# ATTITUDINAL/STANCE LEXICAL BUNDLES IN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' NARRATIVES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS' WRITTEN REGISTER

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## ABSTRACT

*Analyzing multi-word expressions aids in understanding how native and non-native English speakers in secondary schools differ in expressing their attitude and stance, especially in written compositions. Thus, this study sought to compare and analyze the attitudinal/stance lexical bundles used by students in their narratives, specifically in terms of epistemicity, desire, obligation/directive, intention/prediction, and ability to conclude which between the native and non-native speakers used attitudinal/stance lexical bundles more frequently. Results showed that non-native English learners demonstrated a greater number of attitudinal/stance lexical bundles compared to their native counterparts, except in terms of desire. Non-native speakers employed more indirect and impersonal variations, unlike the native speakers whose expressions were more direct and straightforward. In line with these findings, further studies on the implications of the observed rarity and higher frequency of attitudinal/stance bundles use by non-native learners are hereby recommended.*

*Keywords: lexical bundles, discourse analysis, corpus study, Philippine ESL speakers, narrative writing*

## INTRODUCTION

Understanding how English language learners use fixed expressions or lexical bundles in their writings will give insights about their knowledge and competency in using language. Discussion and investigations in this discipline of recurrent word combinations and expressions that appear extensively by chance have been notably prevalent for the past decades, yet to continually monitor the evolution and changes in the lexical bundles being used by a group of learners—native and non-native speakers—is still highly significant in the present provided that these bundles are also dynamically responding in ever-changing contexts and situations. (Hyland &

Jiang, 2018). Despite the perennial variations occurring with the lexical bundles, major differences among L1 and L2 writers' registers are consistently noticed. If these changes can be discussed further, it will be a huge contribution to language learning and how language teaching should advance.

When it comes to fixed expressions usage, professional L2 writers in English have uniquely maximized variations of bundles that are far different from how their professional L1 counterparts used them (Pan, Reppen & Biber, 2016). Upon analyzing them, similar functions were discovered to be expressed differently by L1 and L2 professionals. Nonetheless, these examinations of the expressions must not be

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limited to professionals and academicians and their written discourses, analyzing how L1 and L2 learners utilized them may also address the challenges and issues in accuracy and fluency, especially that it is confirmed that L2 writers still use lexical bundles more abundantly than L1 writers in selected high-rated essays (Bychkovska & Lee, 2017).

However, it becomes alarming when these differences oftentimes pose ungrammaticalities in the sentence or phrasal structures and constructions. For example, an important word/s in a bundle cannot be removed, for this erroneous practice may lead to misunderstandings. To emphasize, differences may not be a matter of great consideration only if threats in the functional and structural aspects are not found. This might be the case because when L2 learners in College tend to deviate from the most commonly used lexical bundles, not only completeness but also correctness is frequently compromised (Shin, Cortes & Yoo, 2018). Despite the revelation, this remains as helpful inputs to the English language pedagogy in these L2 learning contexts, providing recommendations to the agents in the field of English language education to generate targeted improvements and enhancements in the teaching-learning curriculum, assessment, and teaching.

Moreover, even though a study previously subjected young learners' written register, such as their composed argumentative and expository essays (Chen & Baker, 2014), to this genre of analysis, a classification of lexical bundles that support learners in their free and purposive expression of the extent of knowledge (epistemicity), desires, intentions and predictions, directives and obligations, and abilities, known as attitudinal/stance bundles, are not considered to be focused by separating them from the other types, such as discourse organizers and referential bundles. It is also highly essential to observe how attitudinal/stance bundles operate in students' writings of narratives, given the findings that learners relied on them in argumentative compositions (Yang, 2017). Comparatively, non-native Ph.D. scholars were once noted to be using epistemic stance bundles more frequently

compared the native ones in their academic writings (Malik et al., 2019). This shows that learners in different levels, especially undergraduate and graduate levels have been well-focused; nevertheless, L1 and L2 learners in the secondary level are yet to be brought in the limelight of these linguistic proceedings.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To contribute to the field by comparing and analyzing the attitudinal/stance bundles of epistemicity, desire, intention/prediction, directive/obligation, and ability appearing in two groups of secondary school students, the present study attained the following specific objectives:

1. Compare the attitudinal/stance bundles used by native and non-native speakers in secondary schools in writing their narratives, in terms of:
    1.1 Expressions of epistemicity;
    1.2 Expressions of desire;
    1.3 Expressions of intention/prediction;
    1.4 Expressions of directive/obligation; and
    1.5 Expressions of ability
2. Determine which between native and non-native speakers in secondary schools employed the most number of attitudinal/stance bundles in writing their narratives.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a frequency-driven approach and investigation to compare and analyze the usage of attitudinal/stance bundles in the narratives written by native and non-native speakers in the secondary schools. This section also describes the (1) corpora used, (2) data collection and analysis, and (3) intercoding and percentage of agreement.

### Corpora used in research

The corpora used in this study were thirty narratives, two different groups of learners coming from two different schools with different language contexts. The writers were secondary

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school students (ages ranging from 14-16 years old) having English in their respective schools. With the consent of English subject teachers and the students, each of the participants was tasked to compose a narrative which should be restricted to 600-800 words, but only high-rated narratives were selected. To serve the purpose of understanding how students expressed their attitudes/stance, all compositions were required to be written in the first-person points of view.

### Data Collection and Unit of Analysis

The unit that was used by the researcher and the inter-coder to tally the appearance and frequency of lexical bundles was the idea unit of analysis. Thirty narratives were selected from the native speakers, and another 30 were from the non-native speakers for a total of 60 compositions investigated. To mitigate the parsing process, only the first 300 words per composition were examined, the lexical bundles were tallied and categorized. Thus, a total of 9,000 words per group of students—native and non-native speakers—was investigated and interpreted in the results and discussion sections. In the tables that were presented, every asterisk represented five occurrences. Nonetheless, every expression should appear at least thrice in the composition to be included in the analysis.

*Symbol* = *Verbal Interpretation*

\* = 3-5 times per nine thousand words
\*\* = 6-10 times per nine thousand words
\*\*\* = 11-15 times per nine thousand words
\*\*\*\* = above 15 times per nine thousand words

The sample parsing shown was done to all the narratives in the corpora, focusing on the attitudinal/stance bundles in the compositions of native and non-native speakers in secondary schools

DESIRE
*"Yeah? What **do you want**?"*

EPISTEMIC
*"**You look like** you had an interesting life!*
DESIRE
***You want to** tell me some stuff about it?"*

DESIRE
*"Heh! **What is it to you**, youngling?"*

OBLIGATION
*"**I need to know what** it was like during the depression,*
OBLIGATION
***I really need to know** the hardships you went through."*

INTENTION
*"Well...... Alright. **Let me** think for a moment...."*

INTENTION/PREDICTION
*"Really? **You're going to** try to remember?!"*

ABILITY
*"Please, **Let me** remember in peace for it is quite*
INTENTION
*a story that **you can** learn from!"*

### Percentage of Agreement

The same sets of data underwent inter-coding wherein a requested professional counter-checked the identifications of sub-functions performed by attitudinal stance lexical bundles in the corpora. Showing to the inter-coder how the process was being done, including the tallying of phrases [lexical bundles] used and the juxtaposition of those used by the two groups (native learners and non-native learners); as directed, the inter-coder observed the same process to the determine attitudinal/stance expressions of epistemic, desire, attitude, obligation and/or ability.

After the entire process, the interpretations were compared to the analysis of the researcher to yield the percentage of agreement. The same unit of analysis (Idea units) and noting were used and subsequently compared to results tallied by the researcher

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initially. The percentage of agreement noted was approximately 80% (where 128 of the inter-coder's 160 responses agreed to the initial coding results). Yet, despite of the acceptability of the percentage agreement which transpired, there were some items which were corrected and/or considered when the two coders conceded to establish functions of desire, obligation and ability to conventionalized subject-verb patterns as *I want to, I need, I can, etc.*

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data gathered and tallied, the results were obtained to address the objectives of the study and were discussed in comparison and/or contrast to the existing literatures. The results and discussion are as follows:

**1. Comparison of the Attitudinal/Stance Bundles of Epistemicity in Native and Non-native Learners' Narratives**

**1.1 In Terms of Expressions of Epistemicity.** Table 1 shows the attitudinal/modality lexical bundles used by the native and non-native speakers in expressing their epistemicity, which are expressions of knowledge or certainly.

As shown in the table, although there was no huge difference in the frequency of usage between native and non-native learners, the findings were still congruent to the findings of Malik, Fazal, and Moavia (2019) that non-native speakers used more attitudinal/stance lexical bundles of epistemicity in their writings although the younger groups of non-native speakers more impersonal expressions, which were not written in the first-person point of view (POV).

Expressing their epistemic level indirectly may likely avoid being misinterpreted or upset the interlocutor, through the frequent use of impersonal epistemic phrases as *It is indeed true, I'll be sure that it is, when you feel like,* etc.

**Table 1**
*Attitudinal/Stance Bundles of Epistemicity in Native and Non-native Learners' Narratives*

| Expressions | Native Learners | Non-Native Learners |
|---|---|---|
| *I know ...* | * | ** |
| *I believe...* | ** | |
| *I'm not sure if...* | * | |
| *what I thought...* | * | |
| *There were...* | * | |
| *there was no...* | * | *** |
| *You look like ...* | * | |
| *I knew about...* | * | |
| *He made sure that...* | * | |
| *She does not like what...* | * | |
| *little did I know that ...* | * | |
| *I didn't really know...* | * | * |
| *These were a few of...* | * | * |
| *I came to know…* | | * |
| *maybe I* | | * |
| *It is indeed true* | | * |
| *there was an* | | * |
| *I just couldn't remember* | | * |
| *I guess that I* | | ** |
| *I figured that there was* | | * |
| *I think* | | * |
| *I'll be sure that it is* | * | |
| *S/He doesn't know that* | | * |
| *my uncertainty of thoughts* | | ** |
| **Total of Epistemic Expressions** | **51-85 times per 9,000 words** | **57-95 times per 9,000 words** |

Verbal Interpretation
* = 3-5 times per nine thousand words
** = 6-10 times per nine thousand words
*** = 11-15 times per nine thousand words
**** = above 15 times per nine thousand words

**1.2 In Terms of Expressions of Desire.** Table 2 shows the attitudinal/modality lexical bundles used by the two groups of students - native and non-native speakers - in expressing their desire. Results show that frequency in the usage did not pose a huge difference in contrary to the study of Pan, Reppen & Biber (2016) stating that L2 writers in the professional level demonstrated very different lexical bundles compared to the native writers. As apparent in the results, some phrases have evidently been so notable due to their numerable frequency of repeated use by both groups of learners - native and non-native speakers.

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**Table 2**
*Attitudinal/Stance Bundles of Desire in Native and Non-native Learners' Narratives*

| Expressions | Native Learners | Non-Native Learners |
|---|---|---|
| *We shall ...* | * | |
| *I want to...* | * | * |
| *I will ...* | * | |
| *He had wanted to...* | *** | |
| *I would...* | ** | * |
| *I've...* | * | |
| *I didn't ...* | * | |
| *I could be ...* | *** | |
| *i do not ...* | * | |
| *he loved doing ...* | * | |
| *he usually ...* | * | |
| *He was fond of…* | * | |
| *He began...* | * | |
| *I would rather...* | * | * |
| *I swore to myself to...* | * | * |
| *You look like...* | ** | |
| *They wanted to* | * | **** |
| *You're going to...* | * | * |
| *What do you want…* | * | * |
| *I/She want you to* | * | * |
| *I want you all to* | | |
| *it is my choice to ..* | | * |
| *still longing for* | | * |
| *to make sure* | | * |
| **Total Expressions of Desire** | **81-135 times per 9,000 words** | **84-140 times per 9,000 words** |

Verbal Interpretation
* = 3-5 times per nine thousand words
** = 6-10 times per nine thousand words
*** = 11-15 times per nine thousand words
**** = above 15 times per nine thousand words

Some of these were *I could be* [appearing 16-20 instances] in all 30 narratives and *They wanted to* [which was repeated used – about 25 times per 9000 words] which were both common expressions/phrases in expressing one's desires. Certainly, these were the most sensible, appropriate and convenient to use especially in explicitly communicating what was wanted without the need for unfamiliar expressions and ambiguous words to serve the purpose.

**1.3 In Terms of Expressions of Intention/Prediction.** Table 3 shows the attitudinal/modality lexical bundles used by the two groups of students - native and non-native speakers - in expressing their intention/prediction. In expressing intentions and predictions, it is apparent that learners who are native speakers used more expressions of intention.

**Table 3**
*Attitudinal/Stance Bundles of Intention/Prediction in Native and Non-native Learners' Narratives*

| Expressions | Native Learners | Non-Native Learners |
|---|---|---|
| *they/you will ...* | ** | * |
| *I promise...* | * | |
| *You shall be...* | * | |
| *that would be* | ** | |
| *He vowed to...* | * | |
| *We decide to...* | **** | |
| *how is one supposed to...* | ** | |
| *I still I believe that the...* | * | |
| *looking forward to ...* | * | |
| *He would ...* | * | |
| *He was also fond of* | * | |
| *this eventually led to …* | * | |
| *I'm hoping you to* | | * |
| *I want you to know that* | | ** |
| *I'm not interested in* | | * |
| *we started* | | * |
| *he keeps on* | | * |
| *he was going to* | | * |
| *I thought* | | * |
| *We may be* | | * |
| *I decided that* | | ** |
| *She already complained about* | | * |
| *It's been fine to her* | | * |
| *She is starting to be* | | * |
| *they're going to* | | * |
| *they're going to have* | | * |
| *It was easy to* | | * |
| *I really hope that* | | * |
| *I could be* | | * |
| *I should be really* | | * |
| *I'm not doing this for* | | * |
| *I'm doing this to* | | * |
| *it will never* | | * |
| *I see* | | * |
| **Total Expressions of Intention/Prediction** | **99-165 times per 9,000 words** | **81-135 times per 9,000 words** |

Verbal Interpretation
* = 3-5 times per nine thousand words
** = 6-10 times per nine thousand words
*** = 11-15 times per nine thousand words
**** = above 15 times per nine thousand words

Results showed contradiction and at the same time support what was confirmed by Bychkovska & Lee (2017) that in high-rated essays, L2 writers usually utilized a greater abundance of lexical bundles. This somewhat supported the data, as well, because although the non-native group used less bundles in terms of number, the present L2 secondary students still employed more varieties, most significantly when stating intentions and predictions, through impersonal sentence structures. This implies that native speakers tend to be more direct and straightforward, while non-native speakers tend to resort to indirect, impersonal different ways in expressing their intention and prediction rather than to be on point.

Most significantly, this intention/prediction category garnered the most number of lexical expressions noted, followed by the attitudinal stance bundles of epistemic. These were the sub-functions of lexical bundles, wherein writers were able to derive more syntactic forms of expressing; whereas on the other hand, the remaining two categories—which were obligation and ability—fairly consisted only of common word successions that were observed to be often identical in both groups of corpora.

**1.4 In terms of expressions of directive/obligation.** Table 4 shows the attitudinal/modality lexical bundles used by the two groups of students - native and non-native speakers - in expressing their obligation/directive. As presented, obligating others or expressing one's own obligations yielded the least number of stance-expressing phrases and frequencies.

Results then strengthens the conclusion of Chen & Baker (2014) that lower-level writings share almost the same expressions that will gradually be enhanced as they move forth to the succeeding stages in the education. Students at this adolescent stage may not be used to expressing or acknowledging obligations, especially when these were to be described in speech or writing; thus, most of their attitudinal/stance expression were merely intentions and/or expressions of desires. Epistemic stances, too, were comparatively much greater in number compared to these words/phrases of desire and ability.

**Table 4**
*Attitudinal/Stance Bundles of Directive/Obligation in Native and Non-native Learners' Narratives*

| Expressions | Native Learners | Non-Native Learners |
|---|---|---|
| *I really ...* | * | * |
| *I was not supposed to ...* | * | |
| *I/She/He had to* | ** | * |
| *governor was forced to* | * | * |
| *i don't need to* | * | * |
| *you don't have to* | | * |
| *they're going' to* | | * |
| *He just needs to* | | * |
| *I should've* | | * |
| *I know I should* | | ** |
| *I probably should* | | * |
| *I/She* | | * |
| *I had to* | | * |
| **Total Expressions of Directive/Obligation** | **18-30 times per nine thousand words** | **39-65 times per nine thousand words** |

Verbal Interpretation
\* = 3-5 times per nine thousand words
\*\* = 6-10 times per nine thousand words
\*\*\* = 11-15 times per nine thousand words
\*\*\*\* = above 15 times per nine thousand words

1.5 **In terms of expressions of ability. Table 5 shows the attitudinal/modality lexical bundles used by the two groups of students- native and non-native speakers - in expressing their desire.** It reveals that ability bundles - though not as numerous as the leading three stances - displayed a significant number of instances wherein commonly-used expressions from the other group are also used by the learners in the other.

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**Table 5**
*Attitudinal/Stance Bundles of Ability in Native and Non-native Learners' Narratives*

| Expressions | Native Learners | Non-Native Learners |
|---|---|---|
| *you/he can* | ** | **** |
| *I could not* | * | * |
| *I have never* | ** | * |
| *He also learned how to* | * | * |
| *They soon learned to* | * | * |
| *The incapability of to* | * | * |
| *he gets tired to* | | * |
| *I went to* | | * |
| *I ask if he could* | | * |
| *I had* | | * |
| *I can't* | | * |
| *All I can do is* | | * |
| *I've ever had* | | * |
| *I managed to* | | * |
| *It can never be* | | * |
| *It easy for me to* | | * |
| *I have* | | * |
| **Total Expressions of Ability** | **24-40 times per nine thousand words** | **66-110 times per nine thousand words** |

Verbal Interpretation
\* = 3-5 times per nine thousand words
\*\* = 6-10 times per nine thousand words
\*\*\* = 11-15 times per nine thousand words
\*\*\*\* = above 15 times per nine thousand words

This can be clearly understood through the explanation of Chen and Baker (2014) that writers in lower levels substantially used shorter variations of lexical bundles at this stage. They were considerably, as to these results, shorter yet universal.

Frequency-wise, it was not questionable that shorter two- or three-word lexical phrases would appear very often. They were easily noted and spontaneously used by writers, especially the expression *You can,* although other forms or revisions of this popular combination must also be tried in order to purposefully enrich students' creativity in the usage of words as well.

**2. Comparison of the Attitudinal/Stance Bundles of Desire in Native and Non-native Learners' Narratives**
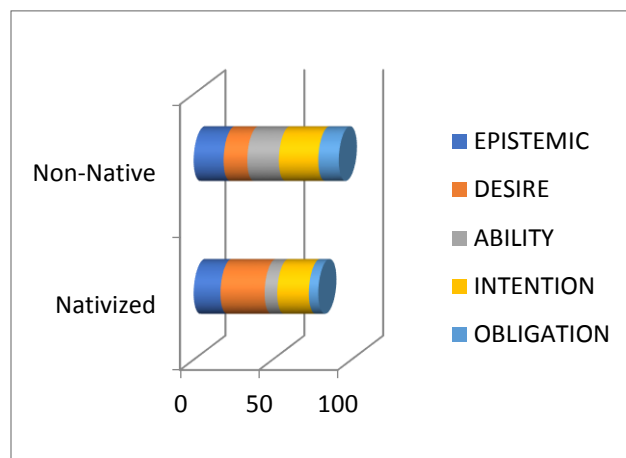


**Figure 1: The Frequency-Driven Comparison of Attitudinal/Stance Lexical Bundles used by Native and Non-Native Speakers**

Figure 1 presents the number of attitudinal/modality stance bundles used by native and non-native groups of students—native and non-native speakers. It remarkably concludes that non-native learners have recorded a greater number of attitudinal/modality lexical bundles compared to the native speakers. Overall, this is consistent with the set of studies (Pan, Reppen & Biber, 2016; Bychkovska&Lee, 2017; Malik, Fazal, and Moavia, 2019) emphasizing that non-native speaker demonstrated a greater and wider use of lexical bundles.

Similar to the results garnered from participating professionals and academics in these aforementioned studies, non-native learners were equally maximizing forms and variations of expressions to signify their stance more frequently than native counterparts who often relied on their fixed and common English register and to selectively use the most-often used sets of lexical phrases, most likely, to minimize ambiguity, peculiarity and confusion that unfamiliar sets of words/phrases may bring to a wider audience or groups of readers.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Anchored on the findings and discussion, the following conclusions were derived:

1. The use of epistemic stance bundles for both native and non-native learners is somewhat similar although non-native speakers showed an edge in using impersonal and indirect variations, which used points of view other than the first person. The use of the impersonal stance by non-native speakers says something about how non-native speakers lessen their sense of assertion and insistence of the extent of what they know.

2. Desire bundles are more frequently used by native speakers who tend to be more direct and straightforward in expressing what they want to do or undertake. Compared to non-native speakers, they have a clearer sense and expressions of their desire.

3. High-rated essays written by native secondary students are confirmed to possess more lexical bundles, most specially statements of intention/prediction, which appeared the most number of times in the studied corpora.

4. Lower-level writers share the same expressions in terms of ability bundles. Learners are expected to progress and learn more bundles when they reach the higher levels of education.

5. Non-native speakers employ the most number of attitudinal/stance lexical bundles, which can be an opportunity for further studies to confirm and further decipher the shown rarity given the fact that frequency of occurring bundles does not automatically entail grammatical accuracy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings of the study, the following are the recommendations drawn:

1. Investigations focusing on the comparison of non-native speakers' use impersonal and indirect stance and native speakers' straightforwardness may be considered to further understand the deeper implications of the significant difference on their culture, personalities, and language acquisition and learning.

2. The advantage of clear, direct, and on-point expressions may be discussed to non-native learners of English, while non-native speakers' avoidance of suggestiveness/assertiveness may also be studied and disclosed to native speakers for better understanding.

3. Zeroing in the presence and purpose that intention/prediction bundles serve in high-level essays may be aimed by further explorations wherein non-native speakers may also learn from provided that these bundles are deemed to be useful in native speakers' advanced essays.

4. More advanced expressions may be introduced to beginning and developing writers for them to practice using in their earliest stages of learning. Exploring unusual expressions may enhance their vocabulary that will help them express themselves more fluently.

5. Parallel studies on the pedagogical implications of these observable rarity and higher frequency of attitudinal/stance bundle in non-native speakers' writing may be added. Similarly, confirmatory and comparative tests on the grammaticality of the lexical bundles variedly used by both groups may be helpful.

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