

## Lexical Bundle Patterns in Malaysian Educational Texts: A Corpus-Based Analysis of English Language Textbooks

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### ABSTRACT

In the era of digital learning, understanding the linguistic input in educational materials is vital for language acquisition. Lexical bundles, or recurring word sequences, significantly contribute to developing fluency and coherence, especially in academic contexts. This study examines the presence and types of lexical bundles in Malaysian Form 4 and Form 5 KBSM English textbooks, analyzing their frequency and functions. Using a mixed-method design with a corpus-based approach, data were collected from textbook reading passages and analyzed with AntConc 3.4.3 software. The study aims to assess whether these textbooks provide sufficient linguistic input to enhance students' English proficiency in academic contexts. The findings show a limited presence of lexical bundles, with 29 different 3-word bundles appearing 203 times in total. Four-word bundles were not found in the corpus. The bundles were categorized into three functional types based on Biber et al.'s (2004) taxonomy; stance expressions (55.2%), referential expressions (44.8%), and discourse organizers which were absent. This gap suggests a shortfall in the textbooks' ability to guide students in creating coherent and well-structured texts. The study emphasizes the need for more comprehensive inclusion of lexical bundles in textbooks to better support language acquisition and academic proficiency. It recommends that future textbooks incorporate a broader range of lexical bundles to better equip students for advanced language uses. This research contributes to discussions on the effectiveness of

educational materials in second language learning and highlights the importance of targeted linguistic input.

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**Contribution/Originality:** This study contributes to the existing literature by analyzing the lexical bundles in Malaysian Form 4 and Form 5 English textbooks, identifying gaps in their linguistic input.

## 1. Introduction

Language acquisition relies heavily on the input learners receive, which typically includes exposure to authentic language through listening and reading. While listening often occurs naturally, reading requires intentional effort and is crucial for vocabulary development and language proficiency. According to [Sadiku \(2015\)](#), reading plays a pivotal role in improving language skills, particularly in expanding vocabulary and enhancing linguistic accuracy. However, the increasing prevalence of digital distractions has led to a decline in traditional reading habits, especially among younger generations. [Baron \(2010\)](#) highlights how technologies such as instant messaging and social media have transformed reading practices, often detracting from the depth of language acquisition.

In Malaysia, where English is taught as a second language, reading is particularly important for students' language development. Studies, including those by [Ali \(2020\)](#) and [Farooq and Waseem \(2022\)](#), have emphasized that reading significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition among second language learners. In the Malaysian educational system, textbooks serve as the primary resource for reading and language learning. Teachers consistently emphasize reading across various subjects, making textbooks central to students' exposure to the English language.

A critical aspect of understanding language acquisition through reading involves analyzing lexical bundles—recurring sequences of words that frequently co-occur within a particular register. These bundles, also known as extended collocations, provide insights into the fluency and competence of language users. [Biber et al. \(2021\)](#) describe lexical bundles as multi-word sequences that reflect a speaker or writer's linguistic proficiency. [Allen \(2009\)](#) further suggests that familiarity with a wide range of formulaic expressions enables learners to achieve greater naturalness in language use.

The study of lexical bundles has gained traction in recent years, particularly in the context of English as a Second Language (ESL) education. The goal of this study is to assess whether these textbooks provide students with the types of linguistic input necessary for improving their English language proficiency. Given the pivotal role of textbooks in the Malaysian education system, it is essential to scrutinize their content, particularly regarding the presence of lexical bundles. Textbooks are the primary reference materials for students, especially those learning English as a second language. The hypothesis of this study is that a higher prevalence of lexical bundles in textbooks would correspond to improved language proficiency among learners. By analyzing the lexical bundles in these textbooks, this research seeks to identify the types and patterns of linguistic input that learners receive, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of factors influencing their linguistic competency.

In addition to that, past studies have shown that lexical bundles are a source of difficulty for novice and non-native writers (Ädel & Erman, 2012). Most of the studies conducted focused on native speakers of English rather than second language learners of English. Thus, this gap has to be filled by looking into the bundles produced by second language learners and in this case, UPM students. This study will also provide important data that could be used by second language teachers and developers of course materials to design the necessary pedagogical interventions in targeting problems in specific areas (Hinkel, 2003). Studies on second language learners are lacking. Second language learners, according to Allen (2009), are rarely competent in the use of such lexical bundles when starting their studies in academic discourse, even if they have been exposed to the target community in their first language. Students are often identified as outsiders when they fail to use native-like formulaic expressions which comes to point that those formulaic expressions are rather difficult for second language learners to acquire (Yorio, 1989). Therefore, it is very crucial to have these lexical bundles investigated to familiarise students with such expressions.

### 1.1. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

- i. Investigate the frequency of lexical bundles found in the corpus of Form 4 and Form 5 KBSM secondary school English language textbooks.
- ii. Identify the types of lexical bundles found in the corpus of Form 4 and Form 5 KBSM secondary school English language textbooks based on the functional taxonomy proposed by Biber et al. (2004) and explore the functions they serve.

## 2. Literature Review

Lexical bundles, as defined by Biber et al. (2004), are sequences of words that frequently co-occur within particular registers. These bundles are vital for developing fluency and coherence in language use, especially in academic writing. Over the years, numerous studies have explored the role of lexical bundles in language acquisition, particularly in non-native English-speaking contexts.

In international contexts, Liu and Zhong (2019) analyzed the use of lexical bundles in academic writing by Chinese scholars in science and engineering. Their findings revealed that non-native writers tend to use fewer and less varied lexical bundles compared to native speakers, which can impede their ability to express complex ideas effectively. This highlights the necessity of targeted instruction in lexical bundles to improve the academic writing skills of non-native speakers. Similarly, Shin (2020) conducted a study on Korean ESL learners and found that these learners heavily relied on a limited set of lexical bundles, which affected their ability to produce linguistically rich academic texts.

Textbooks are a crucial source of reading input for students, particularly in contexts where English is taught as a second language. The presence and frequency of lexical bundles in textbooks can significantly impact the quality of language input students receive. Research by Biber et al. (2004) compared the use of lexical bundles in classroom teaching and textbooks, finding that textbooks generally contained fewer stance and discourse-organizing bundles than classroom instruction. This limitation in textbooks could reduce students' exposure to important language features necessary for developing academic proficiency.

Moreover, [López and Bernal \(2019\)](#) examined the treatment of multi-word lexical units in Spanish L2 textbooks and found that these textbooks often lacked systematicity in presenting lexical bundles, leading to inconsistent exposure for learners. The findings of this study, although focused on Spanish, align with concerns regarding the effectiveness of L2 textbooks in providing sufficient lexical input for learners. Finally, [Chen and Baker \(2022\)](#) demonstrated that explicit instruction in lexical bundles could significantly improve students' writing fluency and overall language competence. Their study with Taiwanese EFL learners revealed that students who were taught lexical bundles were better equipped to produce coherent and fluent texts. This supports the idea that textbooks should include more frequent and diverse lexical bundles to aid in language acquisition.

Given the central role of textbooks in language learning, especially as a primary source of reading input, it is crucial to ensure that they contain a rich variety of lexical bundles. The current study aims to address this gap by analyzing the lexical bundles present in the reading passages of Form 4 and Form 5 English language textbooks in Malaysia. By examining these textbooks, this research seeks to provide insights into the types and patterns of lexical bundles that students are exposed to and how these may influence their language development.

In Malaysia, the importance of lexical bundles has also been recognized. [Beng and Keong \(2014\)](#) explored the structural types of lexical bundles in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) reading passages. Their study revealed significant differences in the use of lexical bundles across different disciplines, with certain bundles being consistently used in both arts and science-based texts. This research underscored the role of lexical bundles in academic assessments and their relevance to language proficiency. In the Malaysian context, [Rahim and Wang \(2023\)](#) conducted a study on the presence of lexical bundles in secondary school English textbooks. Their findings indicated that these textbooks contained a limited range of lexical bundles, which might not provide the necessary exposure for students to develop the required proficiency in English. This lack of lexical variety in textbooks could contribute to the challenges Malaysian students face in reading comprehension and written communication.

Further supporting this, [Ali and Hashim \(2020\)](#) explored the effectiveness of reading materials in Malaysian secondary schools, particularly focusing on the presence and use of lexical bundles in English language textbooks. The study found that students often encountered difficulties in understanding and internalizing lexical bundles due to the limited exposure provided by their reading materials. This limitation affected their overall reading comprehension and language development. The findings highlight the need for more systematic incorporation of lexical bundles into reading materials to enhance students' proficiency in the Malaysian education system.

## 2.1. Theoretical Framework

A review of the literature found two suitable frameworks that have been used interchangeably by researchers and they are [Biber et al.'s \(2004\)](#) and [Hyland's \(2008\)](#). [Biber et al. \(2004\)](#) have created a taxonomy to analyze lexical bundles functionally and it deals with conversation, classroom teaching, textbooks and academic prose. [Hyland \(2008\)](#), on the other hand, created a categorization which is research-focused. [Biber et al.'s \(2004\)](#) taxonomy was adopted for this study because it is consistent with the research questions for this study and also the functional categorization of the taxonomy suits the

categories that this intended to investigate. In addition, [Hyland's \(2008\)](#) categorization is more research-focused which might not be suitable in analyzing lexical bundles in textbooks secondary school level. The functional categorization of lexical bundles by [Biber et al. \(2004\)](#) was revised to suit this study. The revised functional types of lexical bundles are presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1: [Biber et al. \(2004\)](#) Functional Taxonomy of Lexical Bundles

No	Types of Lexical Bundles	Examples
1	STANCE EXPRESSIONS	
	Epistemic Stance Attitudinal/Modality Stance	<i>There is no doubt, in many cases</i> <i>It is important, it is possible to</i>
2	DISCOURSE ORGANIZERS	
	Topic Introduction/Focus Topic Elaboration/Clarification	<i>On the contrary, despite the fact that,</i> <i>On the other hand, other than that</i>
3	REFERENTIAL EXPRESSIONS	
	Identification/Focus	<i>One of the most, the most important</i>
	Imprecision Specification of Attributes Time/Place/Text Reference	<i>And things like that, and such as</i> <i>A number of people, a lot of people</i> <i>As shown above, In Malaysia</i>

### 3. Research Methods

This is a mixed-method design study where a computer-assisted textual analysis was employed in the study which comprised of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This research mainly used a corpus-based approach in collecting the data. The data collected from the textbooks were then analysed through a corpus tool to achieve the first objective of this study, that is, to identify the number of lexical bundles present in the Form 4 and Form 5 English language textbooks. In addition, this research also used a qualitative method in interpreting the data collected.

The study focused on two textbooks ([Figure 1](#) and [Figure 2](#)), the Form 4 and Form 5 *Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah* (KBSM) English language textbooks, specifically the 21st Edition and 9th Edition respectively. These textbooks were standardized resources developed by the Malaysian Ministry of Education and are used across all government schools in Malaysia. The Form 4 textbook was authored by [Annie Lee et al. \(2017\)](#), while the Form 5 textbook was authored by [Parasuraman et al. \(2013\)](#). Analyzing KBSM textbooks provides valuable insights into the evolution of English language education in Malaysia. This historical perspective is crucial for educators and policymakers as it highlights the progression from KBSM to KSSM, revealing shifts in pedagogical methods and curriculum design. While KSSM textbooks represent an advanced system with higher proficiency standards and learning outcomes, there remains a scarcity of research exploring how these improvements are achieved specifically. Notably, there is a gap in studies concerning the use of lexical bundles in both KBSM and KSSM textbooks despite lexical bundles help students to understand the patterns of language that are constructed by the speakers and is proven to have contributed prominently to English learning, especially in academic writing ([Kanglong & Afzaal, 2020](#)). This research contributes to bridge this gap by examining how lexical bundles for English learning are constructed and how they differ between these curricula. Such an investigation is expected to provide a foundation for future comparative studies on lexical bundles, offering a deeper understanding of the impact of curriculum changes on language proficiency.

Both textbooks were selected to ensure a more representative sample, as a larger data set generally offers a more accurate reflection of the population being studied. Only reading passages from these textbooks were included in the data collection.

Figure 1: Form 4 KBSM English Textbook



Figure 2: Form 5 KBSM English Textbook



Given that this was a corpus-based study, the corpus tool AntConc 3.4.3, developed by Laurence Anthony, was employed for data analysis. AntConc is a general-purpose corpus analysis toolkit chosen for its efficiency, simplicity, and cost-effectiveness, as it is available for free. The tool's versatility, including features such as the concordance tool and the cluster/N-grams tool, made it particularly suitable for this study. The concordance tool in AntConc was used to provide an illustrative view of sentences where lexical bundles appeared, allowing for contextual analysis of these bundles. The cluster/N-grams tool was employed to generate essential textual statistics, including the frequency of specific lexical bundles. By setting minimum and maximum word counts, this tool facilitated the identification and extraction of lexical bundles across the entire corpus.

The data collection followed a modified version of a 3-stage framework adapted from [Hamid et al. \(2008\)](#), as cited in [Beng \(2015\)](#). The stages were:

a) Digitization Stage

Textbooks were purchased and digitized by scanning reading passages into a computer, converting them from image files (.jpeg) to Word documents (.docx).

b) Format Conversion Stage 1

The scanned images were converted into Word documents, focusing on extracting reading passages. This was a time-consuming process due to the large number of pages.

### c) Clutter Elimination Stage

Unnecessary elements such as images, headings, and symbols were removed from the documents. Punctuation was standardized, ensuring AntConc could accurately read the text.

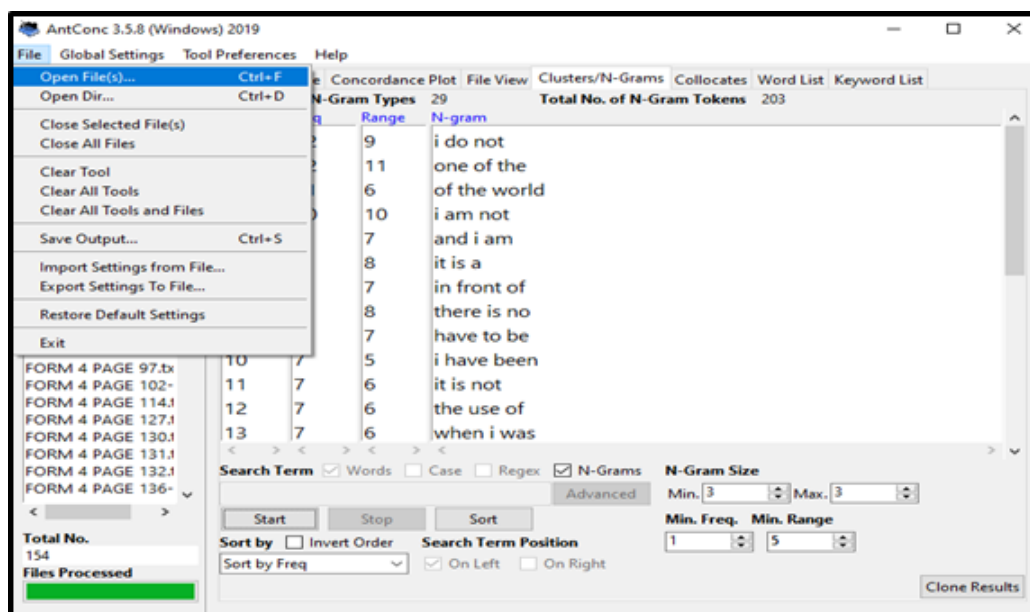
### d) Format Conversion Stage 2

The cleaned Word documents were converted into text files (.txt), as AntConc requires this format for analysis.

### e) Merging Stage

Text files from both textbooks were combined into a single corpus in AntConc. This step finalized the creation of a corpus of upper secondary school English textbooks. Figure 3 shows the text files after being inserted into the AntConc. software.

Figure 3: Files in AntConc. software



The study focused on identifying repeated 3-word and 4-word lexical bundles, as proposed by Hyland (2008), to answer the first and second research questions regarding the frequency and types of lexical bundles in the textbooks. A table was created to categorize all identified lexical bundles according to the functional types proposed by Biber et al. (2004). The bundles were classified based on their discourse functions and then analyzed qualitatively to understand why certain types of bundles were more prevalent, addressing the third research question.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Frequency of Lexical Bundles

The first research question aimed to determine the frequency of lexical bundles in the Form 4 and Form 5 KBSM English language textbooks. The corpus size for this study

consisted of 28,140 words. The prominent features observed in the lexical bundles are discussed below, with the data summarized in [Table 2](#).

Table 2: Frequency of 3-word and 4-word lexical bundles in textbooks

Lexical Bundles	No of Lexical Bundles	Frequency of Lexical Bundles
3-word lexical bundles	29	203
4-word lexical bundles	0	0

As shown in [Table 2](#), 29 different 3-word bundles appeared 203 times across the entire corpus. However, no 4-word bundles were identified. It is important to note that contractions were considered equivalent to their non-contracted forms (e.g., "I do not" and "I don't" were treated as a single bundle).

While most studies on lexical bundles have identified 4-word bundles as common, this study did not find any. However, this finding aligns with research emphasizing the prevalence of 3-word bundles, which often form parts of longer bundles ([Biber et al., 2011](#); [Hyland, 2008](#)). [Biber et al. \(2004\)](#) concluded that higher frequency sequences are more likely to be stored and used as unanalyzed chunks than lower frequency sequences. Although frequency alone cannot definitively determine whether a bundle is prefabricated, it is a useful indicator. In other words, frequent usage of a certain combination of words can hint that it is likely a fixed expression or a standard phrase, but it is not enough to make that determination without further analysis.

Other studies, such as [Alqarni \(2019\)](#), have noted that 3-word lexical bundles often include non-compositional and idiomatic phrases. A compositional phrase is one whose meaning can be understood from the meanings of its individual words ([Conklin & Schmitt, 2012](#)). Conversely, a non-compositional phrase, like the idiomatic bundle "face the music," cannot be understood solely from its components. This study, however, did not identify any idiomatic expressions but did find non-compositional bundles such as "do not know" and "I have a", which require complementary phrases to convey their full meaning.

The absence of 4-word bundles in this study contrasts with findings in other contexts. For example, [Bal \(2010\)](#), found 4-word bundles in published research articles by Turkish scholars, while [Vandeweerd and Keijzer \(2018\)](#) identified 4-word formulaic language in beginner French textbooks. The difference in findings may be due to the varying levels of the texts analyzed. The present study's focus is on high school textbooks, which likely contain simpler language and may explain the absence of more complex 4-word bundles.

This result suggests a gap between the language levels of the textbooks used in this study and those analyzed in previous research, which may have implications for the academic preparedness of Malaysian students.

## 4.2. Types of Lexical Bundles

The second research question focused on classifying the lexical bundles found in the corpus according to [Biber et al.'s \(2004\)](#) functional taxonomy. The results are summarized in [Table 3](#).

Table 3: Frequency of 3-word and 4-word lexical bundles according to the types

Types of Lexical Bundles	3-word Lexical Bundles		4-word Lexical Bundles	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Stance Expressions	16	55.2	0	0
Discourse Organizers	0	0	0	0
Referential Expressions	13	44.8	0	0
Total	29	100	0	0

### 4.3. Functional types of Lexical Bundles and their frequency of occurrences

#### 4.3.1. Stance Expressions

Stance expressions, which reflect the writer's attitudes or assessments, were the most common type of lexical bundle found, making up 55.2% of the total bundles. This is consistent with other studies, such as Hyland (2008), which found stance bundles prevalent in academic writing, where authors often express opinions or evaluations. The frequent use of stance expressions in these textbooks may reflect their instructional nature, where authors present information and guide student's understanding.

Based on Table 4, The frequency of epistemic stance bundles (56.3%), which convey knowledge status, and attitudinal/modality stance bundles (43.7%), which express attitudes or intentions, suggests that the textbooks provide a balanced approach to teaching knowledge evaluation and personal expression. These findings align with Chen and Baker (2010), who observed similar patterns in English textbooks used in Hong Kong secondary schools. The use of stance bundles is crucial for conveying the author's perspective, which is essential in helping students develop critical thinking skills.

Table 4: Frequency of lexical bundles under the category of Stance Expressions

Stance Expressions	No.	Percentage (%)
Epistemic Stance	9	56.3
Attitudinal/Modality Stance	7	43.7
Total	16	100.0

#### 4.3.2. Referential Expressions

Table 5 shows the frequency of lexical bundles under the category of Referential expressions found in the corpus of this study. Referential expressions, which refer to time, place, text, or other entities, were the second most common type of bundle, accounting for 44.8% of the total. These bundles help create cohesion in the text, linking ideas and references.

The absence of imprecision bundles suggests that the texts aim for clarity and precision, a deliberate choice given the instructional context. These results are consistent with findings by Vongpumivitch et al. (2020), who observed similar distributions in English textbooks used in Thailand, where referential expressions were also prominent.

Table 5: Frequency of lexical bundles under the category of Referential Expressions

Referential Expressions	No.	Percentage (%)
Identification/focus	5	38.4
Imprecision	0	0
Specification of attributes	4	30.8
Time/place/text/reference	4	30.8
Total	13	100.0

#### 4.3.3. Discourse Organizers

Interestingly, no discourse organizers were found in the corpus. Discourse organizers are typically used to structure text, signaling transitions, summaries, or contrasts. The absence of these bundles may indicate that the textbooks do not heavily rely on such structures, possibly due to the simpler and more straightforward nature of the texts.

This finding contrasts with other studies, such as [Vandeweerd and Keijzer \(2018\)](#), who found discourse organizers to be common in more complex academic texts. The absence of these organizers may present a challenge for students, as they may not develop the skills needed to produce well-organized, logically structured writing.

The lack of discourse organizers suggests that the texts may not sufficiently prepare students for more advanced writing tasks, highlighting a potential area for improvement in textbook design. This finding is significant as discourse organizers play a crucial role in guiding readers through complex arguments and ensuring coherence in written texts.

## 5. Conclusion

This study provided an analysis of lexical bundles in Form 4 and Form 5 English language textbooks used in Malaysian secondary schools, focusing on their frequency and functional types. The findings revealed that 3-word lexical bundles were prevalent, while no 4-word bundles were identified. Stance expressions and referential expressions were the most common types of bundles, while discourse organizers were notably absent.

These findings have important implications for the design and content of English language textbooks in Malaysia. The absence of 4-word bundles and discourse organizers suggests that the textbooks may not fully prepare students for the demands of academic writing, where more complex lexical structures and organizational tools are required.

To address these gaps, future research could expand the scope to include a broader range of textbooks across different grade levels, from Form 1 to Form 6. Additionally, comparing the lexical bundles in these textbooks with those in other educational materials, such as academic journals or university-level textbooks, could provide further insights into how well-prepared students are for higher education.

Textbook publishers should also consider incorporating more academic language, including a wider variety of lexical bundles and discourse organizers, to enhance students' language proficiency. Providing a list of lexical bundles within the textbooks or making this information available online could also be beneficial for both students and teachers.

Overall, while this study has its limitations, it offers valuable insights into the current state of English language education in Malaysia and suggests areas for potential improvement.

By addressing these issues, educators and publishers can help students develop the language skills necessary for success in both academic and professional settings.

### **Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate**

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects Universiti Putra Malaysia (JKEUPM). This study has obtained an approval clearance from the ethics community as this study used a publicly available data set and does not involve human participants.

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The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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