

## EVALUATIVE FUNCTIONS OF REPORTING VERBS IN THE INTRODUCTIONS OF MASTER THESES

Muna Abdualhussein Swear<sup>1\*</sup>, Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Technology Baghdad, Iraq, <sup>2</sup>Turkish German University, Istanbul, Turkey.

Email: <sup>1\*</sup>mona\_ode@yahoo.com, <sup>2</sup>alirezvani@tau.edu.tr

Article History: Received on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2019, Revised on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2019, Published on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019

### Abstract

**Purpose of the study:** This study has unearthed the serious challenges faced postgraduate students in the University of Technology in either over-using or miss-using of some reporting verbs which make their work monotonous and repetitive

**Methodology:** The study is based on a small corpus consisting of the Introduction (henceforth LR) in 3 master theses written by students from the University of Technology who finished their Master's degree in engineering. It is important to mention here that the term "writer" is used to refer to the master student who is reporting information and ideas of the previous studies written in the same field and the term "source" refers to the person who is being reported as a reference in the study.

**Results:** The analysis revealed the students' preference to use factive verbs more than non-factive verbs; however, they are non-willing to use counter-factive verbs in writing the Introductions. This indicates their inability to challenge existing knowledge in the field effectively.

**Applications of this study:** This research can be used for the universities, teachers, and students.

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** In this research, the model of the Evaluative Functions of Reporting Verbs in the Introductions of Master Theses is presented in a comprehensive and complete manner.

**Keywords:** *Evaluative Functions, Reporting Verbs, Master Theses.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the University of Technology, as in most Iraqi universities, there is an increasing tendency to improve the status of English learning, since it is the language of instructions to most lecturers besides its role as medium in academic writing. This tendency emerged to pursue the development of academic research in the world since English considered the global medium of academic writing and publishing. Consequently, it can be stated that academic writing governed and signified by certain conventions and rules that allow for global of an academic piece of work (Gray, 2011, p.8). In other words, academic writing internationally has firm standards and conventions which set it apart from the characteristics of other types of writing.

According to [Mapako \(2013\)](#), research, in academic writing is mostly concerned with academic writing in general. However, as far as it can be determined, the issue of reporting verbs the subject of this study has rarely been examined in Iraqi academic research. Reporting verbs simply show the writer's argument and assist his/ her agreement or disagreement with other contributions to the field of the study.

In academic writing, particularly for students who write English as Second Language, literature implies that students specifically those who are non-natives face various challenges. Hence, in terms of reporting verbs – the focus of this study - most postgraduate students failed to address the full extent to which these reporting verbs are used in English. It is crucial to maintain that the writer in presenting others' work should show the readers dis/ agreement by using certain words and phrases that demonstrate the writer's point of view. Hence, it is clear that this process of communication is reciprocal and not just a one – way process.

The use of reporting verbs allows writers to convey the reported activity and show whether the claims are accepted or not. In other words, writers used verbs like "demonstrate, prove and show" to express an agreement with the source claims or they might use reporting verbs like "suggest, indicate" to hedge as they hold a full commitment to the study being referred to. Hence, to show contrast views with the reported claims so that they open an "evaluative space" ([Thompson & Ye, 1991: 369](#)).

The focus on reporting verbs in the citation is a subject of interest to many scholars. In their studies, they show how writers try to position themselves in relation to other members of the same discipline ([Hyland 1999; Thompson 2001](#)). Additionally, many studies investigate the function of reporting verbs in citation in experts and novice writers and or compare using reporting verbs between them or between different fields of study ([Mansourizadeh and Ahmad, 2011](#)). Investigating the types and functions of reporting verbs in citation in non-native contexts is, therefore, a matter of interest. Hence, the present study seeks to investigate the types of reporting verbs used in the thesis written by the students who completed their master's degree at the University of Technology [Santos, J. A. L. \(2018\)](#).

### DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURE

The study is based on a small corpus consisting of the Introduction (henceforth LR) in 3 master theses written by students

from the University of Technology who finished their Master's degree in engineering. It is important to mention here that the term "writer" is used to refer to the master student who is reporting information and ideas of the previous studies written in the same field and the term "source" refers to the person who is being reported as a reference in the study.

A close reading of the selected sections helped the researcher to be familiar in-depth with the topics being introduced and helped to find the frequent reporting verbs used by the writers throughout the sections. The reporting verbs then highlighted, tallied, and classified according to their evaluative function (Hyland, 1999). The gathered data were analyzed quantitatively according to the frequency of these reporting verbs and qualitatively in order to describe the function of each type of reporting verbs being classified. The analysis includes only

- Factive verbs: show the writer acceptance and agreement with what is reporting. By using Factive verbs like; Explained, directed, advised, promised, assured, observed, proposed the writer portrays the source as presenting correct opinion or ideas.
- Non-factive: show the writer neutrality in presenting his or her report. Such verbs like; Suggested insisted, stated, reported, affirmed, rolled out, maintained are used by the writer to express no explicit opinion about the information presented by the source [Loan, N. T. T., & Pramoolsook, I. \(2015\)](#).
- Counter-factive: show the writer's disagreement with the information presented by the source. By using verbs like; claimed, accused, criticized, condemned, defied, denied, refused the writer rejects the information and opinion given by the source and portrays the source as presenting false or incorrect information and opinion.

Finally, the researcher got some assistance from two experts to verify the analysis and show how it is done. Table (1) shows the size of the corpus and the frequency occurrence of reporting verbs per 1000:

**Table 1:** Data used and the size of the corpus

Data	Number of words	Number of reporting verbs	Frequency per 1000
Thesis 1	1322	20	15.89
Thesis 2	1388	13	10.09
Thesis 3	1357	16	14.00

## RESULTS

In this study, the types of reporting verbs to refer to the work of others and the extent to which they evaluate the work of others in their writing have been examined according to [Hyland \(1999\)](#) classification. It was found that the students used Factive and Non-factive kinds of reporting verbs in varying proportions. However, writers of the current data show inability to adopt counter-factive reporting verbs. Table 2 below shows the distribution of reporting verbs according to their evaluative function (1999).

**Table 2:** Distribution of reporting verbs in the writers' thesis

Reporting verbs type	Thesis 1		Thesis 2		Thesis 3	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Factive	8	40	5	38.46	7	43.75
Counter-factive	-	-	-	-	-	-
Non-factive	12	60	8	61.54	9	56.25
	20		13		16	

From Table (2) above, it is clear that in all thesis the writers used non-factive reporting verbs more than counter and factive reporting verbs. Hyland (2002), stated that scientists and engineers are likely more capable to report information non-actively. These verbs accounted for 60%, 61.54%, and 56.25% respectively of the reporting verbs in the three Introductions of the corpus. By adopting non- factive verbs; find, identify, observe, present, reveal, and discover the writers review earlier studies to demonstrate no clear reliability regarding the sources being referred to. In the following extract from the current data, the writer used the non-factive verb "present" to comment on previous work findings neutrally without show any attitudes toward its reliability. In other words, the writer here gives only information about a method without giving any comments or expresses certain attitude toward the work being done [Sawaki, T. \(2014\)](#).

Khalil and Ibrahim presented a general method to calculate the inverse and direct dynamic models of parallel robots. The models are expressed in a closed form by a single equation in which all the elements needed are expressed. The solution is given in terms of the dynamic models of the legs, the dynamics of the platform and some Jacobian matrices.

In the same vein, by employing factive reporting verbs the writer signals an agreement with the prior source being referred to. By using factive verbs such as: "establish, demonstrate, recognize, show" the writers accept the prior information being proved or introduced, in other words the writer tends to portray the source being referred to as of true opinion. The extract

below illustrates that the writer by using "establish" sets upon a firm and stable basis as accepted and definitely true. That means the writer by using such factive verb gives a statement as background information which assumes to be true and been accepted from the reader, they represent an explicit stance to express a subjective opinion toward the source (Hyland, 2004, p.15). In other words, the writer cites the sources that support his/her own arguments and strengthen his views on the reported issue being investigated.

Touting established digital algorithms that can automatically detect included land use and land cover. The results can be used to produce images that are free of geometric errors Swales, J. M. (2014).

Finally, it is clear from Table 2 that no Counter-factive reporting verbs used in the current data. This may be due to the writer's desire to avoid criticizing and/or refuting previous studies clearly by presenting negative evaluations. In other words, writers aim not to show confrontation or judging others' work. Although, using these verbs might be very effective for the writer to challenge existing knowledge and find a niche to their current research (Hyland, 2014, p.121).

## CONCLUSIONS

Referring to previous knowledge in academic writing is not only used to present information about what has done before but also it is a strategy used by the writer to support the current arguments. This study examined how the Masters' students used reporting verbs in the Introductions of their thesis to provide information about what research has been done. The study revealed that the writers of the current data tend to use Factive verbs that are to presuppose the truth of the reference being referred to and hence to support the current claim. Likewise, writers reported information Non-factively to show neutral and impersonal judgments regarding what research has been done, hence to justify the current claims. Finally, no Counter-factive verbs have been reported in the current data, this might be due to the writer's unwillingness to present a reference that in his/ her point of view holding negative stance.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author confirms that the data do not contain any conflict of interest.

## REFERENCES

1. Gray, B. E. (2011). Exploring academic writing through corpus linguistics: When discipline tells only part of the story (Doctoral dissertation, Northern Arizona University).
2. Hyland, K. (1999). Academic attribution: Citation and the construction of disciplinary knowledge. *Applied linguistics*, 20(3), 341-367. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/20.3.341>
3. Hyland, K. (2014). Activity and evaluation: Reporting practices in academic writing. In *Academic discourse* (pp. 125-140). Routledge.
4. Mansourizadeh, K., & Ahmad, U. K. (2011). Citation practices among non-native expert and novice scientific writers. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 10(3), 152-161. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2011.03.004>
5. Mapako, F. P. (2013) The art of attribution in academic writing at university level: A case study of Great Zimbabwe University.
6. Thompson, G., & Yiyun, Y. (1991). Evaluation in the reporting verbs used in academic papers. *Applied linguistics*, 12(4), 365-382. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/12.4.365>
7. Loan, N. T. T., & Pramoolsook, I. (2015). Citation in Vietnamese TESOL: Analysis of master's thesis introduction chapters. *The Asian ESP Journal*, 2(1), 95-120.
8. Petrić, B. (2007). Rhetorical functions of citations in high-and low-rated master's theses. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 6(3), 238-253. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2007.09.002>
9. Samraj, B. (2013). Form and function of citations in discussion sections of master's theses and research articles. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 12(4), 299-310. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2013.09.001>
10. Loan, N. T. T., & Pramoolsook, I. (2015). Reporting Verbs in Literature Review Chapters of Tesol Master's Theses Written by Vietnamese Postgraduates. *ESP TODAY-JOURNAL OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES AT TERTIARY LEVEL*, 3(2), 196-215.
11. Xie, J. (2016). Direct or indirect? Critical or uncritical? Evaluation in Chinese English-major MA thesis literature reviews. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 23, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2016.05.001>
12. Williams, I. A. (1996). A contextual study of lexical verbs in two types of medical research report: clinical and experimental. *English for Specific Purposes*, 15(3), 175-197. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0889-4906\(96\)00010-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0889-4906(96)00010-5)
13. Loan, N. T. T. Reporting Verbs in TESOL Master's Theses Written by Vietnamese Postgraduate Students.
14. Santos, J. A. L. (2018). On Political Science Students' Academic Prose: Reporting Verbs in the Undergraduate Thesis Literature Review. *Veridian E-Journal*, Silpakorn University (Humanities, Social Sciences and arts), 11(5), 248-259.
15. Swales, J. M. (2014). Variation in citational practice in a corpus of student biology papers: From parenthetical plonking to intertextual storytelling. *Written Communication*, 31(1), 118-141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088313515166>
16. Gol, A. K., Hezareh, B. G., & Soghondikolaei, E. M. (2014). A contrastive study of rhetorical functions of citation in Iranian and international ELT Scopus journals. *Linguistics and Literature Studies*, 2(6), 155-165.



17. Hu, G., & Wang, G. (2014). Disciplinary and ethnolinguistic influences on citation in research articles. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 14, 14-28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2013.11.001>
18. Sawaki, T. (2014). On the function of stance-neutral formulations: Apparent neutrality as a powerful stance constructing resource. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 16, 81-92. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2014.10.001>
19. Doró, K. (2014). Citation practices in EFL undergraduate theses: a focus on reporting verbs. *UPRT 2013: Empirical Studies in English Applied Linguistics*, 32.
20. Olohan, M., & Baker, M. (2000). Reporting that in translated English. Evidence for subconscious processes of explicitation?. *Across languages and cultures*, 1(2), 141-158. <https://doi.org/10.1556/Acr.1.2000.2.1>
21. Suntara, W., & Usaha, S. (2013). Research Article Abstracts in Two Related Disciplines: Rhetorical Variation between Linguistics and Applied Linguistics. *English Language Teaching*, 6(2), 84-99. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n2p84>