Citation Problems of Chinese MA Theses and Pedagogical Implications

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The use of citations constitutes a great difficulty for Chinese MA students. Based upon a detailed study of a corpus of 100 MA thesis introductions written by Chinese students in English, the present study aims to find the main problems of this group of students in handling citations. Findings show that (1) some students lack awareness of the importance of citation for the purpose of creating their research space in the introduction part of their most important academic writing, the MA theses; (2) Chinese MA students tend to use one citation pattern and a reluctance to use the other patterns. Regarding the use of reporting verbs and verb tenses, Chinese students also show a preference for a limited number of verbs, and a predominating use of the Present Simple tense, indicating that these students do not have sufficient skills in employing citations appropriately; (3) Chinese students tend to overuse citations as authoritative support for their own work, with little critical evaluation of previous research. To ensure the effective use of citations, genre-based teaching of citations is suggested, through both explicit teaching and the practice of analyzing mature writing as well as the writing itself.

Key words: citations, introductions, reporting verbs, tenses, genre-based teaching

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that academic knowledge is a social accomplishment, and

academic writing is a social practice of interaction between the writer and the audience. One of the most important realizations of the research writer's concern for his or her audience is the use of citations, or references to prior research (Hyland, 1999). By reporting what others have done, a writer is trying to create a rhetorical gap for his or her research, and to lay the groundwork for their own perspectives (Swales, 1990). The study of citations is, just as Hemais (2001) says, to see how writers present the research and researchers, and what are the writers' commitments to their propositions.

Citation of previous work in the research area is an important part of academic writing. In his famous Create a Research Space (CARS) Model, Swales (1990) set up a 'move-and-step' analysis in his description of the rhetorical structure of research article introductions. He identified three moves in this model: 'establishing a territory', 'establishing a niche' and 'occupying the niche'. The third step in the first move 'establishing a territory' is 'Reviewing items of previous research', which is 'the review of one or more items deemed by the authors to be relevant to that establishment' (p. 148). According to Swales, reference to others' work is an obligatory step, since it is one of the main occasions where 'what has been found' is related to 'who has found it' (p. 148). In the process of citing what other researchers have done, authors who cite show an attribution and commitment to the researchers who published those findings, while at the same time showing their own stance towards these findings, which is a necessary step for them to create their own research space and provide the way for their own study.

Much work has been done on the conventions of citation behavior in academic writing in the form of guidebooks for student writers (e.g., Swales & Feak, 1994; Weissberg & Buker, 1990; Jordan, 1997). Some scholarly research and empirical investigations have been carried out on the features of reporting verbs and citation patterns in a range of academic fields (e.g., Bhatia, 1993; Dong, 1996; Hawes & Thomas, 1997; Hemais, 2001; Hyland, 1999, 2000, 2002; Levin, Fine & Young, 2001; Pecorari, 2006; Salager-Myer, 1992; Swales, 1987, 1990; Thompson, 2005; Thompson & Ye, 1991; Williams, 1996), but these analyses are mainly on the writing of academics

who are native speakers, or L2 students studying in English-speaking countries or in an English-speaking academic environment.

Recent years have seen a large number of 'non-native speaker' students writing a thesis or dissertation in English. Most of these L2 students are undertaking higher degrees, with the completion of a research thesis or dissertation as a requirement. With the increasing number of postgraduate students undertaking research degrees in English, more work needs to be done to establish the particular characteristics of the genre in which they are required to write. In China, the increase of research students, for example MA students in English, is even doubling each year. These students often have great difficulty in meeting the demands of the kind of English writing required of them at this particular level, and they have various problems in completing the task of thesis writing. Experience tells us that one of their biggest problems is the use of citations. However, no research on the citation features and problems in the academic writing of Chinese graduate students studying in Mainland China has yet been carried out until now.

The present study intends to investigate Chinese MA students' problems in using citations through an analysis of their theses. Pedagogical implications will be drawn for the guidance or teaching of their academic writing. The main research questions are:

1. What are their main problems in the process of employing citations?
2. What are the pedagogical implications?

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The last decade has seen increasing attention given to the notion of genre and its application in language teaching and learning. As a framework for language instruction, the theory of genre has been investigated and practiced widely across different parts of the world. Three approaches were identified for their distinct theoretical foci as well as their regional differences by Hyon in 1996: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Australian genre studies (or the

Sydney School), and North American New Rhetoric studies (Byram, 2000; Johns, 2002).

The term 'genre' is conceived of rather differently in the three major approaches. Miller (1994), an important figure in the New Rhetoric movement, takes genre as a typified rhetorical and social action, and suggests that learning a genre is not simply about learning linguistic forms and conventions, but also about learning how to participate in the actions of a community. The aim of genre analysis, accordingly, is to relate the linguistic features of a genre to the actions they perform. Australian genre theory is grounded in the systemic functional linguistics as developed by Michael Halliday (2000). Systemic functional linguistics seeks to explain why and how people use language in social contexts and what language is required to do in those contexts of situation. Halliday based his systems of language function on the notion of register, constrained by three variables in the immediate context of situation (Halliday & Hasan, 1989): field (what is being done or talked about), tenor (the people involved and their relationships) and mode (the channel of communication and distance in time and space from events). The notion of genre, which concerns analysis of the structural patterns of whole texts, was developed extensively by Martin within a systemic functional framework. Martin (1992, 2001) takes genre as a 'staged, goal-oriented social process', and he emphasized the feature of social interaction in this definition, 'Genres are referred to as social processes because members of a culture interact with each other to achieve them' (Byram, 2000, p. 235).

As a major figure in ESP research, Swales' definition of genre is the most influential:

> *A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. The rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constraints choice of content and style ... In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of*

similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience.
(Swales, 1990, p. 58)

Swales (1990) sees genre as a conventionalized communicative event closely related with communities of practice. In this definition, Swales argues for the social constructivist view of ESP research and practice, a view in which language is used as part of social activities. Language has a function of maintaining social relations, and the choice of language is controlled by social institutions or academic communities.

Although each approach to genre analysis offers a different perspective, they have one very important thing in common: a genre is regarded as referring to a sociolinguistic activity in which the participants are able to achieve particular goals through social interaction. This theory of genre has contributed immensely to our understanding of how discourse functions in academic contexts, how a certain rhetorical device, such as citation practice, works, and how it is realized through language forms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers are interested in the various aspects of how source material is used in the writer's argument, ranging from the types of citations to their structures; from the surface distribution of citation number and frequency to their grammatical or lexical features like reporting verbs and the tense choices. The use of one form rather than the other appears to reflect a decision to give greater emphasis to either the reported author or the reported message, and the writer's attitude towards what is cited.

Swales (1990, p. 148) provides a two-level division of citations: integral/ non-integral and reporting/non-reporting. Integral citation refers to cases where the name of the cited author occurs in the citing sentence, and non-integral citation refers to cases where the author appears in parenthesis or is referred to by superscript numbers or through some other device. Reporting citation refers to a citation containing a 'reporting verb' like '*show*',

'*establish*', '*claim*', etc., which the author employs to introduce what previous researchers have done or have found. Non-reporting citations are alternative ways of reporting what has been found; just as the term suggests, they do not contain reporting verbs. Examples provided by Swales (1990, p. 149) are:

(1) Reporting/integral:

Brie (1988) showed that the moon is made of cheese.

(2) Reporting/non-integral:

Previous research has shown that the moon is made of cheese (Brie, 1988).

(3) Non-reporting/integral:

According to Brie (1988), the moon is made of cheese.

(4) Non-reporting/non-integral:

The moon is probably made of cheese (Brie, 1988).

This classification highlights tendencies in the foregrounding of either research or researcher and in the occurrence of reporting verbs.

Swales (1990, p. 148) has also identified four forms in which the integral citations show the name of the researcher: (1) as subject, (2) passive agent, (3) as part of a possessive noun phrase, and (4) as an adjunct of reporting. Examples of these four forms are:

(1) Brie (1988) showed that the moon is made of cheese.

(2) The moon's cheesy composition was established by Brie (1988).

(3) Brie's theory (1988) claims that the moon is made of cheese.

(4) According to Brie (1988), the moon is made of cheese.

The use of a reporting verb to introduce the work of other researchers is also a significant rhetorical choice. As an important means to demonstrate how writers commit themselves to or detach themselves from the reported proposition to varying degrees, the reporting verb has been intensively studied by scholars.

Hyland (1999, 2000, 2002) did an intensive study of citation and reporting verbs, emphasizing the social features of citation. According to him, the main

function of reporting verbs is not just to indicate the status of the information reported, but also to indicate the writer's position in relation to that information. He provided a further division of these reporting verbs in order to demonstrate how writers signal their assessment of the reported proposition and how they demonstrate their commitment, neutrality or distance from it. In his own words, 'the importance of these verbs therefore lies in the fact that they allow the writer to clearly convey the kind of activity reported and to precisely distinguish an attitude to that information, signaling whether the claims are to be taken as accepted or not' (Hyland, 2000, p. 23).

Tense choices in citations are also an important part, since tense choice is also related to the attitude towards the cited message. Writers may choose the present, the past, or various modal auxiliaries depending on the attitude they hold towards the findings of previous researchers.

Recent years have seen corpus-based studies on citation tenses in Burrough-Boenisch (2003), Hawes and Thomas (1997), Swales (1990), and Yule (2002). By examining a corpus of research articles, these scholarly studies have revealed tendencies in tense choices for citations. For instance, by investigating a corpus of research articles from different issues of a medical journal, Hawes and Thomas (1997, p. 393) drew the conclusion that the main choices for tense and aspect in reporting sentences are Past tense (mainly in the active form) and Present Perfect tense (mainly active form). Their research also revealed discourse functions through tense choices in citations. For example, citations with past tense verbs and named researchers as subject tend to provide particulars for a preceding generalization or the basis for a claim; citations with present tense verbs generally have the discourse function of communicating generalized interpretations or conclusions and also suggest writer commitment to the reported information; and the Present tense verb with a named researcher is associated with a very limited number of discourse verbs. Present perfect tense in citations serves to highlight the direct relevance of previous studies to the reporting writer's own research.

From the studies carried out both in the guidebooks and from the analysis

of authentic corpora, it seems very safe to draw some conclusions. Yule's (2002, p. 69) study gives us a very good summary of the following two points:

(1) In academic writing, there is a tendency to use past tense forms to report on research that is identified as a finding, and the present tense is often used to express generalizations. This conclusion is also confirmed by Burrough-Boenisch (2003).

(2) The choice of type of statement, and particularly its tense, has a clear influence on the status of the information being presented. One specific result (past tense) may be different from possible others, but a current statement of fact (present tense) gives the information much more authority.

Another conclusion can be drawn from the work of Swales and Feak (1994, p. 184):

(3) The differences among tenses are subtle. In general, a move from past to present perfect and then to present indicates that the research reported is increasingly close to the writer in some way: close to the writer's own opinion, close to the writer's own research, or close to the current state of knowledge.

Swales (1990, p. 153), utilizing an updated classification of references, provided a correlational match between the four citation forms and tenses from a pedagogical point of view. His formulation is in agreement with the 'general rule', but it has features of being more concise, easier to follow and more convenient for guiding teaching. His analysis is re-presented here in TABLE 1.

TABLE 1
Swales' Correlational Match Between Citation Forms and Tense Choices

	Integral	Non-integral
reporting	Past	Present Perfect
		It has been shown that...
	Brie (1988) showed that...	*(Brie, 1988)*
non-reporting		Present (or modal)
		The moon may be made of
		cheese (Brie, 1988)

(See Swales 1990, p. 153, Figure 13)

Swales' findings may be taken as the fourth conclusion from the aspect of the teaching:

(4) Past tense is the most prominent feature in the citation of Integral/ reporting forms; the Present Perfect is most commonly used in non-integral/ reporting forms; the Present (or modal) is the tense often used in non-integral/non-reporting forms.

In sum, there seems to be a format of tenses for writers to follow when using citations, and at the same time, different choices of tense play a role in the rhetorical strategy, signaling the writer's attitude towards the reported findings.

All the studies mentioned above sought to categorize the ways in which the writer's commitment to the reported information is realized in the choice of citation forms, the selection of reporting verbs and their tenses. The ultimate purpose for these classifications is to show that academic writers can actively participate in the construction of knowledge in their own field.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Method and Analytical Framework

The present research is an empirical study, employing a genre analysis of citations used in Chinese MA thesis introductions. The analysis is carried out at two levels, as matters discussed in the section above: the structure of citations and its realization – grammatical or lexical signaling features like reporting verb forms and verb tenses.

The investigation starts with the surface features of citations in Chinese MA students' theses, including the distribution of citation numbers in texts. Swales' (1990) two-level division of citations and his classification of the ways to show the name of the researcher in the integral citations are explored in this analysis. At the level of grammatical or lexical signal, the emphasis is on the reporting verbs and their tense choices.

Corpus

The data include 100 texts drawn from the School of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Beijing Normal University (where the present researcher works) in the field of Applied Linguistics from 1999 to 2005. Following Nwogu (1997), the selection of the corpus is based on criteria of *accessibility* and *representativity*. *Accessibility* here refers to the ease with which texts which constitute the corpus were obtained. That is to say, the texts were chosen within easy access of the present researcher. *Representativity* means that the corpus in the study can ensure a representative sample of the language of these groups of MA students in this particular field. To this end, no conscious effort was particularly made to ensure that the texts were written by Chinese MA students, since all of them are non-native speakers of English and none have the experience of living or studying in an English speaking environment. Another criterion followed for choosing the corpus is *familiarity*. In the selection of the texts, an attempt was made to avoid theses introductions from unfamiliar disciplines, since the lack of full comprehension of the topic may have resulted in the misinterpretation and inaccurate coding of textual segments in the following analysis (Árvay & Tankó, 2004). Thus, the selected discipline became linguistics, and most of them are in the field of applied linguistics, with which the present researcher is most familiar.

In order to gain a good understanding of the citation features and problems of Chinese MA theses, a large corpus is needed, and the analysis should be based upon a detailed study of the corpus. Since an MA thesis is a rather long text, there is insufficient space for the study of all citations in the theses in the present work. The focus of the present study of citations is therefore limited to the introductions of these theses.

The resulting corpus of 100 Chinese MA thesis introductions consists of 451 pages of text, 1103 paragraphs, 10200 lines, and about 122400 words, with an average of 4.5 pages, 11 paragraphs, 102 lines, and 1224 words respectively, as shown in TABLE 2:

TABLE 2
Basic Facts about the Introductions

100 texts	No. of pages	No. of paras	No. of lines	No. of words
Total	451	1103	10200	122400
Average	4.5	11	102	1224

Procedure

Below is the Procedure Followed in This Research:

First, the corpus was carefully searched for citations. Sentences containing citations were noted according to the classification of integral/non-integral and reporting/ non-reporting. Then, distinctions were made regarding how authors were referred to syntactically, for instance, as subject, as agent, as part of a possessive noun phrase, or as an adjunct of reporting. Next, reporting verbs were highlighted, noted and counted to identify the verbs selected by the students and their distribution among the texts. Finally, tense choices of citations were classified. Chi-square tests were run to compare the frequency of figures collected. The existing problems were identified and pedagogical implications were raised based on the findings.

RESULTS

The results of analysis provided a clear view of citation features in Chinese MA theses, from which problems existing in students' employment of references were revealed, mainly in four aspects: citation awareness, variety of citation forms, choice of reporting verbs and tense patterns in citations.

Some Chinese Students Lack Awareness of Employing Citations

We have found that most students realize the importance of reference to prior research as an indispensable feature of academic writing introductions, with 92% of students having employed this means to help 'establish a

research territory' (Swales, 1990), and a few students having used more than 20 citations. However, their awareness of the importance of citing previous research was not at the same level. Some even had no sense of its importance at all, as 8% of them had no citations. Among those who cited previous work in their writings, 20% used citations less than four times, which means that this group of students did not attach as much importance of citation to the need for citation in their research writing as it deserved.

Hyland (1999, 2000, 2002) has pointed out that reference to prior research is a defining feature of the academic research article. All research papers, even the most original ones, integrate and represent ideas, concepts, findings, and theories from other sources. According to him, the importance of citations in academic discourse lies in 'providing an appropriate context of persuasion, demonstrating how the current work builds on and reworks past utterances to establish intertextual links to the wider discipline', and 'academic writing depends for its success on situating current work in a larger disciplinary narrative'(2002, p. 115). Thus, by connecting new research activities to previous work in the field, citations play a role of justifying the author's arguments and establishing the novelty of the writer's own position. The introduction is one of the most important places in which to realize the function of connecting what has been done with what is new. The importance of the introduction in the whole article or thesis lies in the fact that it shows the relevance of the research to be reported to previous work in the fields as well as the writer's own perspective towards the research.

The reason for some Chinese MA students' use of very few or no citations in their introductions may be that they think there is no need to use citations since they will have a separate chapter for literature review, where citations are frequently employed. These students ignore the social purpose and function of the introduction in a thesis, thus revealing the fact that they do not have a clear view of how the purpose of social interaction of a text is realized through rhetorical structures, including the device of reference to previous work.

Chinese Students Lack Variety of Citation Forms

All four forms of citation, the integral/reporting, integral/non-reporting, non-integral/reporting, non-integral/non-reporting are used in Chinese MA theses. For example,

Integral/reporting:

Nunan (1987: 137) also suggests that "genuine communication is characterized...". (Text 3)

Integral/non-reporting:

According to Ellis (1999), 'interaction' has two different but related meanings.... (Text 6)

Non-integral/reporting:

More and more recent findings ...have also indicated that...(Doughty, 19991; Pica, 1994). (Text 1)

Non-integral/non-reporting:

...teachers need information for teaching instructions....(O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). (Text 2)

However, Chinese students have an overwhelming preference for one form and a reluctance to use another. Integral/reporting represented the biggest share, comprising 42.7% of the total. The second most frequent form was non-integral/non-reporting, occupying 33.4% of the total. The percentages for the two less frequent forms of integral/non-reporting and non-integral/ reporting were 8.6% and 15.2% respectively. The differences among the four forms were statistically significant (P<0.005).

This uneven distribution of the choice of citation structure occurs again in the choice of how researchers' names are expressed in integral citations. Among the integral citations, nearly all of the researchers' names (480 citations in out of 488) fell into four categories: as subject, as passive agent, as part of a possessive noun phrase, or as an adjunct of reporting. For example,

As subject:

McGinn (1983) argues that the human mind.... (Text 7)

As passive agent:

This view changed in the mid 1970s with the work by Hatch (1978; Mackey, 1999). (Text 6)

As part of a possessive noun phrase:

Up to now, the central claim of Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis that taking part in interaction can facilitate second language development has not been fully tested empirically. (Text 6)

As an adjunct of reporting:

According to Ellis (1999), 'interaction' has two different but related meanings....(Text 6)

However, the overwhelming choice is to express the researcher's name as subject (378 instances), leaving the other three forms – as an agent (44 instances), as part of a possessive noun phrase (19 instances), or as an adjunct of reporting (39 instances) – almost ignored. The difference in the frequency of occurrence of these forms was significantly different (P<0.005).

We all know that good writers employ a range of patterns in order to vary their sentences. From the rhetorical point of view, using the same structure all the time can cause the reader to lose interest. The strong preference for one form over others reflects students' lack of language variance. At the same time, this tendency also shows the student's attitudes towards the cited author or message; that is to say, the fact that Chinese MA students are more likely to use integral structures with the author in subject position can also demonstrate the stance they have towards cited authors. The preference for the integral structure shows that Chinese MA students tend to give greater emphasis to the reported author, and by putting the author in the initial position, we can see that Chinese MA students depend to a large degree on the authority represented by the author for their own argument.

Chinese Students Lack a Critical Eye towards References

As stated above, the use of a reporting verb to introduce the work of other researchers is an important signal of citation feature, as well as a

manifestation of stance towards what is cited. Writers can vary their commitment to the message by adopting an explicitly personal stance or by attributing a position to the original author through the choice of reporting verbs. Hyland (1999) has identified three groups of reporting verbs: the reported information is represented as true (e.g. '*acknowledge*', '*point out*', '*establish*'), as false (e.g. '*fail*', '*overlook*', '*exaggerate*', '*ignore*') or non-factively, which gives no clear signal of the writer's stance.

Findings from the present study show that Chinese students tend to rely on a very restricted range of verbs to introduce quotations. Though 137 reporting verbs were identified from the corpus, only 13 words were frequently used (with each having been used more than 10 times). The majority of them (70%) were used only once or twice. Of all the reporting verbs used, two groups can be generally discriminated: verbs related to the research itself, such as '*make*' or '*conduct*' a research, and verbs related to the writer's position, such as '*state*', '*point out*' and so on. Among the 13 frequently used verbs ('*point out*', '*propose*', '*argue*', '*state*', '*claim*', '*define*', '*find*', '*conduct*', '*suggest*', '*make*', '*provide*', '*put*', '*say*') in the corpus of Chinese MA theses, two of them related with the research ('*conduct*' and '*make*'), all the rest (11 verbs) show the writers' position towards the quoted message or researcher. The verbs of position represent the reported information either as true or positive; none of them show a disagreement or present the information as false. Examples of the use of these reporting verbs are:

(1) Wang (1985) says that the most effective method of foreign language teaching is by contrasting Chinese with other foreign languages. (Text 16)

(2) Cameron and Low (2001) demonstrated their discovery of the significance of metaphor in applied linguistics. (Text 26)

(3) Huckin and Coady (1999) believe that extensive reading for meaning does not lead automatically to the acquisition of vocabulary. (Text 35)

(4) Wilkins (1974) states that 'knowledge of a language depends mastery of its vocabulary as much as of its grammar' (p. 19). (Text 43)

(5) Wang (1999) contends that EFL researchers have not paid enough attention to

…. (Text 50)

(6) Nuttall (1982) points out that productive vocabulary refers to words we know well enough to use ourselves and receptive one refers to words we understand approximately when we meet them, but cannot use. (Text 100)

The frequent use by Chinese students of the positive reporting verbs listed above shows that they tend to overuse quotation as authoritative support for their own work, with little critical evaluation of previous research. If they are to reach the level of the sophisticated research papers written by native speakers, Chinese students should be encouraged to develop a critical eye towards references as a powerful tool to create their own research space.

Chinese Students Have Difficulties in Choosing the Correct Tense Forms

As is discussed in the Literature Review, academic writing has certain verb tense conventions that are often presented as 'rules'; however, what we have found in Chinese MA theses about the tense patterns in citations shows quite different results from the conventional rules of tense usage.

The main tense forms present in the corpus are the Present Simple, the Past Simple and the Present Perfect with each shown in both the active and passive voices. Some other tense forms were found in the students' theses, with the majority introduced through modals. The number distribution of each form is also presented in TABLE 3.

TABLE 3
**Distribution of the Reporting Verb Tenses**

	Present simple			Past simple			Present perfect			Others		
	Act.	Ps.	Total/%	Act.	Ps.	Total/%	Act.	Ps.	Total/%	M.	Oth.	Total/%
Inte./Rep.	229	16	245	160	7	167	22	7	29		1	1
			55.4			37.8			6.6			0.2
Inte./N.Rep.	42	4	46	11		11	3	1	4		2	2
			73			17.5			6.3			3.2

N.Inte./Rep.	45	12	57	29	1	30	27	27	54	1	3	4
			39.3			20.7			37.2			2.8
N.Inte./N.Rep.	144	37	181	19	5	24	20	17	37	29	2	31
			66.3			8.8			13.6			11.3
Total	460	69	529	219	13	232	72	52	124	30	8	39
%	49.8	7.5	57.3	23.7	1.4	25.1	7.8	5.6	13.4	3.2	0.9	4.1

Note: Inte./Rep.=Integral/Reporting; Inte./N. Rep.=Integral/Non-Reporting; N.Inte./Rep.= Non-Integral/Reporting; N.Inte./N.Rep.=Non-Integral/Non-Reporting; Act.=active; Ps=passive; M.=modal; Oth.=others

We can see that the Present Simple tense was the most preferred choice (529, 57.3%), followed by Past Simple (232, 25.1%), and then the Present Perfect tense (124, 13.4%). The difference among the three tense forms is statistically significant (P<0.005). FIGURE 1 presents a simplified view of the distribution of the three main tenses.

FIGURE 1
Distribution of Three Main Tenses of Reporting Verbs in the Four Forms of Citations
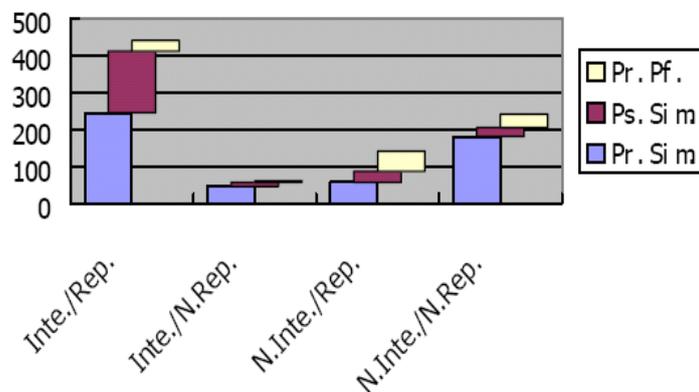
Statistical tests showed that the Present Simple tense was the most preferred choice in all the forms of citations. We can thus establish a correlational match between citation forms and their tense choices, as shown in TABLE 4:

TABLE 4
The Prominent Use of Tenses in Citation Forms

	Integral	Non-integral
Reporting		Present Simple
	Present Simple	Present Perfect
Non-reporting	Present Simple	Present Simple

When compared with the correlational match between reference and tense established by Swales (1990) (cf. TABLE 1), we can see great differences existing in Chinese MA students' citations. Instead of past tense being the most prominent choice, as given in the guidebooks or shown in the results of studies by other researchers, the Present Simple tense (mostly active) predominates in the corpus of Chinese MA theses, and this tense form is not only used to refer to a situation which has influence on the students' own research, but also refers to specific events, processes, or experiments carried out by the researcher cited, as can be seen from the following examples:

(7) Pan (1997) mentions that doing contrastive study is also a new and efficient approach to promote the study of our native language and can help to establish the translation system. (Text 16)

(8) Linguists such as Fowler (1986, 1991), Kress (1989), Trew (1979) explore the ideological inequality through the analysis of discourse…. (Text 7)

(9) Neaman and Silver (1983) try to find out the motive hidden behind the euphemistic phenomena. (Text 34)

(10) Liu (2000) and Jiang (2000) analyze the associative meaning of euphemisms and point out that …. (Text 34)

(11) Zhang and Xu(?) make a systematic study on negative transfer from Chinese into English at four levels…. (Text 41)

(12) Gu (1999) conducts a semiotic analysis on euphemisms. (Text 34)

The overuse of the Present Simple by Chinese MA students may show their lack of conventional knowledge about the use of English tenses. Salager-Myer (1992) mentioned two functions of Present tense. One is that it

refers to a situation that holds true up to the moment of utterance; the other is that it is employed when the writers wish to emphasize the relevance of their own study and to enhance its generality. Thus, the use of present tense is closely related to the writers' stance towards the citation. Chinese students' widespread use of the present tense is also a reflection of their attitude of certainty or trust toward the cited information or researcher.

Burrough-Boenisch (2003) quoted the following comment made by a native speaker reviewer on the use of the Present Simple tense in academic/ scientific writing:

> *The present tense provides a greater immediacy and certainty to science writing, … 'science' is a collection of hypotheses of various power and consistency, and our goal as scientists is to 'refute' these hypotheses if we can. Science is not a field of certainty and reporting it in such terms is counter-productive in the long-term.* (p. 15)

Though writers may employ different tenses in citations, the analysis carried out in this research shows that our learners have serious difficulties in using them effectively.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Theses or dissertations are very important to graduate students, as students' success in writing theses will ensure the degree they are aiming for, and the skill manifested in writing them will also influence their future development in the research field. Teachers or supervisors have the responsibility to prepare and assist students to participate fully in English-dominated international research communities. This kind of help is significant in that it involves not only helping students to write theses or dissertations, but also helping to ensure that students have sufficient competence and confidence in their English-language research writing to carry on after graduation (Swales,

1987).

The findings of the present study show that Chinese graduate students have great difficulty in meeting the high demands made of them in academic writing and they need help in the employment of citations. Explicit teaching of this rhetorical device is therefore of great significance.

Holding the view that 'writing is collective, co-operative persuasion and occurs within communities bound together by shared assumptions about the nature of the world, how to hold ideas, and how to present them to peers' (Hyland, 1999, p. 357), many scholars have emphasized the importance of citations in teaching academic writing (e.g., Hyland, 1999; Jordan, 1997; Swales, 1987, 1990; Thompson & Ye, 1991). How to cultivate students' ability to cite appropriately is of much concern in the teaching of academic writing, especially for non-native students.

Much research has been done regarding the teaching of academic writing in recent years, (e.g., Dudley-Evans, 1997; Flowerdew, 2002; Leckie-Tarry, 1993; Lewin, Fine & Young, 2001; Paltridge, 2001; Pecorari, 2006; Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2005), and it has been shown that a genre-based approach is particularly useful for the students with relatively little experience in academic writing. For one thing, genre theory 'aims to make the learner aware of the structure and purpose of the texts of different genres – the significant features – and to empower him/her with the strategies necessary to replicate these features in his/her own production'(Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998, p. 308). On the other hand, this approach is concerned with understanding texts not only as linguistic but also as social, meaningful constructs. With a focus on both the social purpose of a particular linguistic device, and the conventional forms and patterns which are recognized by a certain academic community, it balances mastery of textual forms with an understanding of the process by which they are composed. The basic idea embodied in the genre-based approach provides important insights for citation teaching, as can be seen from the following points.

Firstly, explicit instruction on how to use citations correctly and effectively is necessary for students. Teachers should expose students to various citation

forms, tense conventions in citations, reporting verb choices and so on, and let them follow these patterns in their own writing. This method has also been validated by scholars. Burrough-Boenisch (2003, p. 19), for example, in talking about how to use tense patterns in academic writing, points out that 'the easiest way for writers to minimize miscommunication about the generality or specificity of the information being presented is to keep to the tense conventions in scientific English. This is certainly the safest option for NNS writers who may be unskilled in deploying other devices to signal the specificity or generality of information'. Considering that there are various academic conventions that govern the different forms for making references or citations, Jordan (1997, p. 214) also states that 'it is necessary for students to become familiar with those that are appropriate for their subject and the type of academic writing they embark upon'. And this is surely a very good suggestion for Chinese students, who are just feeling their way in the academic world, to use citations effectively.

Secondly, besides teaching explicitly linguistic knowledge about the various formats and citation conventions, teachers should develop students' awareness of and skills in purposeful and functional use of citations. This can be done through analytical reading of academic papers written by expert writers. Let students identify the social context in which citations are used and analyze their social functions. Generally speaking, citations are used to show the research was worthwhile, give credit for previous work, display knowledge, make new knowledge claims, demonstrate the writer's familiarity with the latest work, build consensus within the community or gain acceptance in the field, enhance the writer's own argument, contextualize the writer's research, justify/backup the writer's own research and so on. In addition, let students examine how these functions are conventionally accomplished, how they are realized through linguistic signals and what analytical position the original author takes. Items in TABLE 5 may serve as guidelines for the analysis of the linguistic features of citations, and the functions these citations aim to achieve as well as attitudes towards the cited research or researcher.

TABLE 5
Items for Citation Analysis

Items for Analysis
Linguistic features
Citation patterns
Integral/reporting Integral/non-reporting
Non-integral/reporting
Non-integral/non-reporting
Place of the cited researcher in the sentence
As subject
As agent
As part of a possessive noun phrase
As an adjunct of reporting
Reporting-verbs
Attitude
Research
Tense choice
Past Simple
Present Perfect
Present Simple
Others
Functions
To show the research was worthwhile
To give credit for previous work
To display knowledge
To make new knowledge claims
To demonstrate his familiarity with the latest work
To build consensus within the community/gain acceptance in the field
To enhance his own argument
To contextualize his research
To justify/backup his own research
…
Analytical position
Positive
Affirming other's work
Negative
Challenging other's work
Pointing out the controversial nature of the prior research

Thirdly, in order to help students go into a deeper level of analysis in interpreting and criticizing the use of citations, teachers can build cooperative and reflective activities into the classroom. The first step may be for students

to work cooperatively on a piece of academic writing. Let students note down the lexical or syntactical features of citations with example sentences. Then let them analyze the purpose for selecting the citations or the functions of citations, followed by a critical discussion of the analytical position the author tries to take, and the tone used when making topic generalizations.

Fourthly, teachers should assign students academic writing tasks requiring use of citations, since success in making students produce appropriate citation forms in specific academic contexts depends to a large degree on the practice of real writing. After they have finished their work, the students may again work cooperatively in small groups to discuss the use of citations. After the process of exchanging papers and commenting on each other's use of citations, students can revise their writing accordingly. A very important step in this process is extensive teacher feedback on students' work, such as stating what the student did well, suggesting improvements, or explaining to the student why it is important for the citation to be used in this way.

In this way, students will gradually gain an understanding that all the linguistic features of citations take place in the context of their function in the text, what forms or patterns are suitable for achieving a certain purpose, and gradually develop a routine of connecting purposes with proper citation features.

In the teaching process, teachers need also to let students understand that the use of citations might differ according to rhetorical contexts, influenced by the different ways taken by the author to tackle the research. That is to say, teachers should make clear that linguistic patterns are not considered prescriptive, but allow for variations due to the influence of the specific context, as can be seen in Marshall's (1991, p. 5) words, 'Genre-based teaching is not a descriptive or prescriptive enterprise – it is a critical and evaluative exercise in the creation of more effective structures'.

CONCLUSION

The study carried out above was a detailed analysis of the use of citations by Chinese MA students in their thesis introductions. The investigation showed that the use of citation presents considerable difficulties for the novice writer, especially non-native student writers, the most prominent being the following:

(1) Some students tend to overlook the rhetorical and social functions of citations in their writing by employing no citations at all, which shows that some Chinese MA students still lack awareness of the importance of citations for the purpose of creating their research space in the Introduction of their most important academic writing, the MA thesis. This means that these students do not have a very clear view of the social purpose of academic writing and do not know how rhetorical structures are used to realize the function of social interaction.

(2) Generally speaking, most Chinese MA students do not have sufficient skill in employing citations appropriately, which can be shown in both the limited amount of variation in structure and vocabulary, such as the choice of reporting verbs, and in students' limited knowledge about citation conventions, such as tense patterns.

(3) Chinese students tend to overuse citations as authoritative support for their own work, with little critical evaluation of previous research. That is to say, most Chinese students are lacking in a multifaceted view, especially a critical view towards the cited information or author. They use references mainly for the purpose of justifying their own claims, thus excluding other purposes for citations, such as comparison or contrast. Their effectiveness in creating a research space and developing their own point of view is therefore lessened to a certain degree.

Pedagogical implications have been discussed in detail, using a genre-based teaching approach, since the concept of genre provides not only a way of looking at what students have to do linguistically in the practice of citations in academic writing, but also an understanding of why the citation

used is the way it is through a consideration of its social context and its purpose. Citation practice should be carried out early in the students' academic writing. It can be done through both explicit teaching and the supervision of the teacher, and through group activities in which students can cooperate in analyzing, commenting on, and correcting their own use of citations.

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