Frequency of Verbs in Lifestyle Column in The Jakarta Post and The Relation to Text Characteristics: A Corpus-Based Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines the use of verbs in Lifestyle column in The Jakarta Post to identify the frequency of verbs used in the column and to find out the relation between frequency of verbs and the characteristics of Lifestyle column as the staple product of soft news. This study collected the data, sentences containing lexical verbs, from Lifestyle articles labeled as Lifestyle Corpus comprising 29.195 words. The Lifestyle Corpus was loaded into Lancsbox corpus tool to get the assistance in identifying the use of the verbs. The data were analyzed both qualitatively (classifying the types of the verbs based on Scheibmann's compilation and interpreting the relation between frequency and text characteristics) and quantitatively (counting the percentage of verb usage and list the verbs from the most frequent to the least frequent one). The results of the study show that the verb types most frequently used in Lifestyle of The Jakarta Post are material, verbal, and relational and the least frequent ones are possessive/relational, cognition, and perception/relational. The highest use of material verbs is plausible since the members of material verbs can also be used as phrasal verbs and used metaphorically. Following material, verbal verbs occupies the second most frequent verb of which it is in accordance with the nature of news text, that is to report something. Meanwhile, perception/relational verb indicates that the expression of subjective perception is less prominent in writing Lifestyle articles as it is also avoided in news writing in general. This strongly indicates that frequency of linguistic units is (1) affected by the nature of the linguistic units themselves or (2) affected by the characteristics of the text.

Keywords: verbs; corpus; soft news; The Jakarta Post

Introduction

As one of lexical categories and its prominent role in clause structure, verb

is a salient word class in almost all languages. (Chafe, 1970) states that verbs are nucleus of clause constructions because they determine the number and types of arguments in the clauses. Morphosyntactically, verbs in Indo-European languages—including English—are the linguistic unit to be attached by tense and aspect inflections (Comrie, 1976, 2000). Meanwhile, some languages depend on the existence of tense inflection to make the sentence grammatical and their absence cause the production of ungrammatical constructions. With regard to semantic aspect, verbs are naturally more dynamic than nouns and adjectives since they state events, action (Clackson, 2007). Although, nouns are primary to some extent, e.g., in language acquisition (O'Grady, 2005), but verbs are grammatically salient.

In terms of language use, however, the choice of a particular linguistic unit (i.e., verb) is influenced by the context of use or the nature of the text. More specifically, different communication mode (spoken or written) might also influence the use of linguistic units due to different characteristics (Biber & Conrad, 2009; Halliday, 1990). Spoken language use tends to be more spontaneous, thus allowing for the use lexical hedges (Biber & Conrad, 2009), and the use of pronoun in spoken context differs from that in written one with first person singular *I* is the most frequent one in spoken English (Conrad & Biber, 2009). In relation to verb use, it is also influenced by distinct text categories, mode, dialect (Bybee & Hopper, 2001; Oktavianti, 2016, 2019).

One of the examples of language use is in the newspaper. The language used in newspaper should be as close to daily life language as possible (Bell, 1991; Conboy, 2010). It is different from language used in literary works (e.g., fictions) since the language is manipulatively used to build up the stories (Leech & Short, 2007) and academic texts demand the use of standardized forms (Biber & Gray, 2016). It is then interesting to relate the salience of verbs and the nature of newspaper language as the representation of daily language use to depict actual language use. Regarding news texts, they basically can be divided into two more specific texts, namely *hard news* and *soft news* (Bell, 1991). As both texts differ form each other, it is eventually appealing to analyze language use in each of them. To delimit the focus, this study concerns on *soft news* represented by *Lifestyle* column in *The Jakarta Post.* As the most well-established and the oldest English newspaper in Indonesia, it enables the easy access and rich compilation of data to achieve comprehensive results on the description of verbs use.

This study employs a corpus-based analysis to describe verb use, hence it focuses on the frequency of use. Corpus-based analysis is used because it can be used to analyze *big data* resulting in more comprehensive analysis and more reliable findings. Besides, studying frequency is prominent in linguistics because it might indicate the key concept in a certain language (or, a certain text type). As Baker (2010) stated that frequency indicates what is important. In

corpus-based analysis, frequency is one of key analyses (Szudarski, 2017) and by identifying the frequency, it apparently supports the purpose of the study to figure out the relation between the use of verbs and text characteristics.

Previous corpus-based studies on newspaper texts reveal that verbs in news texts tend to be in the form of present tense and active voice is used more frequently over passive voice to achieve some purposes (Bednarek & Caple, 2012; Biber & Conrad, 2009; Biber & Quirk, 2012). However, those studies examined the morphosyntactic aspects and did not specifically about the verb types. Some other studies on language in newspaper has been carried out to relate with pedagogical implication (Deng & Li, 2017), and primarily to assist critical discourse analysis of the texts (Moon, 2016; Wang, 2015). With regard to verbs, there are some previous corpus-based studies on how verbs are acquired (Nordlund, 2008), how verbs are used in legal context (Denyer, 2003), how verbs are used by native and non-native speakers of English (Yilmaz & Ertürk, 2017), and how phrasal verbs are used (Zarifi & Mukundan, 2013). So far, the discussions on verbs in newspaper are limited to their morphosyntactic properties (e.g., tenses, voice, transitivity) (Bednarek & Caple, 2012; Biber & Quirk, 2012; Conrad & Biber, 2001). Recently, a study on how frequency of verbs in *news* section is influenced by the characteristics of the news text has been done (Oktavianti & Ardianti, 2019), resulting in *verbal* verb types (e.g., *say*) as the most frequent verb type in the text, in which is obviously in accordance with the nature of the text as a report of an event and others. The use of verbs in soft news section, however, has not been widely discussed. Therefore this study is expected to describe verb frequency and how it is related to text characteristics.

Methods

This study uses corpus-based approach, compiling language data from articles published in *Lifestyle* column in *The Jakarta Post* from October to November 2018 with the toal size of 29.195 words and labeled as *Lifestyle Corpus*. The corpus was then analyzed by identifying the verbs in the corpus as well as the absolute frequencies of the verbs. The investigation was done using corpus tool *Lancsbox* (Brezina, Timperley, & McEnery, 2018). By using the *Word* feature in *Lancsbox*, the frequency of verbs can be counted validly; the search was then continued to sort the type into *lemma* and filter the result box by inserting the code *_v to limit the results (verbs only). The corpus tool automatically filters the results from the most frequent verbs into the least frequent ones.

As for the verb types, this study follows the compilation of verbs by Scheibmann (in Bybee & Hopper, 2001) in which she combined verb taxonomy of Halliday (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) and verb types of Dixon (Dixon,

2005). The complete list of the verb types is mentioned in table 1 below.

Table 1. Verb types compiled by Scheibmann (in Bybee and Hopper, 2001)

Verb Type	Description
Cognition	cognitive activity
Corporeal	bodily gesture, bodily interaction
Existential	exist, happen
Feeling	emotion, wanting
Material	concrete and abstract doings and happenings
Perception	perception, attention
Perception/Relational	perception (subject not senser)
Possessive/ Relational	possession
Relational	process of being
Verbal	saying, symbolic exchange of meaning

This study adopts the classification compiled by Scheibmann because it is the most suited one for textual analysis. Some other classifications are too simple (Chafe, 1970), too concrete (Levin, 1993), or too abstract (Pavey, 2010). This sort of classification, however, triggers the tendency of ambiguity for some words, e.g. *look* that might be categorized into either *perception* or *perception/relational* or in identifying which *have* belongs to lexical verb. The concordance lines below shows some examples of *have* as auxiliary and as an initial unit of quasi-modal *have to*. These sorts of problems can be overcome by looking at the context of use and the structure of the whole clause. Hence, this study used *KWIC* feature in *Lancsbox* as it provided concordance lines for each search result, enabling the investigation of which *look* belong to which type or which *have* that can be taken as data. Below is the example of concordance lines of *have*.

105	're gay, you can't show it. You	have to be a certain size, a certain he
106	ay blocked. "We discovered that you	have to comply with a lot of requirem
107	k-or-treating, Sonny, Sam and Sarah	have to save the town from the influe
108	October 28, 2018 | 09:09 pm "You	have to struggle so hard to make you
109	you to know about Beethoven. So, I	have to study all about Beethoven ar
110	ians or 16 percent of the population	have used cannabis this year, and th
111	. "It is the kind of story that I	have wanted to tell but I've never dor
112	the same time. It is not necessary to	have watched the first film to unders
113	out Indonesia? As for local brands, I	have\xCAnot really seen any obvious
114	ther film. Spoiler alert for those who	have yet seen the film. Some adult cl

Figure 1. Concordance lines of *have*

The examples of *have* displayed in figure 1 were then excluded from the data.

To depict the relation between frequency of verbs and text characteristics (i.e. *lifestyle* articles), this study employed the concept of *thick description* proposed by Geertz (Stake, 2010) to interpret the connection between frequency of use in a particular text and the characteristic of text. The interpretation using this concept was done by profoundly relates the available findings (i.e., frequency of verbs) with the relevant theory on news text characteristics.

Results

This section displays the results of the quantitative analysis toward the verb types in the *Lifestyle Corpus,* using absolute (raw) frequencies. Table 1 shows the complete frequency of verb types.

Table 2. Frequency of verb types in *Lifestyle Corpus*

Verb Types	Frequency (%)
Material	40.84%
Verbal	18.81%
Relational	8.12%
Corporeal	6.93%
Perception	6.27%
Feeling	5.49%
Existential	4.78%
Possessive/relational	4.48%
Cognition	2.33%
Perception/relational	1.97%

As is shown in table 2, *material* type is the most frequent verb type found in *Lifestyle* column. This verb type dominates by occurring 40.84% of all verbs in the corpus. Following *material,* there are *verbal* type occupying 18.81% and *material* verb type occupying 8.12%. Based on the percentage of occurrence, it is actually evident that the gap between *material* and the other two (*verbal* and *relational*) is pretty significant. As with the less frequent verb types, there are *corporeal* (6.93%)*, perception* (6.27%)*, feeling* (5.49%)*, existential* (4.78%), and *possessive/relational* (4.48%)*.* Meanwhile, the least frequent verb types in the corpus are *cognition* (2.33%)*,* and *perception/relational* (1.97%)*.* Both of the least frequent types have low-percentage result that is under 2.5% of the all verbs in the corpus. Table 3 describes the example of each verb type along with

the token frequency of the example.

Table 3. Frequency of verb types and examples

Rank	Verb type	Frequency	Example	
			Verb	**Token Frequency**
1	Material	684	*make*	70
2	Verbal	315	*say*	221
3	Relational	136	*include*	51
4	Corporeal	116	*hold*	24
5	Perception	105	*see*	39
6	Feeling	92	*want*	35
7	Existential	80	*remain*	17
8	Possessive/Relational	75	*have*	24
9	Cognition	39	*know*	21
10	Perception/Relational	33	*look*	21

Table 3 shows that in *material* verb type, verb *make* is the most frequent in the type by occurring 70 times (including the alternative inflected forms *makes, made, making*). Interestingly, based on token frequency of individual verb, verb *say* (and its inflected forms) is the highest of all (221 occurences), but in terms of verb type, *material* verb as a whole type is more dominant. It is because *material* has more verb members (e.g., *make, work, show, create, perform,* etc.), meanwhile *verbal* type only has smaller members (e.g., *say, tell, announce,* etc.). As for *relational* verb type in the third most frequent verb type, there is *include* being used for 51 times in the corpus. Other examples of verbs with the highest frequency are *hold (corporeal), see (perception), want (feeling), remain (existential), have (possessive/relational), cognition (know),* and *look (perception/relational).*

Discussion

This section discusses the results of the analysis and relates it with the text characteristics. As one of text categories, news texts differ from others due to different aims of the texts. News text itself can still be dichotomized into notorious classification, i.e. hard news and soft news (Bell, 1991; Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2010; Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr, & Legnante, 2012). News texts classified to hard news are more bound to time and contain immediacy,

reporting events, crimes, conflicts, accidents, natural disasters, and so on (Bell, 1991; Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2010). On the other hand, soft news does not contain immediacy and might have more freedom in style, related to human interests (Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2010) e.g., lifestyle articles, gossips, etc. The dichotomy, however, remains problematic; some say that the parameter of hard and soft lies on the topic and the coverage: is it political or societal coverage? Due to the longer space need for the in-depth discussion for this, the debates thus will not be further discussed in this study. At the very least, this sort of classification (hard and soft news) enables the description of distinct linguistic characteristics of both types of news (and news texts).

News texts generally use present tense more frequently; past tense is used for some purpose, e.g., providing temporal information of the events (Bednarek & Caple, 2012). According to Biber & Conrad (2009), news rarely use modal verbs compared to fiction or academic texts. But Bednarek & Caple (2012) found out that *will*—one of English core modals—is a key verb in British newspaper. This result is also supported by Oktavianti (2019) stating that modal verbs are more frequently used in newspaper than in fiction and academic texts, contrasted with Biber & Conrad (2009). As with the purpose of news texts, hard news aims to report daily events, while soft news serve as entertainment, and editorials seek to persuade (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 112). This distinct purpose might yield different tendency of linguistic features typical to the text. Because soft news focuses more on the entertainment side and might not attempt to frame something intensely, then the language use slightly differs from hard news.

According to the data analysis, the most frequent verb type in *Lifestyle Corpus* is *material* verb type. Regarding the nature of *material* verbs that state concrete action (Bybee & Hopper, 2001), this is not unacceptable to see these verbs use a lot in the news texts. In delivering the message of the news, lifestyle articles need to use verbs expressing concrete actions. In hard news, *material* verbs occupy the second most frequent verb type, right after the *verbal* verbs (Oktavianti & Ardianti, 2019). Because lifestyle articles contain information or stories on human interests, the explanation of the interests should be clearly written; and one of them can be done by concretely described the information or stories. This need presumably triggers the high use of concrete action verbs in the corpus. This assumption has to be proven by empirically observe the use of the verbs in the corpus.

Taken as an example, verb *take* is observed and the concordance lines are displayed in figure 2 below.

Figure 3. Concordance lines of *take*

14	retailers, being made in some way to	take more responsibility for the cloth
15	2It\xD5s very important for me to	take my life experience...to find differ
15	d be to give employees the option to	take off from work on their birthday,
16	retching, so that you\xD5re ready to	take on a day in the water. Wear suns
17	rassment, India\xD5s campaign has	taken on a more diffuse character. H
18	't need to work. But I want to	take on challenges like this," he told
18	etton and I have always had a similar	take on fashion, characterized by the
19	9:02 pm Over the years, Barbie has	taken on many roles: beach beauty, s
19	ber 5, 2018 British designer Trotter	takes over at Lacoste News Desk Ac
20	ggage? It all felt very weird." She had	taken over her husband's porter job
20	ced "record earnings" since women	took over. "The revenues have grow
20	awked at the women when they first	took over the station and often unde
21	mpas.com reported that the minister	took part in renowned fashion desigr
21	an. Other Indonesian celebrities also	took part in this challenge, including
22	e launch on Wednesday night, which	took place in a temporarily built glass
29	sale of the remaining items is set to	take place online afterwards. Deneuv
30	#MeToo movement has long failed to	take root in India, but a Bollywood ac
31		

Interestingly, some of the uses show verb *take* being used as the initial unit of phrasal verb (e.g., *take over, take on, take off* [McCarthy & O'Dell, 2017])*.* The use of phrasal verbs are very common among English native speakers and are normally used in newspaper, especially for newspaper headlines (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2017: 6). Hence, it is not unusual to find the use of phrasal verbs (using *take*) in news articles. Another point to highlight is the metaphorical use of the verb *take,* as in *take responsibility.* The metaphorical use is plausible since it is used to concretely state something abstract (e.g., *responsibility*) and is commonly happened (Heine & Kuteva, 2007: 40). Another usage of *take* as in *take place* is idiomatic as the meaning cannot be predicted by each component of the phrasal combination. Other material verbs, such as *make, set,* are also notorious units of phrasal verbs in English and thus is found or used frequently. It is then clear that the firm reason of high frequency of *material* verbs is in accordance with the nature of the verbs themselves. They can serve as phrasal verbs, be used metaphorically and idiomatically.

The second most frequent verb type is *verbal* verbs. Based on the nature of the texts to deliver the information about human interests (Biber & Conrad, 2009; Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2010) , thus it is important for the text to collect perspectives—by interviewing—from many people. Thus, the use of *verbal* verbs to report the result of the interview is definitely inevitable. The following figure (figure 4) presents the concordance lines of *say* in the corpus.

Figure 4. Concordance lines of *say*

1	t because it is bloody expensive," he	said. "A lot of what I do is trying
2	e no one to collect my remains,\xD3	said a note left by a man in his 70
2	s a tribute to all mothers,\xD3 Marisa	said about her composition. \xD2The
3	I give you Beethoven,\xD3 Nordling	said about the challenge of offering t
4	e built this, the world has changed,"	said Abrima Erwiah, the co-founder b
5	heir world and build the tension," he	said after the screening. "Television i
5	orms like WeChat or Instagram,\xD3	said Ahn Jeong-hyun a beauty consu
6	s to publish stories on #MeToo,\xD3	said Alka Kurian, a professor at the U
6	so with interesting details,\xD3 Kara	said. Along with the usual fashion sh
7	le are starting to see what we have,"	said Amaka Osakwe, the designer be
7	d the animals for up to four months,	said Anisa Ratna Kurnia from GSI. (w
8	itting [process] was so fun,\xD3 she	said. Anne added, \xD3Usually, top n
12	prison,\xD3 showrunner Jenji Kohan	said, as reported by Variety. \xD2I wi
9	t sorry for myself,\xD3 Kim, now 20,	said at a recent public event in centra
14	–phone networks. "It's impossible to	say at this stage just how big these c
15	. A crew member, who is not named,	said Bahl insisted on escorting her to
16	ant marijuana in their buildings," she	said, because of its pungent smell ar
17		

As seen from figure 4, the use the verb *say* predominantly refers to the indirect speech used to report the interview of the source person. It is a common feature in news text, reporting the statement from someone to describe the event or to complete the information.

As for the third frequent verb type, there is *relational* verbs, marking inclusivity or exclusivity, as conveyed by *include.* The verb *include* shows inclusivity and it is necessary in explaining things to add up the information needed by the readers. Figure 5 displays the concordance lines of *include* in the corpus.

Figure 5. Concordance lines of *include*

1	ed after more than a dozen women,	including a Bloomberg journalist bas
2	The Beauty of West Kutai event that	includes a book launch\xCAfor\xCATe
3	xhibited Castelbajac's work in 2006,	including a Campbell's soup can dre
4	s to make alternative use of objects,	including a "fur coat" of teddy bears
5	m Korea\xD5s cosmetic shops. This	includes a large portion of foreigners
6	partment, featuring three bedrooms	including a master bedroom at the c
7	alian photographer Oliviero Toscani,	including a 1989 poster which featu
8	5s. Other non-traditional needs may	include a second monitor for dual-sc
9	ind?' - Other tongue-in-cheek posts	include a woman surrounded by an a
10	–language series features a cast that	includes Adinia Wirasti (Ada Apa Der

Figure 5 shows that the verb *include* marks inclusivity and it is used literally, not metaphorically. Its frequent use is due to the necessity of the article writers to completely write the news.

Along with *material, verbal,* and *relational* verbs as the most frequent verb types in the corpus, there are also some other verbs belong to the less frequent categories, such as *corporeal, perception, feeling,* and *existential*. These verbs are to some extent needed according to the context, but they are not significant and infrequent. Some verb types, namely *perception* and *feeling* are not in accordance with the nature of news texts, so they are infrequently used. News texts report factual events and share factual information so they attempt to avoid bias as much as possible (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 110). Verb types belong

to *perception* (senses) and *feeling* (emotional state) might contain subjectivity.

With regard to the other less frequent verbs, there are *corporeal verbs* (e.g., *hold*). This verbs show activity related to bodily gestures (Scheibmann in Bybee & Hopper, 2001) and this activity presumably is less significant in writing news. This verb type also occupies low position in hard news (Oktavianti & Ardianti, 2019) proving that news texts do not really need this expression. In hard news, *existential* verbs are commonly used (Oktavianti & Ardianti, 2019), to add information on the event: where and when it takes place. This information (time and place) is part of basic facts of reporting and plays salient role in news writing. As stated by (Leitner, 1986), features of news involve the report of the actors and the place and time of the event. Therefore, the use of existential verb is significant. Unlike hard news, the use of *existential* verbs in *Lifestyle Corpus* is not significant. It is found occupying only 4.78% of the total verbs in the corpus. Meanwhile, according to Oktavianti & Ardianti (2019), *existential* verbs occupy 16% and hold the third most frequent verb type in hard news in *The Jakarta Post.* This finding emphasizes the difference between hard news and soft news.

The last two verb types are the least frequent ones; they are *cognition* and *perception/relation* verbs. *Cognition* verbs refer to activities involving thinking and can be more comprehensively defined as 'the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses' (*Oxford Dictionary of English*, n.d.). This definition implies the involvement of personal thought or personal assumption as represented by the expressions *I know* or *I think* conveying subjectivity*.* In this verb type, there are only two verbs found, *know* and *think.* As for *perception/relation,* it is the least frequent verb type by occupying 1.97% of the verbs in the corpus. The rarity of this type is, however, not unusual since it also contains subjectivity. News texts are expected not to express personal opinion, but to report something as fair as possible (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 110).

To sum up the discussion, there is an illustration portraying the relation between verb frequency and the characteristics of soft news texts shown in figure 6.

Figure 6. The relation between frequency and text characteristics

Linguistic unit/feature A, B

Text

frequently used
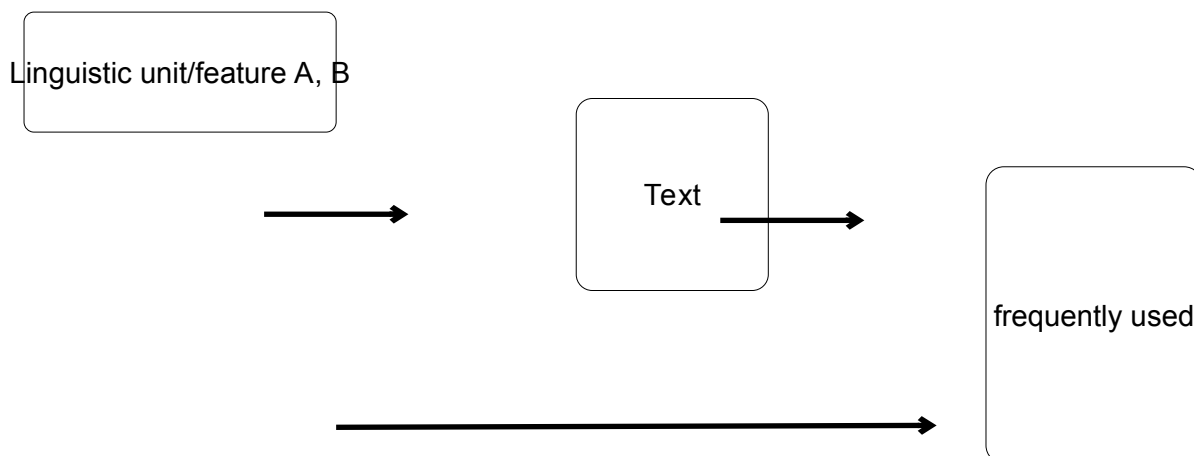
A:
in accordance with

B: multi-usage

Figure 6 emphasizes the strong relation between text characteristics and the frequency of linguistic units, in this case is verb. Linguistic units that meet the characteristics of the text, support the text to achieve its purpose, are frequently used and those who are not in accordance with the nature of the texts are infrequently used. There is, however, a certain case for linguistic units that are basically flexible and have multi-usage of which they will naturally occur frequently in any kind of texts.

Conclusion

This study found that there are certain verb types predominantly used in Lifestyle column of The Jakarta Post. These verbs include material, verbal, and relational verbs in the first, second, and third position respectively. There is, however, an interesting case with material verbs as the most frequent verbs in the corpus. Based on observation, it is known that material verb take, for example, is used as phrasal verb and/or used metaphorically. It is then typical to find this type in the highest position of the classification. Regarding text characteristics, basically verbal verbs are more relevant and individual example of verbal type, say, dominates by being used 221 times. Some other verbs are

less frequent because they are not that significant to the text and some others, cognition and perception/relational are least frequent because they are in contrast with the nature of the text. On top of everything, this study figures out that particular linguistic units are frequently used in a certain type of text because of two possible reasons: (1) they meet and in accordance with the nature of the text or (2) those linguistic units are basically ubiquitous due to its flexible functions and distributions in linguistic constructions (as in take as part of phrasal verbs and the possibility to be used metaphorically).

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