FORMAL AND INFORMAL LANGUAGE FEATURES IN STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING AT ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM

(A Descriptive Research on the 4th Semester Students of English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Tanjungpura)

A THESIS

BY:

ANGELICA

F1021211036

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM

LANGUAGE AND ARTS EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

FACULTY OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION

UNIVERSITAS TANJUNGPURA

2025

FORMAL AND INFORMAL LANGUAGE FEATURES IN STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING AT ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM

(A Descriptive Research on the 4th Semester Students of English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Tanjungpura)

A THESIS

Jurisdiction Responsibility by:
ANGELICA
F1021211036

Approved by:

Supervisor I

Sumarni, S. Pd., M. TESOL
NIP. 196905262000122001

Supervisor II

Yanti Sri Rezeki, M.Ed., Ph.D
NIP. 197706192002122009

Examiner I

Drs. Luwandi Suhartono, M. Hum.
NIP. 196211011990021001

Examiner II

Dwi Riyanti, M. A., Ph. D
NIP. 197908042005012005

Legalized by:

The Head of English Education Study Program

Yanti Sri Rezeki, M.Ed., Ph.D.
NIP. 197706192002122009

Date of Pass: Thursday, 24 July 2025

FORMAL AND INFORMAL LANGUAGE FEATURES IN STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING AT ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM

(A Descriptive Research on the 4th Semester Students of English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Tanjungpura)

A THESIS

Jurisdiction Responsibility by:

ANGELICA

F1021211036

Approved by:

Supervisor 1

Sumarni, S. Pd., M. TESOL

NIP. 196905262000122001

Supervisor II

Yanti Sri Rezeki, M.Ed., Ph.D

NIP. 197706192002122009

Legalized by:

The Head of Language and Arts Education Department

Dr. Agus Wartiningsih, M.Pd

NIP. 197908162002122002

Date of Pass: Thursday, 24 July 2025

FORMAL AND INFORMAL LANGUAGE FEATURES IN STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING AT ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM

(A Descriptive Research on the 4th Semester Students of English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Tanjungpura)

A THESIS

Jurisdiction Responsibility by:

ANGELICA

F1021211036

Approved by:

Supervisor 1	Supervisor II
Sumarni, S. Pd., M. TESOL	Yanti Sri Rezeki, M.Ed., Ph.D
NIP. 196905262000122001	NIP. 197706192002122009

Legalized by:

Dean of Teacher Training and Education Faculty

Universitas Tanjungpura

Dr. Ahmad Yani T, M.Pd.

NIP. 196604011991021001

Date of Pass: Thursday, 24 July 2025

DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

The writer who undersigned:

Name	:	Angelica
NIM	:	F1021211036
Department/Study Program	:	Language and Art Education Department/ English Language Education Study Program

Hereby declare that the thesis entitled "Formal and Informal Language Features in the Students' Academic Writing at English Language Education Study Program" is entirely the writer's own work and is not a copy of another person's writing or ideas.

If in the future it is proven or can be proven that this thesis is a result of plagiarism, the writer is willing to accept the responsibility and comply with the regulation.

Pontianak, 20th July 2025

The writer



Angelica

NIM. F1021211036

ABSTRACT

One of the essential skills that every student should have for academic success is academic writing. Academic writing requires clarity, precision, and objectivity, which can be achieved through formal language. However, students often apply informal language in their actual practices. This descriptive qualitative research analyzed the dominant type of language features utilized by 23 fourth-semester students. It also analyzed the rhetorical purposes for which they utilized them. Additionally, this study explored students' awareness of using formal language features and avoiding informal ones in their academic writing. Data were collected from argumentative essay assignments and a questionnaire. The findings indicate the predominantly utilized formal language features in their essays. These included precise wording, also supported by lexical density exceeding 61%, passive voice, and hedging. The informal language features predominantly applied were colloquial expressions, followed by two-word verbs, idiomatic expressions, and contractions. This study contributes to the existing literature on academic writing. It also provides information to improve academic writing courses and guides students toward more formal writing.

Keywords: academic writing, formal language features, informal language features

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the name of Lord Jesus Christ, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful. Praise to The Lord Jesus for His abundant blessings and grace, so that the writer can complete the thesis entitled "Formal and Informal Language Features in Students' Academic Writing at English Language Education Study Program (A Descriptive Research on the 4th Semester Students of English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Tanjungpura)"

This thesis is submitted to fulfil one of the requirements for the Bachelor Degreee Examination to English Language Education Study Program at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Tanjungpura, Pontianak.

On this occasion, the writer would like to give the great and sincerest gratitude and appreciation to Sumarni S. Pd., M. TESOL as the first supervisor and Yanti Sri Rezeki, M.Ed., PhD as the second supervisor for the guidance, advice, support, and contribution in helping the writer during the process of writing this thesis.

The writer would also like to express the great gratitude and appreciation to Luwandi Suhartono, M. Hum as the first examiner and Dwi Riyanti, M.A., Ph. D as the second examiner, who had given the feedback and suggestions to the writer to be able to complete this thesis.

The writer also realizes that this thesis would not be completed without the support, suggestion, and help from several sides. Therefore, the writer would like to give special gratitude to:

1. Dr. Ahmat Yani T, M. Pd., as the Dean of the Teacher Training and Education Faculty,
2. Dr. Agus Wartiningsih, M. Pd., as the Chair of the Department of Language and Arts Education,
3. Yanti Sri Rezeki, M.Ed., PhD as the Head of English Education Study Program,
4. Dr. Dewi Novita, S.Pd., M. App. Ling for permission to the writer to collect the data from students under her supervision.
5. All lecturers in the Department of English Language Education Study Program who have given their knowledge, experiences, and inspirations during the learning process at Universitas Tanjungpura,
6. The writer's parent Tjeng Kiang and Martina, sisters and brother, Michelle, Jonathan, and Karen for the unlimited love, pray and all support for the writer financially and mentally.
7. All of the writer's friends at the English Language Education Study Program especially the students of Academic Year 2021 who actively support and help the writer in completing this thesis.

The writer realizes that there are many weaknesses in this thesis. Therefore, the writer looking forward to any constructive, criticism, and suggestions for the betterment of this thesis are warmly and openly accepted.

Pontianak, July 20th, 2025



Angelica

NIM. F1021211036

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL PAGE……..……..……..i
DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY iv
ABSTRACT…. v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS vi
TABLES LIST viii
IMAGES LISTS ix
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION 1
1.1. Background 1
1.2. Research Questions 5
1.3. Research Purposes 6
1.4. Research Significance 6
1.5. Scope of Research 8
1.6. Terminology 8
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW 10
2.1. Academic Writing of EFL Learner 10
2.2. Rhetorical Purposes in Academic Writing 13
2.3. Essay Writing in ELT Context 14
2.4. Formal Language Features in Academic Writing 21
2.5. Informal Language Features in Academic Writing 33
CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 45
3.1. Research Design 45
3.2. Participants 50
3.3. Techniques of Data Collection 51
3.4. Tools of Data Collection 52
3.5. Techniques of Data Analysis 56
CHAPTER IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS 61
4.1 Findings 61
4.1.1 The Dominant Type of Language Features Used 61

4.1.2 Rhetorical Purposes of Using Selected Formal and Informal Language Features..... 71
4.1.3 Students' Awareness of Formal and Informal Language Features Usage 84
4.1 Discussion 100
CHAPTER V CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION 105
5.1 Conclusions 105
5.2 Suggestions..... 106
REFERENCES..... 108
APPENDIX 117

TABLES LIST

Table 2. 1 Transition Signal for Logical Division of Ideas based on Oshima and Hogue (2006) 189

Table 2. 2 Examples of Hedge Words according to Hinkel (2020)..... 29

Table 3. 1 Table of Specifications for Questionnaire 53

Table 3. 2 Table of Formal Language Features Analysis 57

Table 3. 3 Lexical Density Formula based on Halliday (1985) 59

Table 3. 4 Classification of Lexical Density proposed by Ure (1971) and Johansson, 2008) 59

Table 4. 1 Lexical Density of Students' Essays 62

Table 4. 2 Frequencies of Caution and Passive Voice in Students' Essays 65

Table 4. 3 Frequencies of Informal Language Features in Students' Essays 67

Table 4. 4 The Examples of Caution from Students' Essays..... 75

Table 4. 5 The Examples of Passive Voice Used in the Students' Essays..... 77

Table 4. 6 The Examples of Idiomatic Expressions Used in the Students' Essays 78

Table 4. 7 The Examples of Colloquial Expressions Used in the Students' Essays 79

Table 4. 8 The Examples of Contractions Used in the Students' Essays..... 81

Table 4. 9 Questionnaire Results of the Tendency of Students to Use Caution in Their Essays 88

Table 4. 10 Questionnaire Results of the Tendency of Students to Use Passive Voice in Their Essays 91

IMAGES LISTS

Figure 2. 1 Illustration of Theoretical Framework as Adapted from Bailey (2018) 44

Figure 3. 1 Components of Content Analysis based on Krippendorff (2019)..... 46

Figure 4. 1 Questionnaire Responses to the Question: How often do you pay attention to use formal language features in your essay?..... 84

Figure 4. 2 Questionnaire Responses for the Question: Which formal language features do you find most difficult to use in your essay?..... 85

Figure 4. 3 Questionnaire Responses for the Question: How often do you use specific and accurate vocabulary?..... 86

Figure 4. 4 Questionnaire Responses to the Question: How often do you use caution words in your essay? 87

Figure 4. 5 Questionnaire Responses to the Question: How often do you use passive voice instead of active voice in your essay? 90

Figure 4. 6 Questionnaire Responses to the Question: Do you intentionally avoid using informal language features in your essay? 94

Figure 4. 7 Questionnaire Responses for the Question: Which informal language features do you find most difficult to avoid in writing in your essay?..... 94

Figure 4. 8 Questionnaire Responses for the Question: How often do you use idiomatic expressions or slang in your essay? 95

Figure 4. 9 Questionnaire Responses for the Question: How often do you use colloquial expressions or slang in your essay? 96

Figure 4. 10 Questionnaire Responses for the Question: How often do you use contractions in your essay? 97
Figure 4. 11 Questionnaire Responses for the Question: How often do you use two-word or phrasal verbs in your essay? 98
Figure 4. 12 Questionnaire Responses for the Question: Which formal language features do you find most difficult to use in your essay? 98
Figure 4. 13 Questionnaire Responses for the Question: How often do you use listing with vague expressions? 99

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

One of the most important skills that every university student should acquire is academic writing, which is necessary for their academic achievement. Academic writing is nonfictional writing that is composed to present objective information that has reliable and credible data with a formal style. Sheehy et al. (2019) noted that academic writing is characterized by an emphasis on facts rather than being unduly influenced by personal ideas. Staples et al. (2016) added that academic writing in particular is produced in circumstances where language is carefully planned and edited, detailed and specific, and produced in a concise format. Academic writing should be precise, clear, coherent, and objective. In order to achieve all of these aspects, formal language is suggested to be used in academic writing.

Formal language is usually used for academic or professional purposes. Akhtursunova and Aubakirova state (2024) that formal communication in professional settings provides structure, responsibility, and adherence to norms, whereas informal communication in everyday life cultivates interpersonal relationships, shared experiences, and bonds of emotion. Formal English, commonly known as Standard English, is the language that is most commonly utilised in academic, professional, and governmental contexts. Based on Mullany and Stockwell (2010), Standard English has been standardised by dictionaries, grammar manuals, and other educational

materials. It is often considered as the 'proper' form of English, despite this perception being socially created. It follows strictly to grammatical and syntactic rules and has a more extensive and accurate vocabulary. As Li and Graesser (2020) stated that formal language is characterized by precision, cohesion, and articulation, independent of context and shared understanding, while informal language is defined by its conversational, personal, and narrative qualities, reliant on context and common ground. Therefore, formal language is essential to be retained in academic writing to maintain clarity.

The formal tone and style in academic writing help the intended audience understand the written subject accurately. The use of formal language in academic writing emphasizes that it keeps the writing free from ambiguity, misunderstanding, subjective opinion, and all of which can cause the writing to lose objectivity by avoiding the use of informal language features. Akhtursunova and Aubakirova (2024) argued that Formal English is the language typically employed in academic contexts. It follows grammatical and syntactic conventions, and its vocabulary is often more comprehensive and precise. As a result, the absence of formal language in academic writing may negatively impact both the author and the content.

Consequently, it is essential to analyse formality EFL students' academic writing. Several studies related to challenges students' experience in following academic writing conventions, particularly in EFL context at Tanjungpura University have been conducted. Previous researchers have identified common challenges that students of English Language Education

Study Program at Tanjungpura University face. The first study by Shilvani et al. (2023) found that many students made grammatical errors writing in English abstracts for journal publishing, even after their thesis-based publications were published in 2021.

Another study by Santri et al. (2022), found that difficulty using correct grammar and difficulty choosing appropriate words are the causes of writing anxiety of students. In addition, the study by Rastri et al. (2023) found that struggled most with linguistics factors, followed by sociocultural and psychological factors. Furthermore, the study by Wahyuni (2022) found that students experienced problems in organization, particularly in coherence and using correct grammar. Different from others, study by Oktafiandi et al. (2021) found that the majority of students faced difficulties with in-text citation precision, reference list formatting, and consistency in citation style, suggesting possible plagiarism caused by inadequate referencing.

There are several international researchers who have analyzed formal language in academic writing. Firstly, the study by Constantinou et al. (2019) analyzed data from texts from high-stakes exams in English written by UK students taken between 2004 and 2024. The research by Constatinou focuses on analyzing how university students' academic writing has become more formal. This research applies a quantitative corpus-based study with a diachronic (time-based) design. Another similar study was conducted by Iddir and Lameche (2020) that analyzed eighty (80) exam essays written by third-year students in the department of English at Mouloud Mammeri University

of Tizi-Ouzou (MMUTO), Algeria. This study focused on analyzing informal aspects of Algerian students' writing, such as syntax and spoken language. Furthermore, the study by Akhtar and Riaz (2019) aimed to to explore how EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students employ formal language in academic writing of English as a foreign language at Government Postgraduate Islamia College for Women.

This current research differed from their research in terms of research