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Exploring the Correlation between Phraseological Pattern of the Reporting Clause and Reporting Verb Functions in Citation

A Corpus-based Study of Theses in Applied Linguistics*

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Abstract—**Making reference to the prior eminent literature helps academics to establish an intertextual link to the wider discipline. And such link could be utilized to justify their arguments and the novelty of their position, since it connects their "research activities to significant work in the field" (Hyland, 2002, p.115). It is therefore pivotal to equip novice ESL/EFL writers with the essential skill. This article aims to provide ESL/EFL writers a clear image of how phraseological pattern of the reporting clause correlates to reporting verb functions, and provide them a model pattern of most frequently and typically used reporting syntactic structures. In this way, not only may it facilitate novice writer's interpreting skill in reading academic papers, but also, beyond that, raise their syntactic consciousness of structuring an appropriate reporting clause. To this end, this article first examines 50 published research papers in the area of applied linguistics, and with the aid of the software AntConc a corpus of reporting statements will be generated. Then to give the readers a small taste of the kinds of findings this research project might yield, a brief preliminary analysis of a small sample of the data has been conducted. The findings show that there seems to be a causal relationship between the function carried by the reporting verb and the phraseological pattern of the reporting clause. Corresponding syntactic forms of reporting speech (e.g. 'V that', 'it be V-ed that', integral, and non-integral) are strategically employed, by an expert writer, to either strengthen the evaluative function, or mitigate it.**

Keywords—phraseological pattern; applied linguistics; reporting clause

I. INTRODUCTION

Partly owing to the persuasive nature of the current academic papers, the crucial role of citation, which is also referred to as the intertextuality, in academic writing has been extensively recognized. By referencing the previous studies, not only can writers intensify the credibility of their claims, but also it displays writers' allegiance to the disciplinary academic discourse communities. While there may be other explanations justifying the fundamentality of intertextuality, the aforementioned two reasons may be vital enough to render citation an essential skill that novice writers need acquire. To this end, a wealth of research (e.g. Swales, 1986; Shaw, 1992; Harwood, 2009; Thompson and Ye, 1991) has focused attention on how citation performance could be facilitated to conform to the expected conventions. From a broad term, these studies in applied linguistics fall into two strands. One (Swales, 1986; Shaw, 1992; Thompson and Ye, 1991) is primarily concerned with different types, forms and functions of citation across various disciplines, ranging from focusing on reporting verbs, integral and non-integral citing to concentrating on the rhetorical purpose of citation practice. Among the other studies (e.g. Harwood, 2009; Petric, 2007) which occupy only a small proportion within the realm of citation research, they direct much attention to citer motivations. However, to our best knowledge, there are few studies concentrating on the correlation between phraseological pattern of reporting clause and reporting verb functions. The phraseological pattern of reporting clause here refers to syntactic construction of the sentence in which a reporting verb occurs. The author hypothesizes that there might be a tendency for native expert writers to adopt a typical pattern of reporting clause so as to respond to a particular function of the reporting verb. It may be, the author assumes, of considerable value for ESL/EFL novice writers (the reason of which will be elaborated later) to clarify how these two components correlate with each other. The aim of the research proposal is, thereby, to 1) explore the correlation between phraseological pattern of reporting clause and reporting verb functions, and 2) to provide a model pattern of most frequently and typically used reporting syntactic structures. To accomplish the research goals, this article will first review the relevant literature to justify why phraseological pattern of reporting verb is important for ESL/EFL novice writers and indicate the research gap by reviewing the two strands of studies of citation in applied linguistics. Then, drawing on a qualitative and quantitative corpus-based approach, the article is in an attempt to explore the reason why a certain pattern of reporting clause is adopted by the expert writers when reporting verb carries an

evaluative implication, and finally some possible typical phraseological patterns of reporting clause will be tentatively identified through frequency counts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The Reason Why Phraseological Pattern of Reporting Verb is Important for ESL/EFL Novice Writers

A model pattern of associations of words and structures of reporting clause may be used to raise ESL/EFL academic novice writer's grammatical awareness of how to best structure the phraseological pattern of reporting clause to meet the conventional requirement. Numerous studies (e.g. Milton & Hyland, 1999; Skelton, 1988; Johns, 1990; Hu et al. 1982; and Allison, 1995) have demonstrated that to present claims that are neither overstated nor understated is a real challenge for language learners. Milton and Hyland (1999) arguess that Chinese-speaking writers seems to "express themselves much more categorically in English than do English NS student writers" (p. 160). Similarly, Johns (1990) asserts that, as opposed to native speakers, EFL learners appear to be more tended to generate a direct and unqualified writing. In essence, these findings resonate with what Mansourizadeh and Ahmad (2011) shows from the results of a case study on citation practices. It indicates that novice writers mainly use citation in isolation to attribute the precedent while expert writers "strategically use it to support and justify their claims"(Mansourizadeh & Ahmad, 2011, p.152). One of the important functions of citation is that it could be utilized as a claim to support the argument, but it seems that ESL/EFL novice writer lacks in ability to make the claim appropriate. There may be a number of reasons that are attributable to it. One possible reason would be concerned with the usage of reporting verbs. Apparently, much attention has been directed to the study of denotative and evaluative usage of reporting verbs, as it is assumed that the incompetence is primarily resulted from the lack of vocabulary. While this may be partly true, the inadequate knowledge with regard to phraseological patterns of reporting clause, which is somewhat under-researched (Charles, 2006), is likely to be another important factor that leads to the consequence. Thereafter, it may be worthwhile to give more preference to phraseological patterns of reporting clause for the following reasons. Firstly, to investigate the reporting clause from the perspective of syntactic patterns could provide ESL/EFL learners an opportunity to synthesize discourse strategies in stating a stance conventionally accepted. For example, Milton and Hyland (1999) shows that Chinese novice writers tend to position in an over assertive tone in making a claim, but lexical choice alone may not fully address the issue. If novice writers could be equipped with skills of how to adapt the assertive tone by restructuring the sentence pattern, say a pattern of "Smith (1999) believes that..." structure may produce different assertive tone from a "it is believed that...(Smith, 1999) " structure, they are more likely to make an efficacious claim. Secondly, it will be repetitive and boring to write the reporting clause with all same sentence structures. Based on the author's own teaching experience, EFL novice writers opt to adopt a "human subject + v +

that..." structure when referencing the prior studies. Such an mono pattern in reporting form is obviously inconsistent with norms required from the academic discourse communities.

B. Two Strands of Citation Studies in Applied Linguistics

We have, thus far, discussed about why phraseological pattern of the reporting clause serve a fundamental role in helping ESL/EFL novice writers facilitate their citation performance. However, the aim of this article is not to identify the typical phraseological pattern of reporting clause adopted by native expert writers, which is too general to be realized, instead, the study topic is narrowed to what typical reporting syntactic pattern will be conventionally used to accord with the particular function that the reporting verb serves. The current citation studies in applied linguistics do not fully address the issue. Grounded by Swales (1986), citation has been split into two categories: integral and non-integral citation. The integral citation refers to those where the cited author is either served as a subject or object in the reporting sentence while the non-integral one makes reference to the author in parenthesis (Swales, 1986). It has provided a new perspective from which citation analysis could be conducted, since the selection between the two types seemingly disclose the intention whether to place greater emphasis on the cited author or the reported speech (Hyland, 1999). Presumably prompted by the potential intention reflected from the choice of citation types, a growing research interest has been aroused in investigating the rhetorical and social intention that citation carries. However, these studies (e.g. Shaw, 1992 and Swales, 1990) merely seeks to demonstrate the rhetorical effects of syntactic features (e.g. tense and voice) of the reported message, but fail to address how it relates to the reporting verb function. For example, Shaw (1992) has investigated the correlation between tense and voice and between these two and syntactic pattern. Although the findings reveal that the selection of a particular noun/noun phrase as the theme binds with a corresponding selection of tense and voice, it does not clarify how reporting form correlates with the functions that reporting verb serves. Speaking of the functions that citation undertake in the reported information, studies in this field could be sub-divided into two groups, each featuring themselves with a differing analysis angle. One (e.g. Harwood, 2009; Petric, 2007) is started from the writer's perspective to investigate the writer's motivation to reference the previous literature, while the other group (e.g. Thompson and Ye, 1991; Hyland, 1999, 2002; Hunston & Thompson, 2003; Charles, 2006) directs more attention to the reporting verb itself. Thompson and Ye (1991), for instance, finds that reporting verb carries an denotative and evaluative function. Particular attention in this ground-breaking study has been paid to the evaluative potential of a reporting verb which means that the different lexical election indicates the writer's affirmative or negative status towards the reported speech. In the same fashion, Hyland (2002) further elaborates each of the denotative and evaluative function of reporting verb into three sub-set types. A denotative reporting could be used to indicate 1) the research acts (e.g. observe and show), 2) cognition acts (e.g. believe

and think), and 3) discourse acts (e.g. state and discuss), while an evaluative reporting verb which is sub-categorized into factive, non-factive, and counter-factive verb implies the writer's agreeable, neutral, and disagreeable options of stance towards the reported claims. Undoubtedly, studies on reporting verb functions have achieved fruitful results, but it fails to consider how these functions affect the construction of reporting clause pattern. Thus, based on Hyland (2002), this article will inspect how correlates function of reporting verb with the syntactic patterns of reporting statements. But it merely examines the evaluative functions for two reasons. First, in comparison to the denotative function, the evaluative function of reporting verb is likely to pose more difficulty to ESL/EFL learners, as non-native English learners cannot truly interpret the explicit evaluative potential of reporting verb from its literal meaning if they are not informed of the particular knowledge previously. As is argued by Thompson and Ye (1991), the most problematic issue of citation that NNS encounters is the evaluation that a reporting verb carries or implies. Second, the incorporation of denotative function into the research topic will surely go beyond the limited publishing space and time limit.

III. PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF A SMALL SAMPLE

Considering the word limit, only a small part of the qualitative analysis will be presented as follows.

A. Clause Type

To allow the most frequently used phraseological pattern of reporting clause to be identified, the study will investigate the verb pattern "V that" (e.g. Smith claims that) and "it be V-ed that"(e.g. It is claimed that) drawn from Francis, et, al. (1996)'s notion of pattern grammar1. It is worth noting that a more elaborated model of phraseological pattern of reporting clause may facilitate ESL/EFL learner's grammatical consciousness (Hunston & Francis, 2000). Hence, the verb pattern "V that" will be sub-divided into two types differed by its different grammatical subject: 1) a noun subject with human reference (e.g. Smith claims that), and 2) a noun subject with no human reference (e.g. the Australia school holds that). A typical sample analysis that exemplifies the above-mentioned three verb pattern could be seen as follows:

- Jefferson (1983) demonstrates that *yeah* might indicate a shift from recipiency to speakership.

- New rhetoric genre theories focused on the social, cultural and institutional contexts of particular genres (Miller, 1984).

- It is claimed that this may provide some improvement (Davis, 1994). . .

B. Extracted from the Corpus

Based on Hyland's (2002) categorization of reporting verb functions, all the three reporting verbs occurred in the

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1 Pattern grammar (Francis, et al. 1996) refers to a model syntactic pattern of individual word, which describes the typical context in which each lexical item is used.

above sample clauses serve an evaluative function. Specifically, they are respectively factive function (demonstrate), non-factive function (focus), and counter-factive function (claim). Apparently as they show, the verb pattern of each clause adopted by the expert writer varies considerably. Is this resulted from a purposeful discourse strategy employed by the expert writer? The subsequent analysis may provide some implications.

- The choice of reporting verb "demonstrate" shows the writer's affirmative stance to the cited author and the reported message. To correspondingly display the writer's intention from the syntactic perspective, a "noun subject with human reference + V that" pattern is selected. Comparing with non-human subject, the human subject enables the writer to attach more personal credit to the cited author. Additionally, the "V that" complement provides the writer an opportunity to present his/her own interpretation of the cited information, thus it can be used as the basis for the writer' own argument.

- The reporting verb "focus" reveals the writer's neutral position to the cited message. A "non-human subject + V that" may better realize this aim as in this pattern the writer's own authorship or identity could not be detected. In doing so, the writer could maintain a distance with the cited information so as to position himself/herself neutrally.

- The reporting verb "claim" has clearly shown the writer's negative view to the cited statements. This critical evaluation surely involves face threatening acts. Brown and Levinson (1987) argues that it is critical not to threaten the interlocutor's self-image when interacting with others. The same goes for reasoning for one's own argument. Hereby, it may be necessary to devise a syntactic structure to mitigate the potential face-threatening effect caused by the reporting verb. The "it be V-ed that" pattern is likely to be one possible solutions owing to the following reasons. Firstly, by using an impersonal subject "it", an objective stance has been constructed which may obscure the writer's responsibility for his/her criticism. Secondly, the passive voice employed in the syntactic pattern has actually caused a shift of emphasis from focusing on the cited author to the reported statements. Accordingly, the writer's critical evaluation could be directed to the cited message only, thus mitigating the face-threatening effect.

C. Integral and Non-integral Citation

From a functional perspective, integral and non-integral citation differs with each other by whether it is author prominent or information prominent. An author prominent type of citation (integral) means that focus is placed on the cited author while an information prominent citation emphasizes the reported proposition or deemphasizes the cited author. Based on the functional differences between integral and non-integral citation, it may be not difficult to elucidate the correlation between citation form (integral or

non-integral) and evaluative functions of reporting verb. When reporting verb carries an affirmative meaning, either two types of citation is likely to be adopted, depending on what the writer tries to stress. However, non-integral citation may be applied to the reporting clause in which the reporting verb carries either a negative or neutralized implication. This is because a non-integral citation that deemphasizes the cited author could be utilized to mitigate face threatening effect caused by the critical evaluation. As such, a non-integral citation could help writer establish detachment with the cited author by excluding the citation in the sentence, thus reinforcing the neutralized stance the writer has displayed by lexical choice.

IV. CONCLUSION

The author of the this article acknowledges that the correlation between reporting clause syntactic pattern and the evaluative function of reporting verb could be even more complex than what has been discussed above, because many of other disturbing variables, such as the tense of phraseological pattern, and citing motivations, are not considered owing to the time limit. But it is the author's presumable contention that the different evaluative implications that a reporting verb carries may be assigned to different patterns of reporting clause by an expert academic writers strategically, and the findings derived from the above trial analysis is just a small part of the justification.

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