

A Study on Phrases Used in Writing Thesis Abstracts

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Abstract: This study aimed to identify and analyze the types of phrases used in thesis abstracts written by students of the English Education Study Program. Phrase usage in academic writing, especially in thesis abstracts, plays an important role in presenting research information clearly, concisely, and effectively. This study focused on five types of phrases, namely noun phrases, verb phrases, adjective phrases, prepositional phrases, and adverbial phrases. The study employed a descriptive qualitative design using content analysis. The data were taken from five thesis abstracts written by students of the English Education Study Program and were classified and analyzed based on phrase categories to determine their frequency and distribution. The findings revealed a total of 463 phrases, consisting of 186 noun phrases, 85 verb phrases, 54 adjective phrases, 97 prepositional phrases, and 41 adverbial phrases. Noun phrases were the most dominant type, indicating their important role in presenting key research elements such as topics, objectives, participants, methods, and findings. The dominance of noun phrases reflects the characteristics of academic writing, which emphasize clarity and conciseness.

Keywords: academic writing; content analysis; noun phrases; phrase types; thesis abstracts

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a fundamental role in human communication (Durga & Mehrotra, 2022). It conveys ideas, expresses thoughts, and builds meaning within a text. In academic writing, and especially in thesis abstracts, language presents research objectives, methods, findings, and conclusions in a concise and objective way. Effective language use therefore ensures that readers grasp the information in an abstract accurately.

English now dominates academic and scientific communication (Zeng & Yang, 2024). Most journals, proceedings, and research reports appear in English, so students must develop strong English academic writing skills. In a thesis abstract, appropriate English reflects accurate meaning, grammatical control, and adherence to international academic conventions. Academic writing is also formal, objective, clear, and well organized, so every linguistic element must contribute to an efficient presentation of information.

A thesis abstract consists of paragraphs built from sentences, and sentences are built from smaller grammatical units such as phrases (Sakkir

et al., 2025). A phrase is a group of words that works as a grammatical unit but lacks both a subject and a predicate. Although phrases are smaller than clauses, they carry meaning efficiently. Writers use noun phrases, verb phrases, adjective phrases, adverbial phrases, and prepositional phrases to summarize research information within the limited space of an abstract.

Phrases condense complex ideas into compact forms while keeping clarity and coherence. Appropriate phrase use lets writers state objectives, methods, findings, and implications effectively. Studying the types and functions of phrases in thesis abstracts therefore reveals how linguistic structures support successful academic writing. This study analyzes the phrases used in thesis abstracts and identifies their role in conveying academic information. It addresses three questions: the types of phrases commonly used in thesis abstracts, how those phrases are used, and what role they play in constructing effective abstracts.

METHOD

This study applied a descriptive qualitative design using content analysis. Descriptive

qualitative research examines the condition of natural objects and positions the researcher as the key instrument (Dulal, 2025). The design suited this study because most of the data appeared as words and written text rather than numbers. The research took place at Hamzanwadi University in Selong, East Lombok. The data came from five thesis abstracts written by students of the English Education Study Program who graduated in 2025. The researcher selected the abstracts through purposive sampling because they represented different research topics and provided sufficient data for phrase analysis. The thesis abstract served as the primary data source, while previous articles and journals served as secondary sources.

The researcher served as the main instrument, supported by a phrase identification

checklist based on English grammar theory. The analysis followed three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The researcher read each abstract, recorded every phrase, classified each phrase into one of the five types, and then counted the frequency and distribution of each type. Trustworthiness followed four criteria, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Aslan, 2025).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of five thesis abstracts identified 463 phrases across five categories. Table 1 presents the distribution of each phrase type in every abstract.

Table 1. Distribution of Phrase Types in Five Thesis Abstracts

No	Title of Thesis Abstract	Total	NP	VP	AdjP	PP	AdvP
1	Investigating Students’ Perception of the Utilization of ChatGPT in Improving Writing Skills	80	31	15	9	19	6
2	The Effectiveness of Using Spotify to Enhance Listening Proficiency at the English Department of Hamzanwadi University	105	40	22	13	23	7
3	Development of English Learning Module Based on Local Wisdom for Grade X Students of MA Hisbul Wathan NWDI Semaya	96	41	17	11	20	7
4	Revealing the Best Students’ Achievement and Learning Style Using the FARK Model at SMK IT Nurul Mukhlisin Pringgarata	77	30	14	8	15	10
5	The Effectiveness of Using the ELSA Speak Application to Teach English Speaking Skills to High School Students	105	44	17	13	20	11
	Total	463	186	85	54	97	41

Note: NP = noun phrase; VP = verb phrase; AdjP = adjective phrase; PP = prepositional phrase; AdvP = adverbial phrase.

Table 1 shows that noun phrases occurred most often in every abstract, with counts of 31, 40, 41, 30, and 44. Prepositional phrases ranked second in all abstracts. Verb phrases, adjective

phrases, and adverbial phrases appeared less often. Figure 1 shows the overall frequency of each phrase type across the five abstracts.

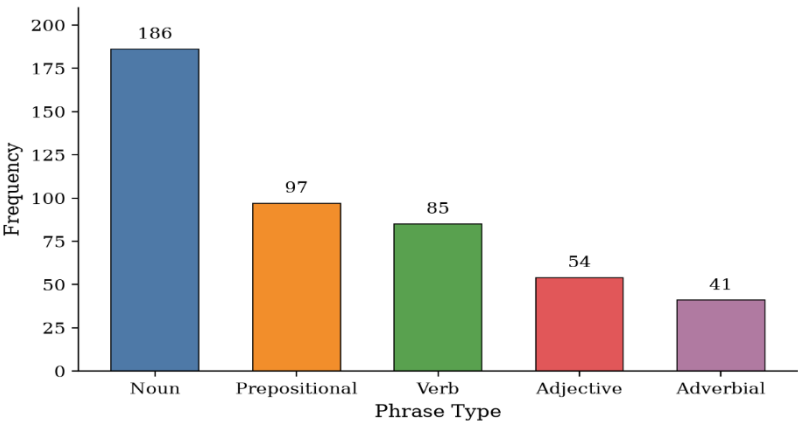


Figure 1. Overall Frequency of Phrase Types in Five Thesis Abstracts

Discussion

Noun phrases dominated the language of the abstracts because they present research topics, objectives, variables, participants, instruments, and findings. Since an abstract summarizes a whole study concisely, writers use noun phrases to pack information without long sentence structures. This result agrees with Frempong et al. (2022) and Biber et al. (2011), who found that academic texts rely on noun phrases to compress complex information into concise expressions.

Prepositional phrases ranked second in every abstract. They added information about place, purpose, method, and the relationships between concepts. In academic writing, prepositional phrases clarify meaning and create logical links between ideas while keeping the text concise. Their frequent occurrence showed the writers' effort to provide context without adding length.

Verb phrases appeared less often than noun and prepositional phrases, ranging from 14 to 22 occurrences. They mainly described research activities, procedures, and findings. This pattern indicated that abstracts focus more on presenting information than on describing actions in detail.

Adjective phrases and adverbial phrases occurred least, with 8 to 13 and 6 to 11 occurrences respectively. Their limited use suggested that thesis abstracts prioritize factual and objective information over detailed description. This finding supports the nature of academic abstracts, which require concise, clear, and informative language.

Overall, noun phrases played the most significant role in constructing thesis abstracts. Their dominance reflects the communicative purpose of an abstract, which is to summarize research information within a limited number of words. Prepositional phrases supported the organization and clarification of information, while verb, adjective, and adverbial phrases served complementary functions. The findings confirm that phrase use in thesis abstracts follows academic writing conventions that emphasize information density, clarity, and conciseness.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of five thesis abstracts identified five types of phrases and a total of 463 phrases, consisting of 186 noun phrases, 97 prepositional phrases, 85 verb phrases, 54 adjective phrases, and 41 adverbial phrases. Noun

phrases were the most frequent type, which shows their dominant role in presenting research topics, variables, participants, objectives, methods, and findings in a concise and informative way. The dominance of noun phrases reflects the emphasis of academic writing on information density, clarity, and conciseness. Students, lecturers, and future researchers should therefore pay close attention to phrase structures, especially noun phrases, to improve the quality of thesis abstracts.

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