in the linguistic domain. On the other hand, out of the four Indonesian RAs, only one linguistic article used idioms (last resort).

Table 1. The idiom frequency distribution in the MICUSP papers.

| Idiom | SOC G 0031 | SOC G 0111 | SOC G 1105 | SOC G 3052 | SOC G 3071 | SOC G 3081 | Tota l |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Across | - | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | - | (7) |
| Along the lines of | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | (1) |
| Beg the questio n | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | (1) |
| Driving force | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | (2) |
| On the one hand | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | (1) |
| On the other hand | - | - | - | - | - | 8 | (8) |
| Take for granted | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | (2) |
| The lines in the sand | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | (1) |
| The other side of the coin | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | (1) |

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| TOTAL | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 11 | (24) |
| L | | | | | | | |

In MICUSP, the most recent phrase used for idioms is “on the other hand” which means an argument presenting contrasting points. It means that the writers give some other points to the readers on their work. Minimal use of idioms can be some reasons. One of them is that many people think that idioms are for informal situations. But in fact, Idioms are a literary device that writers use to set the scene for characters, dialogue, and settings. They may also be utilised to inject comedy into a piece. Idioms can give more variation of the kind of words. But, many writers have not applied for it yet. It can be concluded that does not imply that all native speakers utilise idioms, though, as usage among the BASE lecturers varied widely. The researcher will retry the text with Indonesian authors to be compared with the native text.

Table 2. The idiom frequency distribution in the Indonesian authors’ papers.

| Idiom | VOL63NO2S99 329946 | iji_2021_ 3_24 | 3921514 1PB | 4371529 1PB | Tot al |
|--------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Last resort | - | - | - | 1 | (1) |
| TOTAL | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | (1) |

It is almost the same as Indonesian authors. From four linguistic and sociology papers, only one idiom (last resort) was found, which has meant the only choice that remains after all others have been tried that adjust the topic of the paper. This idiom is in the discussion section, and it has the function of reporting positive and negative reactions in the research report of that paper. This finding reveals that Indonesia hardly uses any idioms for their writing. The researcher has given BASE & OCAE’s idioms list to be looked up. The result shows that the Indonesian authors use less idioms than English native, even though both do not commonly use idioms in academic writing.

1.5 Comparison of idioms in RAs by Native English and Indonesian Authors

Table 3. reveals that the use of idioms is more common in RAs written by native English, whereas it is only found once in RAs written by Indonesian writers. Another difference shown by our findings is that the use of idioms in the MICUSP data is only found in the sociology domain, while the idioms usage by Indonesian writers are only found in the linguistic domain.

Table 3. The idiom frequency distribution in all of the RAs.

| PAPER ID | SENTENCE | SECTION | ANALYSIS |
|----------|---|----------------------|----------|
| SOCG0031 | Many scholars believe that a persistent feeling of hopelessness is the <u>driving force</u> behind suicide in adults. | Literature Review | C1S05 |
| | On <u>the other side of the coin</u> are sociologists who believe that individuals have considerable power in shaping their world and perceptions. | Literature Review | C1S06 |
| | Later, in the discussion section, I will support my conclusions by citing and integrating the above scholarship to provide a complete picture of the <u>driving forces</u> behind tendency toward suicidal behavior. | Methodology | C3S02 |
| SOCG0111 | (though not a consistently legal medical option <u>across</u> the States), | Introduction | C1S01 |
| | So this <u>begs the question</u> : how far is morality interconnected with abortion? Are these two concepts causally related? | Introduction | C1S10 |
| SOCG1105 | ... Table 2 demonstrates the distributions of | Results | C4S02 |

| | | | |
|----------|--|--------------------------|-------|
| | attitudes toward unhappy marriages <u>across</u> different demographic and socioeconomic variables. | | |
| SOCG3052 | Greater racial/ethnic diversity was represented in this project than <u>across</u> the campus at large. | Data & Method | C3S10 |
| | <u>Sort of along the same lines</u> , do you think that there's any stigma associated with women partying? | Data & Method | C4S11 |
| | She eloquently, if somewhat pessimistically, argues that <u>the lines in the sand</u> that women draw to distinguish themselves from rape victims are ineffective, ... | Data & Method | C2S12 |
| SOCG3071 | Social (dis)advantage is thus a cumulative process of tracking experienced <u>across</u> many transitions | Introduction | C2S06 |
| | The proportion male declines <u>across</u> periods as men disproportionately enroll, | Methods & Findings (M&F) | C4S08 |
| | Marriage also shows a differing effect <u>across</u> the life-course. | M&F | C4S08 |
| | Timing of college enrollment is associated with a number of variables in ways that vary <u>across</u> individuals' employment life-courses, | Conclusion | C6S02 |
| SOCG3081 | Thirdly, they conflated "femininity" with | Preliminary Findings | C2S16 |

| | | |
|---|------|-------|
| “women” and <u>take the conception of femininity for granted</u> which only confirms the stereotypes of femininity. | (PF) | |
| <u>On the other hand,</u> the analyses of femininity are grounded in Butler’s notion of performativity. | PF | C2S14 |
| Further, Chen (1999) claims that “In discussions of gender, hegemony is associated with <u>the taken-for-granted</u> conceptions about the nature of men and women, of masculinity and femininity” (586) and it is about one type of masculinity establishing and preserving ascendancy over others. | PF | C2S12 |
| <u>On the other hand,</u> class, ethnicity and gender are connected with one another as activities and accomplishments; | PF | C2S16 |
| <u>On the other hand,</u> female interviewees confirmed the relationship between the work and “performative” of femininity. | PF | C4S11 |
| <u>On the other hand,</u> they emphasize hard working and staying at labs all the time protected their femininity from contaminated. | PF | C4S12 |
| <u>On the other hand,</u> another change in the | PF | C4S12 |

| | | | |
|------------|--|------------|-------|
| | engineering career paths is engineers' moving into management. | | |
| | <u>On the other hand</u> , Chinese men evaluated these women's "accomplishment of femininity" in different ways. | PF | C5S07 |
| | <u>On the one hand</u> , they thought their American female colleagues and faculties were too masculine. | PF | C4S11 |
| | <u>On the other hand</u> , they thought American women outside engineering and science were too open to be morally pure. | PF | C4S11 |
| | <u>On the other hand</u> , women choose different reference groups to construct their femininity though it is always built in relations. | Conclusion | C6S11 |
| 43715291PB | As such, the grammar is "forced" to apply Onset Metathesis as a <u>last resort</u> , | Discussion | C4S06 |

Based on data from MICUSP, the use of idioms in academic writing steps by native English-speaking authors can be found in several steps. For example, the idiom appears four times in step C1 (introducing the work), six times in step C2 (referring to sources), twice in step C3 (describing the method), nine times in step C4 (reporting results), once in step C5 (discussing findings), and twice in step C6 (writing conclusions).

These results reveal that the use of idioms tends to occur frequently at step C4 (reporting results) in academic writing by native English-speaking authors. However, the use of idioms is rare in step C5 (discussing findings). A possible explanation for this might be because the step C4 usually focused on presenting information and analysing the data. The results reporting section is usually focused on presenting information and analysing data. Idioms, with their figurative or figurative

meanings, can be used in this section to add emphasis, succinctly convey complex ideas, or give a clear picture of the result obtained. The use of idioms in C4 can increase the clarity and impact of findings, making them more attractive to readers.

On the other hand, the step C5 involves the interpretation and analysis of the results in relation to the research question or objective. The C5 steps aim to provide a deeper understanding and critical analysis of the findings. Thus, the focus is more on logical reasoning, objective analysis, and clear explanation of the implications of the results. Idioms, which are more colloquial or figurative in nature, may be considered less suitable for the objective and analytical tone required in discussing findings. Therefore, idiom usage tends to be relatively less common in C5.

3 Conclusion

The analysis of both MICUSP and Indonesian authors' RAs reveal interesting findings regarding the use of idioms in academic writing steps. Most papers follow the academic writing steps C1 to C6. However, a notable difference in the use of idioms was confirmed, that Indonesian authors hardly ever use idioms in academic writing compared to the native English authors (MICUSP). From MICUSP, idioms appear only in sociology papers, while from the Indonesian authors papers, it appeared in the linguistic domain. Besides that, the data shows the infrequent use of idioms in Indonesians papers. The results also show that idioms were predominantly utilised in step C4, where idioms can add emphasis and clarity to the findings, and were infrequently used in step C5, which emphasises objective analysis and critical interpretation of results. Therefore, this observation shows the need for the development of teaching materials that address this phenomenon and aid Indonesian students in improving their English proficiency and writing skills.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of developing teaching materials that specifically address idiomatic expressions for non-native English speakers, especially those from Indonesia. Integrating idioms properly into academic writing can greatly increase the clarity and impact of research findings, infusing text with colour and expressiveness. While native English writers tend to use idioms more often, Indonesian writers can benefit from incorporating idiomatic expressions in their academic writing to improve their language skills. Leveraging resources such as Morley's Academic Phrasebank [15] and idiom databases, such as those presented in Miller's study [8], can help students improve their academic writing more naturally and effectively.

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