



Reporting verb in research projects of EFL English major students

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Abstract

Aim: The current study set out to determine 1) which types of reporting verbs are most commonly used by EFL English major students in their research projects and 2) which types of reporting verbs are most commonly used by this population.

Method: 52 research projects written by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students majoring in English were chosen and analyzed to achieve the study's goals. Furthermore, reporting verbs were categorized according to Francis, Huston, and Manning's (1996) work.

Findings: As the results indicated, "show," "find," "present," "analyze," and "state" were the five reporting verbs used most frequently. The results showed that after classifying the reporting verb groups, the ARGUE verb group comprised 50% of all reporting verb groups, followed by the THINK verb group (18.75%), SHOW verb group (12.5%), FIND verb group (12.5%), and ADD verb group (6.25%), respectively.

Implications/Novel Contribution: The purpose of this research is to educate writers to make more informed decisions when selecting reporting evidence for academic writing or research projects. From a theoretical perspective, this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to investigating the potential benefits of evidentiality for language users beyond simply identifying the origin of a piece of information. It could help guide future research and provide a basis for new findings. There is still room for research into topics like the purposes of different kinds of evidence, genre conventions, and the application of evidence in different types of writing.

Key Words: Reporting Verb, Research Projects, EFL Students, Academic Writing

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INTRODUCTION

In most cases, a student's research project or thesis will be based on topics or research into areas that the student is particularly passionate about. The students, the school, and the library all keep copies for reference purposes. A research project or thesis may require fourth-year students at some colleges and universities to satisfy some of the requirements for the degree. Therefore, students need to use various resources and draw upon the work of their peers. In addition, when planning their research environments, they must publicize and debate prior research and cite relevant claims (Swales 1999; Zhang 2008). The reporting verb is one of the most important tools for discussing and reporting on the work of others (Writing Centre, 2014). The reason is that it is a significant semantic word in academic writing typically used to discuss or present the work of others and to convey one's level of familiarity with and attitude toward the sources. In academic writing, the reporting verb serves multiple functions, including demonstrating the author's expertise in the subject, influencing readers, and delving deeper into the author's research (Bavelas 1978; Gilbert 1977; Myers 1991).

Reporting verb is a crucial academic skill for providing a concise summary of someone's work or knowledge. Since it is seen as a very common language that does not need to be characterized, both language teachers and students overlook its significance and complexity in grammar books and language textbooks (Zhang 2008). According to some studies, non-native writers face challenges when using reporting verbs in academic writing (Bruce 1989; Granger 1993; Pickard 1995; Thompson and Yiyun 1999). This demonstrates the importance of the reporting verb in academic writing and its careful application. It has a slightly different and often subtle meaning, so it's important to realize and understand how to choose a reporting verb accurately before using it in a sentence. Since most Thai university students take English as a second language (EFL), this research focuses on the challenges and difficulties that EFL students face when using the reporting verb. In addition, there needs to be more research on reporting

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verbs in Thailand, so the following questions are particularly interesting to this study.

1. What are the most frequently used reporting verbs in research projects of EFL English major students?
2. Which reporting verbs do most of them use in their research projects?

METHODOLOGY

The Compilation of the Corpus

The compilation of this corpus was from 52 research projects written by EFL English major undergraduate students who enrolled in an Independent Study course, amounting to 1,071,558 running words. The students were in the last semester of their fourth year of studies in Rajamangala University Isan (RMUTI) from the 2010 to 2014 academic year. This course is a partial fulfilment of the requirements of their degree. The compilation of the study involved their major areas in the discipline of English. The section organization of their research projects followed a general format in all seven main sections (Abstract, Introduction, Literature Review, Method, Results, and Discussion and Conclusion, and Reference).

In order to answer the research questions, the reporting verb list of the corpus represented the Abstract, Introduction, Methodology, Results, and Discussion section followed by Swales (1999). Table 1 gives an overview of the data used for the EFL English major students while Table 2 shows the average of the Research Project (RP) Corpus.

Table 1: Material for the RP corpus

Academic Year	No. of Research Projects	Token words (Running words)
2010	12	222,711
2011	10	211,336
2012	10	212,450
2013	10	212,402
2014	10	212,659
Total	52	1,071,558

Table 2: Coverage of reporting verb in the RP corpus

Number of Token words (Running words)	1,071,558
Average of Word Length	849.76
Frequency of Reporting verb	10,404
% of Reporting verb Coverage	0.97

Table 2 contains information on the coverage of reporting verb in the RP Corpus. The number of token words (running words) was 1,071,558 words. As it is seen, there was a total of reporting verbs found in the corpus equal to 10,404 occurrences which accounted for 0.97% of the whole compiled corpus.

Procedure and Data Collection

To answer the purposes of the study, we gathered 52 English research projects written by EFL English major students in order to form a list of reporting verbs and group of reporting verbs most of them use in their research projects. As a result, there are two main procedures of the analysis that composed of collecting reporting verb frequency and classifying their groups.

The concordancing software called “WordSmith Tool Version 6” (Scott 2012) was selected for this study. This is an integrated suite of program for making the list of reporting verbs. Since, all research projects were in PDF file then we converted them into text file (*.txt.) in order to apply with the concordancing software.

Firstly, the Wordlist tool was used to make the word frequency lists of research projects. This tool of software program offered both alphabetical and frequency order of the reporting verbs. Next, the most frequently occurring reporting verbs were obtained. Then we classified the groups of reporting verbs used in the RP Corpus.

Data Analysis

To respond to the first research question that is about the frequency of reporting verbs in research projects of EFL English major students, an attempt is made to select reporting verb words that frequently appeared in the compiled corpus of this study. The list is obtained from the help of the concordancing software “WordSmith Tool Version 6”. Additionally, the second research question is purposed to explore the groups of reporting verbs found in the RP Corpus. After obtaining the list of the most frequently used reporting verbs, we classified the verb groups on the basis of Francis et al. (1996) as follows:

1. ARGUE: verbs are concerned with speaking, writing and other forms of communication, e.g. argue, suggest, point out, write, conclude, claim, add, maintain, propose, imply, and mention.
2. THINK: verbs are concerned with thinking, including, having a belief, knowing, understanding, hoping, fearing, e.g. think, assume, feel, hold, and believe.
3. SHOW: verbs are concerned with indicating a fact or situation, e.g. show, demonstrate, and reveal.
4. FIND: verbs are concerned with coming to know or think something, find, observe, discover, and indicate.
5. ADD: verbs are concerned with the relationship of something that is said or written to something else that has been said or written, e.g. add, repeat, and verify.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study concentrated on the frequency, coverage, and distribution of reporting verbs in the RP Corpus. Consequently, a corpus of 1,071,558 running words from EFL English major students’ research projects has been applied. This section is structured to answer the two posted research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the most frequently used reporting verbs in research projects of EFL English Major Students?

Table 3 below showed the ranking and frequency of the most frequently used reporting verbs of the RP Corpus.

Table 3: The most frequently used reporting verbs of the corpus

Rank	Word	F	Rank	Word	F
1	show	2,205	17	maintain	123
2	find	1,416	18	claim	117
3	present	1,170	19	believe	117
4	analyze	1,005	20	recognize	99
5	state	726	21	demonstrate	93
6	consider	444	22	observe	93
7	describe	399	23	acknowledge	57
8	think	396	24	confirm	48
9	indicate	393	25	establish	39
10	explain	345	26	argue	33
11	define	261	27	illustrate	30
12	suggest	192	28	assume	24
13	comment	168	29	doubt	18
14	note	129	30	assert	6
15	emphasize	129	31	verify	6
16	discuss	123			

From the data shown in Table 3, it provided the most prevalent reporting verbs in the RP Corpus. The total frequency of occurrences in this table was calculated from the 1st rank to 31th rank and there was a total of 10,404 occurrences. According to the list, the top five high frequency words were “show” 2,205 times, “find” 1,416 times, “present” 1,170 times, “analyze” 1,005 times, and “state” 726 times.

Research Question 2: Which group of reporting verbs do most of them use in their research projects?

To answer this question, we classified the verb groups that are adapted from Francis et al. (1996). According to Table 4, the highest percentage of reporting verb groups for the RP Corpus refers to the ARGUE verb group (48.39%). In addition, the results also presented that EFL English major students tend to use THINK verbs (19.36%) as their second preference and followed by SHOW (12.9%), FIND (12.9%), and ADD (6.45%) verb groups respectively.

Table 4: The groups of reporting verbs of the RP corpus

	Argue		Think		Show	Find	Add
state	suggest	maintain	consider	acknowledge	show	find	confirm
describe	comment	claim	think	assume	present	analyze	verify
indicate	note	observe	believe	doubt	demonstrate	recognize	
explain	emphasize	argue			illustrate	establish	
define	discuss	assert					

Discussion

Based on the findings, this study attempts to form the frequency of reporting verbs used by EFL English major students and which groups of reporting verbs most of them use in their research projects. Firstly, to analyze the frequency of reporting verbs, it was seen (Table 3) that reporting verbs covered only 0.97% of text. It clearly showed that reporting verbs occurred less often than academic or general words as the function of them are specific purpose. Since, we usually apply them to refer to the academic writers' previous studies with ideas, research outcomes or findings, and research activities of previous research agents while the academic or general words are used to write or describe the whole paper.

The results of this study demonstrated that the most frequently occurring reporting verbs were “show”, “find”, “present”, “analyse”, and “state” that are related to many studies (Jirapanakorn 2012; Yang 2013; Nguyen and Pramoolsook 2015). Secondly, to classify the groups of reporting verbs, it was found (Table 4) that EFL English major students used the ARGUE verb group in the highest percentage (48.39%). THINK verbs were used in the second rank (19.36%), SHOW (12.9%), FIND (12.9%), and ADD verb groups were used in the lowest rank (6.45%) respectively. These results are close to Yeganeh and Boghayeri's (2015) that the ARGUE verb group is the highest percentage in their data.

Table 5: The groups of reporting verbs of the RP corpus

No	Concordance		
1	The results of the study	showed	the rank of top 100 most frequent adjectives that
2	Nation (1997)	have shown	that a second language learner needs to know a
3	that the most frequency	show	words in the English language will be those most useful
4	different sound but it can	show	that the same expressive feeling
5	In addition, it also	shows	that the statistics about the
6	Result of the data analysis	showed	that the most employed English
7	In summary, the examples	show	that the strategy of translation
8	The more incorrect answer	shows	that the students have much
9	The finding	showed	that 24 students of the first
10	different sound but it can	show	the same expressive feeling
11	The wanted words	are shown	in the straight line in
12	the translated text would be	shown	it would help him/her to
13	the criteria of level	show	that item 10 was the most
14	and interjections	showed	that the highest scores for the
15	has several words that	show	the gender or animals and others

These results were confirmed by Hyland (2002) that writers or researchers in the social sciences and humanities notably preferred ARGUE verb than others. From these results, it is possible to note that teachers should

consider to begin with the ARGUE group when teaching academic writing because it has the highest percentage of usage. In addition, this study also presented that there is appreciable use of reporting verbs with that-clause to conclude others' researches as shown in Table 5.

The above finding is in close agreement with Francis et al. (1996) that reporting verb is a verb usually followed by a that-clause or V that pattern used to indicate the event or situation that is mentioned.

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The importance of reporting verbs and the effect they may have on how writers are perceived makes teaching of these verbs and how they are used a necessary component in research methodology and academic writing courses (Manan and Noor 2014). This study aimed to explore the most frequently used reporting verbs in research projects of EFL English major students and groups of reporting verbs do most of them use in their research projects. The results demonstrated the total of research projects, the number of tokens or running words and the total of occurrences. For this study, we collected 52 research projects of EFL English major students of Rajamangala University of Technology Isan (RMUTI) from 2010 to 2014.

The number of tokens or running words of the RP Corpus was 1,071,558 words. Additionally, the results indicated that the five most prevalent reporting verbs in the RP Corpus were "show" 2,205 times, "find" 1,416 times, "present" 1,170 times, "analyze" 1,005 times, and "state" 726 times respectively. After classifying the groups of reporting verbs, the results presented that EFL English major students tend to use the ARGUE verb group most (48.39%). The results also presented that they use THINK verbs (19.36%) as their second preference followed by SHOW (12.9%), FIND (12.9%), and ADD (6.45%) verb group respectively.

The differences in reporting verb use from this study provide useful information to research writer. Even a research project has standard four-section format: Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion, the linguistics characteristics such as reporting verbs in these sections may vary in different fields. This study intends to help to raise the writers' awareness in choosing reporting evidential in research project or academic writing. Theoretically, it is a beginning to study what evidentially can do for the language users other than indicating the information source. It may lay a foundation for the future research and provide orientation for further studies. There are more areas to be further studied, for example, the functions of other evidential types, the genre convention, and evidential use in other genres. Besides, an evidential use across genres in different cultures may vary and it is regarded to be an interesting topic in significant study.

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This article does not have any appendix.