

A PRELIMINARY CORPUS-BASED INVESTIGATION OF ENGLISH LEXICAL VERBS IN L2 PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERING WRITING

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Abstract: *Corpus-based studies relating to academic writing in the engineering field have been aplenty compared to those looking into aspects of professional writing in the field. This is particularly true in the context of second language writing. This preliminary study thus aims to investigate the use of English lexical verbs in the writings of Malaysian professionals in the field of engineering. The objectives of the study are to: 1) identify frequently used lexical verbs in written engineering texts, and 2) determine whether frequent lexical verbs can be considered as 'specialized' vocabulary. A total of 20 written texts comprised of official reports, memos, and instructions in the field of electrical, electrical and mechanical engineering were collected. The scripts were contributed by individual engineers from various companies who speak English as a second language. The AntConc 3.5.7 software was used to compute the frequencies of different verb forms as well as to identify the top 10 verbs in each verb form. The verb form with the highest occurrence is the base form with the tag _VVO whilst the singular simple present verb forms tagged as _VVZ had the lowest occurrence. A further concordance analysis showed that the written works were commonly written in the imperative form suggestive of instructional procedures. A majority of the most frequent verbs found in the writings are listed as academic words (Academic Word List, 2000) with a few that may be categorized as specialized engineering vocabulary. This preliminary finding with limited data sets suggests that there exists certain overlaps between commonly used verbs in academic and professional engineering writing. More importantly, knowing the kinds of lexical verbs used in written works of professional engineers may bridge existing gaps between the linguistic knowledge commonly taught at the tertiary level and those that are actually practiced in the professional engineering setting.*

Keywords: *Corpus-based studies, lexical verbs, academic words, specialized engineering vocabulary*

Introduction

The last two decades have witnessed heightened interest in corpus-based studies of academic writing in the field of science and technology. This is due to the advancement of corpus technology for language research as well as the increasing emphasis on science and technology in the 21st century workforce. Writing skills, alongside other communication skills, are highly emphasized by employers besides technical knowledge and skills. For professional engineers, they are required to engage in various kinds of writing including writing emails, reports, project proposal, and presentation slides, among others. (Rajprasit, Pratoomrat, Wang, Kulsiri, & Hemchua, 2014). Unfortunately, writing and engineering are typically viewed as a dichotomy