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Disciplinary and ethnolinguistic influences on citation in research articles

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A B S T R A C T

Citation, as an integral part of academic discourse and a signature feature of scholarly publication, has attracted much research attention. Previous research, however, has focused on several aspects of citation practices in a largely discrete fashion and addressed disciplinary and ethnolinguistic influences on citation in isolation from each other. This article reports on a study designed to investigate cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic variations of multiple citation features from the unifying perspective of Bakhtinian dialogism. The dataset consisted of 84 research articles sampled from 12 leading Chinese- and English-medium journals of applied linguistics and general medicine. All the citations in the corpus were identified and examined in an integrative analytic framework that characterized multiple aspects of citations in terms of dialogic contraction (i.e., closing down the space for alternative views) or dialogic expansion (i.e., opening up the space for alternative voices). Quantitative and textual analyses revealed marked cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic differences in the level and type of citation-based dialogic engagement. These differences are interpreted in reference to the nature of cited information, epistemologies underlying cultural and disciplinary practices, ethnolinguistic norms of communication, and culturally valued interpersonal relationships. Pedagogical implications derived from these findings are discussed.

1. Introduction

Citation is a direct and explicit means of intertextuality (Bazerman et al., 2005) whereby information of various types (e.g., concepts, terminology, data, methods of inquiry, knowledge claims, and findings) is attributed to sources external to the text (Coffin, 2009; Hyland, 2002). It is a discursive practice serving myriad cognitive, epistemological, and rhetorical functions, such as establishing intellectual linkages, demonstrating paradigmatic allegiance, contextualizing research, enhancing persuasiveness, and managing interpersonal relationships (Gilbert, 1977; Latour, 1987; Paul, 2000; White & Wang, 1997). As an integral part of academic discourse and a signature feature of scholarly publication, citation has attracted much research attention in several disciplines, including applied linguistics (White, 2004). The discursive phenomenon has been investigated and referred to variously as *academic attribution* (Hyland, 1999), *bibliographic reference* (Fløttum, Dahl, & Kinn, 2006), *citation* (Bazerman, 1988), *discourse representation* (Fairclough, 1992), *intertextuality* (Salager-Meyer, 1999), *referencing* (Small, 2010), and *reporting* (Thompson & Ye, 1991). In this article, we report a study that built on previous citation research in the

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tradition of writing for research purposes and set out to explore multiple aspects of citation in research articles (RA) in an integrative framework and from a combination of cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic perspectives.

2. Previous research

Although modern citation practices did not start to develop until the 19th century (Bazerman et al., 2005), citation has evolved into an enormously complex discursive phenomenon (Small, 2010; White, 2004), and the number of citations per RA has witnessed an upward trend across disciplines (Bazerman, 1988; Milojević, 2012; Salager-Meyer, 1999). In his interdisciplinary synthesis of scholarship on citation, White (2004) notes that citation practices have been studied by applied linguists from three research traditions: discourse analysis, English for research purposes (ERP), and genre analysis. Of particular relevance to this study is previous research on citation undertaken in the ERP tradition. Collectively, the ERP research has investigated several aspects of citation practices. One aspect that has received much attention is citation density, namely the absolute/relative frequency of citations in academic texts (Coffin, 2009; Fløttum et al., 2006; Hyland, 1999, 2002; Thompson, 2005a; Thompson & Tribble, 2001). Citation density is indicative of the heteroglossia of academic discourse or the extent to which a scholarly text engages with the knowledge-making work of other texts (Bakhtin, 1981). Another aspect that has been the focus of many studies is the linguistic environment of citations – lexico-grammatical resources such as reporting verbs (e.g., Bloch, 2010; Hyland, 2002; Thompson & Ye, 1991), reporting structures (Charles, 2006a,b; Hyland, 1999; Jalilifar, 2012), and tense (Davidse & Vandelanotte, 2011; Hawes & Thomas, 1997). Such lexico-grammatical features are important resources for construing evaluation or writer stance (Thompson & Ye, 1991), namely the attitude taken by a writer toward the cited propositional content.

ERP-oriented research has also examined citation integration and its rhetorical effects (Coffin, 2009; Hyland, 1999, 2000, 2002; Swales, 1990; Thompson, 2005b; Thompson & Tribble, 2001). Such integration is concerned with whether a citation is *integral* (i.e., a cited author being syntactically part of the citing sentence; Swales, 1990), whether a cited proposition is assimilated into the text (Coffin, 2009; Hyland, 2002), or both. As Coffin points out, citation integration can achieve important rhetorical effects, such as opening up or closing down alternative views. Other aspects of citation previously investigated include the functions and motivations of citation (Bazerman, 1988; Harwood, 2009; Mansourizadeh & Ahmad, 2011; Paul, 2000; Petrić, 2007), the nature of cited sources (Coffin, 2009), and the age of references (Bloch & Chi, 1995; Pecorari, 2006). While it has contributed to a growing understanding of citation as a multifaceted discursive practice, one limitation of the extant research is its predominant focus on discrete aspects of citation without incorporating them into a unifying framework to allow an integrative view.

Given the widespread recognition of academic writing generally and citation specifically as situated literacy practices (Bazerman, 1988; Hyland, 2013; Taylor & Chen, 1991), much of the aforementioned research has been conducted with a view to identifying culturally shaped variations in different aspects of citation. This burgeoning research can be further classified according to a useful distinction drawn by Atkinson (2004, p.279) between "small culture" (e.g., disciplinary cultures) and "big culture" (e.g., national cultures). Many studies have compared citation practices across disciplines and identified disciplinary differences in citation density (Fløttum et al., 2006; Hyland, 1999; Thompson & Tribble, 2001), citation functions (Harwood, 2009), citation integration (Fløttum et al., 2006; Hyland, 1999; Thompson & Tribble, 2001), sources of citations (Charles, 2006b; Pecorari, 2006), types and tenses of reporting clauses (Charles, 2006a), frequency of reporting verbs (Hyland, 1999), and preferences for particular types of reporting verbs (Charles, 2006a; Fløttum et al., 2006; Hyland, 2002). Notably, disciplinary citation differences have been found to correlate with a broad contrast between what Becher and Trowler (2001) refer to as "hard" and "soft" disciplines. Hyland (2000), for example, found a greater citation density and a higher proportion of *integral* citations in RAs from the soft disciplines (e.g., sociology and applied linguistics) than in those from the hard disciplines (e.g., mechanical engineering and physics). He also reported a complete absence of direct quotations in the hard sciences, though they were present in the soft disciplines. In addition, RAs in the soft disciplines tended to adopt a critical writer stance to cited sources, in contrast to a more neutral stance manifest in RAs in the hard disciplines. Such differences have been seen to reflect "more than simply the stylistic proclivities of individual writers" and stem from "the different procedures and epistemological understandings of particular fields of enquiry" (Hyland, 2002, p.129).

Parallel to the cross-disciplinary research is growing research attention to cross-cultural and cross-linguistic differences in citation to understand how big cultures shape academic discourse (Atkinson, 2004; Fløttum et al., 2006). In their pioneering cross-linguistic study, Taylor and Chen (1991) found that Anglo-American physical scientists writing in English used more citations in introductions to journal articles and throughout the articles than their Chinese counterparts writing in English and Chinese, respectively. Similar but more fine-grained results were reported in Bloch and Chi's (1995) contrastive analysis of English- and Chinese-medium journal articles from a number of disciplines. In a more recent study, Mur Dueñas (2009) found cross-linguistic differences in the frequency, sectional distribution, type, and reporting structure of citations between business management RAs written in English and Spanish. Comparable English–Spanish differences were also observed in Soler-Monreal and Gil-Salom's (2011) study of computing PhD theses. Bondi's (2009) contrastive analysis of book review articles revealed a preference in her English corpus for reporting structures that frame argument as dialogic (i.e., explicitly engaging with voices of agreement and disagreement), in contrast to the tendency in her Italian corpus to represent argument as monologic (i.e., characterizing argument as an internal process without referring to divergent voices). In a noteworthy endeavor to examine the interaction of disciplinary and ethnolinguistic influences on citation, Fløttum et al. (2006) noted significant cross-linguistic (i.e., English, French, and Norwegian) differences in citation density in their samples of linguistics and medical RAs, though no such differences were present in their corpus of economics RAs.