



# Citation difficulties in nonnative undergraduate English teachers' monographs

Wilmar Salazar Obeso

PhD professor at Human Sciences Faculty, Universidad del Atlántico, Colombia

Received: 10 Apr 2023; Received in revised form: 08 May 2023; Accepted: 16 May 2023; Available online: 23 May 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Citation use is a significant challenge for Colombian undergraduate English teachers. Continuing the line of inquiry on citation difficulties in nonnative novice writers, the present study aims at describing the main difficulties this group of students have in citing external sources. The analysis was carried out on 30 theoretical framework chapters from their monographs. Findings indicate that (1) Some undergraduate English teachers lack further textual elaboration since they just cite but do not explain or make a comment to complement the external authors' idea; (2) These undergraduate English teachers lack citation type variety because the predominant citation type is integral citation, turning the discourse monotonous; (3) These teachers highly employ attribution as the main citation function which indicates an epistemological dependency on key disciplinary authors since external authors' ideas are duplicated. This study can be used to raise awareness on nonnative undergraduate English teachers towards better citation practices in their disciplinary academic papers, which can be supported by (a) formal direct instruction in writing composition courses, in research tutoring sessions, etc., and in institutional research hotbeds; (b) analysis of experts' texts to identify and understand the important features of academic English; (c) incorporation of studies like the present one and others in the university syllabus of research and writing composition courses.

**Keywords**— citation, monograph, theoretical framework, undergraduate English teachers

## I. INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is a distinctive feature of disciplinary texts. It is also used in university papers through which undergraduate students not only learn their discipline, but also share their own understanding of specialized content. As a social practice (Street, 2015), academic writing entails the presence of some key components in the undergraduate students' writing production, being citation one of them. When an undergraduate student cites source texts, his or her writing follows conventionalized features, accepted and validated by the discourse community, in this case, ELT community.

Citation studies on academic writing have been carried out in past decades over experts and novice writers' written production in order to understand and define important elements related to the practice and role of citation on both

groups. The point of departure for this tradition was Swale's (1990) citation distinction between integral and nonintegral citations in which the position of the cited author marks the main syntactical difference. Previous works have centered on citation patterns and verbs used in citations (Bathia, 1993; Hyland, 1999; Pecorari, 2006; Thompson, 2005, among others). Furthermore, citation practice has also been studied in doctoral thesis (Nguyen & Pramoolsook, 2015; Soler-Monreal and Gil-Salom, 2011; Dong, 1996; Thompson, 2000; Thompson & Tribble, 2001; Jomaa and Bidin, 2017), master's thesis (Jalilifar & Dabbi, 2012; Loan and Pramoolsook 2016; Samraj, 2013) and published journals (Harwood, 2009; Hewings et al., 2010; Hyland, 1999, 2000; Hu and Wang, 2014; Zhang, 2022).

In the last two decades, difficulties on nonnative writers, when using citation, has been a major concern from

scholars (Buckingham and Nevile, 1997; Sun, 2008; Hyland, 2002; Jalilifar and Dabbi, 2012; Manan and Noor, 2014, among others). For instance, Sun (2008) found four principal difficulties on Chinese MA students: 'lack awareness of employing citations', 'lack variety of citation forms', 'lack a critical eye towards references' and 'choosing the correct tense forms'. Even though these studies show important aspects in these nonnative writers, which open pedagogical actions for the teaching and learning of citation, few studies have focused on the line of inquiry of nonnative undergraduate students' writing (see for example Ramoroka, B.T., 2014; Lee, Hitchcock & Casal, 2018; Nesi, 2021; Kongpetch, 2021). For instance, Nesi (2021) found out that the more college students advanced in their career, the more progress is shown in the use of citation. This is an important reason to study citation practice and citation difficulties so as to increase the understanding and contribute to undergraduates' academic writing and change, to some extent, this neglected area of study (specially nonnative undergraduate English teachers whose research spectrum is scarce) into a more active one and draw the attention on local undergraduates' academic practices beyond more powerful and influencing cultural contexts.

For nonnative undergraduate English teachers, citation must be presented in their monographs, specially in the theoretical framework chapters, since they represent one of the most important academic endeavors which require a great amount of source texts. To some extent, this faculty paper assignment influenced the sources they choose to include (Knight-Davis and Sung, 2008) in order to support their arguments. This has been a neglected line of inquiry which requires to be researched to widen the scope of citation as a broad research topic whose results can help this group of students understand the conventionalized use of the academic writing within the scope of ELT.

Following the line of inquiry of citation difficulties in nonnative undergraduates' writing, this study aims at describing the citation difficulties Colombian undergraduate English teachers have in the theoretical framework chapters of the monographs.

### **Citation**

Citation is a rhetorical device that refers to the relationship established between a writer and other authors' disciplinary contribution (Swales, 2014). This rhetorical device is a predominant element in academic writing, found out in experts and novices' writing. Throughout citation, a network of knowledge is created within the disciplinary field of study in which both of them belong to. The practice of citation, on the other hand, allows the construction of solid arguments to promote readers' persuasion (Bennet,

2015) which is one of its main roles. Thus, good citation practice can enact an effective social relationship between writers and the audience the text targets (Alramadan, 2023) to the point of validating authors' epistemological conceptions (Fazilafar et al., 2018). Related to undergraduate students, the creation of meaning in university contexts is facilitated by the practice of citation (Shi, 2008) since external sources are connected to their own ideas which are entangled in the disciplinary knowledge.

### **Types of citation**

Citation has been distinguished between integral and non-integral citation (Swales, 1986, 1990). When using integral citation, the writer uses the author's name and a reporting verb to create a syntactic function. To this respect, "the integral citations show the name of the writer as subject, passive agent, as part of possessive noun phrase and as an adjunct of reporting" (Nugrahaningtyas, 2021, p. 118). On the other hand, when employing non-integral citation, the author's integration to the sentence has no syntactic function. Thus, parentheses are used to refer them.

### **Functions of citation**

Citation aids in defining a particular area of study or issue, to which the present work contributes, and as a result, more references are now covered in great depth throughout the piece (Hayland, 1999). This is one of the reasons citation is crucial for attributing knowledge to the external author while the writer advances in the mastery of citation as well. Related to this important aspect of academic writing, some specific rhetorical functions of citation have been identified (Thompson & Tribble, 2001; Petric, 2007, among others). Attribution, exemplification, and further reference were functions identified by Thompson & Tribble (2001). However, five extra functions complemented the previous ones: statement of use, application, analysis and evaluation, establishing links between sources, and comparison of one's own findings or interpretation with other sources (Petric, 2007). This typology of rhetorical functions have been used as framework to explore the reasons expert writers and novice writers cite external sources.

## **II. METHOD**

The current study is empirical and makes use of citation analysis in 30 theoretical framework chapters of monographs, written by undergraduate English teachers from Colombia at Universidad del Atlántico. One of the requirements for graduation from the Education Faculty for these teachers is to present a monograph. To be accepted as a research outcome that came from a research

process, occurred at the practicum location, the monograph must be assessed and assessed. The overview of the corpus is provided in Table 1. The information was gathered to investigate the main citation issues these non-native English speakers face in the theoretical frameworks.

The majority of the monographs were chosen at random from the university's open library throughout the years 2018 to 2023. The major focus of the investigation was to identify the challenges this team of novice writers had while acknowledging external sources in the aforementioned chapter of the monograph.

Table 1. Overview of the corpus

Corpus	Number of pages	Numbers of paragraphs	Amount of words	Number of citation
30 theoretical framework chapters	333	800	69.200	1085

### III. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis derived from the present study showed the citation difficulties in the theoretical framework chapters of the monographs written by Colombian undergraduate English teachers. The principal aspects to highlight are: Lack of further textual elaboration, lack of citation type variety and the predominant use of attribution function.

#### *Undergraduate English teachers lack further textual elaboration*

When Colombian undergraduate English teachers build paragraphs around a borrowed idea (integral citation, Swales, 1986;1990), further textual elaboration is not perceived. In order to write paragraphs of the theoretical framework chapters, these writers need to employ their literacy skills repertoire so as to construct meaning (Flower, Stein, Ackerman, Kant, Mecorkmic & Peck, 1990). This meaning construction is an institutional academic practice which is situated within the disciplinary knowledge of ELT. However, limitations on this knowledge field tends to affect the textual elaboration that is required to develop ideas, which are triggered by the source text, undergraduate teachers' prior knowledge and textual experience (Ackerman, 1991).

As it is seen in samples 165 and 177, the undergraduate teachers started the paragraphs with external authors' ideas ('Brown (1994) and Richards (2008)', the former and 'Moya (2003)', the latter). None of them shows any epistemological contribution to the author's thought. Thus, the borrowed idea diminished the undergraduate writer' writing potential to develop the idea towards their own thought.

#### *Sample 165*

*Brown (1994) and Richards (2008) claim that some of the difficulties of linguistic order that students present during a communicative act are: speaking at a slow pace, make many pauses, use too many buzzwords, delay in organizing ideas, express incomplete sentences, not connect ideas in an organized and coherent way, grammatical mistakes*

*regularly, lack the vocabulary to communicate, do not use reduced forms of language as contractions, and syllabic elision reductions, not pronouncing words correctly with proper intonation.*

#### *Sample 177*

*Moya (2003) argues that the author Krashen says that a second language is not consciously learned through explicit study of grammar, but is acquired using it in real communication situations naturally and unconsciously, like language maternal principle of this that, although it has sparked controversy and discussion since its formulation between linguists and methodologists, must be taken into account in the process of teaching and learning a foreign language at an early age, where the main objective is to sensitize the child to other forms of oral communication and contribute ultimately to their development and their basic training.*

#### *Undergraduate English teachers lack citation type variety*

Besides the lack of further textual elaboration in the paragraphs of the theoretical framework chapters of the monographs, the results showed that Colombian undergraduate English teachers employed all types of citation proposed by Swales (1984; 1990). It was identified a total amount of 1085 citations. Out of 1085 citations, 770 citations corresponded to integral citation whereas 315 citations were non-integral ones. This study confirmed a previous study done by Jalilifar & Dabbi (2012). Jalilifar, (2012) states that intergral citation is a simpler form of citation, demanding fewer source texts cited as input. Thus, when Colombian undergraduate English teachers put the cited author as the point of departure of the sentence, there is an epistemological dependency since the author's idea guides the textual construction of the paragraph. This dependency also reveals a disciplinary knowledge limitation on ELT. These undergraduate teachers mainly base, to some extent, their discourse on external sources. However, throughout this novice discourse practice, they are not able to build their own

identity (Hyland, 2002), which can be related to the knowledge community they try to be part of.

On the other one, the results also confirmed a previous study carried out by Sun (2008). In this study, Sun (2008) found out that MA thesis students showed preferences for integral citation which was determined as 'lack variety of citation forms'. Undergraduate English teachers are novice writers who are learning to write academic texts which followed the conventionalized discourse practices of the ELT discipline. However, the overuse of one type of citation (integral citation) over the other one (non-integral citation) can be due to a lack of citation type awareness since they just acknowledge the cited author through a syntactical function. The balance of both types of citation can bring a dynamic flow of the discourse in the paragraphs these teachers write. Since "in any scientific field the existing 'body of knowledge' is an accumulation of distilled insight, theoretical constructs, experimentally derived data and empirical observations" (Cronin 1984, p. 26), these undergraduate teachers textually announce their beliefs on the disciplinary knowledge of ELT by citing leading and key authors that require to be located in a predominant position within the paragraphs. Nevertheless, they are not aware of the fact that by putting the cited authors as a subject position of the sentence, the citation style tends to be monotonous and unbalanced as well. Sample 6, sample 90 and sample 98 show this citation form:

#### Sample 6

*In this point, Er (2014) claims that teachers should reflect about the proper methodologies to teach a foreign language to young children because it is essential to wake up the willingness among learners and help them to understand that learning a foreign language is not as difficult as it seems.*

#### Sample 90

*On the other hand, Sowell et al. (1996) focused on studying the areas of the brain that are needed to develop the process of writing, stating the importance of the memory in the procedure.*

#### Sample 98

*Daniels (1996) defines writing as a system of more or less permanent marks used to represent an utterance in such a way that it can be recovered more or less exactly without the intervention of the utterer.*

#### **Predominant use of attribution function**

Another difficulty found out in Colombian undergraduate English teachers' citation was the predominant use of attribution function. This result confirmed a previous study by Karamina and Wachidah (2021) in which attribution was a common function of citation in the analysed corpus.

These undergraduate English teachers did not establish any relationship between the cited author and a research background. They just presented the author's idea without any evaluation process. Again they trusted key disciplinary authors of ELT since there was no intention to validate or criticize the external source. Not having a wide scope of disciplinary knowledge interferes with the possibility of contributing to ELT discipline. Such limitation shows a lack of creativity (Kamyabi, Ghonsooly and Mahdavi, 2014) since the information is presented but not appraised. Some samples (1, 10 and 15) are shown to illustrate this:

#### Sample 1

*According to Cameron (2001), children are more enthusiastic and lively as learners, moreover, they tend to be more curious about the knowledge and they like proactive tasks which keep them motivated to continue with their learning.*

#### Sample 10

*According to Collier (1992) bilingual literacy is enhanced by a strong development of literacy in the first language because the academic and linguistic skills are transferred to the second language, even in the case of languages with dissimilar writing systems.*

#### Sample 15

*In fact, Thomas and Collier (2012) state that dual language acquisition allows deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively.*

## IV. CONCLUSION

The intention of this study was to describe the citation difficulties Colombian undergraduate English teachers had in the theoretical framework chapters of the monographs. The analysis showed three areas of difficulties, demonstrating that citation is still an issue within nonnative undergraduate English teachers:

#### **Lack of further textual elaboration**

Colombian undergraduate English teachers locate external authors, in syntactical role, as the point of departure in sentences to elaborate a fully idea to create meaning in their disciplinary knowledge. Though most of the sentences start with the cited author, they do not explain or comment about such author's idea. Instead, they mainly paraphrase previous authors' ideas. To some extent, they do not know the conventionalized academic writing features experts use to disseminate ELT knowledge through discursive artifacts. In other words, they have some epistemological limitations of their discipline and do not

understand the social background of the nature of academic writing.

### **Lack of citation type variety**

In spite of the fact that Colombian undergraduate English teachers can employ integral and non-integral citation in their theoretical framework chapters, they lack variety in citation type. They tend to overuse integral citation which indicates an epistemological dependency with the key disciplinary authors. This dependency is also marked by a limitation in the disciplinary knowledge which lead them to organize the discourse around cited authors, creating an imbalance in the voices presented in the text. Furthermore, they are not aware that the discourse is monotonous when the cited author performs a syntactical role within the sentence that initiates the paragraph.

### **Predominant use of attribution function**

Colombian undergraduate English teachers employ attribution as the principal citation rhetorical function. They pile external authors in most of the paragraphs without evaluating the impact of such sources on the idea that is intended to be conveyed, but these undergraduate teachers fail to create a discourse poliphony in the theoretical framework chapters. On the other hand, there is not any intention in criticizing the cited authors' ideas since these teachers trust the certainty that key disciplinary authors can provide for them when creating arguments.

## **REFERENCES**

- [1] Ackerman, J. M. (1991). *Reading, Writing, and Knowing: The Role of Disciplinary Knowledge in Comprehension and Composing*. Research in the Teaching of English, 25(2), 133–178. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40171186>
- [2] Alramadan, M. (2023). *Citation behavior, audience awareness, and identity construction in Arabic and EFL research*. Heliyon, Volume 9, Issue 2.
- [3] Bhatia, V. K. (1993). *Analyzing genre: language use in professional settings*. London: Routledge.
- [4] Bennett, R. E. (2011). *CBAL: Results from piloting innovative K-12 assessments*. ETS Research Report Series 2011(1). Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- [5] Buckingham, J., and Nevile, M. (1997). *A model of citation options*. ARAL, 20(2): 51-66.
- [6] Cronin, B. (1984). *The Citation Process: The Role and Significance of Citations in Scientific Communication*. London: Taylor Graham.
- [7] Dong, Y. R. (1996). *Learning how to use citations for knowledge transformation: non-native doctoral students' dissertation writing in science*. Research in the teaching of English, 30(4), 428-457.
- [8] Fazilatfar et al. (2018). *An investigation of the effects of citation instruction to avoid plagiarism in EFL academic writing assignments*. Sage open April-June, 1–13. doi: 10.1177/2158244018769958journals.sagepub.com/home/sg
- [9] Harwood, N. (2009). *An interview-based study of the functions of citation in academic writing across two disciplines*. Journal of Pragmatics, 41, 497–518.
- [10] Hewings, A., Lillis, T., & Vladimirou, D. (2010). *Who's citing whose writings? A corpus based study of citations as interpersonal resource in English medium national and English medium international journals*. Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 9(2), pp.102–115. doi:10.1016/j.jeap.2010.02.005
- [11] Hu, G., & Wang, G. (2014). *Disciplinary and ethnolinguistic influences on citation in research articles*. Journal of English for Academic Purposes. 14, pp.14–28.
- [12] Hyland, K. (1999). *Academic Attribution: Citation and the Construction of Disciplinary Knowledge*. Applied Linguistics 20-3, 341-367.
- [13] Hyland, K. (2000) *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in Academic Writing*. Harlow: Longman.
- [14] Hyland, K. (2002). *Authority and invisibility: authorial identity in academic writing*. Journal of Pragmatics 34, 1091–1112.
- [15] Jalilifar, A. (2012). *Academic attribution: citation analysis in master's theses and research articles in applied linguistics*. International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 22: 23-41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1473-4192.2011.00291.x>
- [16] Jalilifar, A. & Dabbi, R. (2012). *Citation in applied linguistics: Analysis of introduction sections of Iranian master theses*. Linguistik online, 57(7), 91-104.
- [17] Jomaa, N. & Bidin, S. (2017). *Perspectives of EFL Doctoral Students on Challenges of Citations in Academic Writing*. Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction. 14. 10.32890/mjli2017.14.2.7.
- [18] Kamyabi A., Ghonsooly, B. Hezareh and Mahdavi, H. (2014). *A Contrastive Study of Rhetorical Functions of Citation in Iranian and International ELT Scopus Journals*. Linguistics and Literature Studies 2(6): 155-165. DOI: 10.13189/lis.2014.020601
- [19] Karamina, P., Wachidah, S. (2021). *The Rhetorical Functions of Citations in the Discussion Sections of Two Articles in Journal of English for Academic Purposes*. STAIRS: English Language Educational Journal.
- [20] Knight-Davis, Stacey and Sung, Jan S., (2008). "Analysis of Citations in Undergraduate Papers". Faculty Research & Creative Activity. 2. [http://thekeep.eiu.edu/lib\\_fac/2](http://thekeep.eiu.edu/lib_fac/2)
- [21] Kongpetch, S. (2021). *Use of Citation Forms in Academic Writing of Thai Undergraduates*. Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 1-10. London: Longman.
- [22] Lee, J., Hitchcock, Ch., and Casal, J. (2018). *Citation practices of L2 university students in first-year writing: Form, function, and stance*. Journal of English for Academic Purposes 3, 1, 11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2018.01.001>
- [23] Loan, N., and Pramoolsook, I. (2016). *Citations in Literature Review Chapters of TESOL Master's Theses by Vietnamese Postgraduates*. GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies. Volume 16(2).
- [24] Manan, N. A., & Noor, N. M. (2014). *Analysis of reporting verbs in master's theses*. ICLALIS 2013, Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 134, 140–145.

- [25] Nesi, H. (2021). *Sources for courses: Metadiscourse and the role of citation in student writing*. *Lingua*, Volume 253, 103040
- [26] Nguyen, Thi Thuy Loan & Pramoolsook, Issra. (2015). *Citations in Literature Review Chapters of TESOL Master's Theses by Vietnamese Postgraduates*. 16. 18-32. 10.17576/gema-2016-1602-02.
- [27] Nugrahaningtyas A. (2021). *Types of Citations in Indonesian Exemplary Theses*. *Jurnal penelitian dan karya ilmiah*. June. DOI: 10.33592/pelita.v2i1i1.1220
- [28] Pecorari, D. (2006). *Visible and occluded citation features in postgraduate second language writing*. *English for Specific Purposes*, 25, 4-29.
- [29] Petriç, B. (2007). *Rhetorical functions of citations in high- and low-rated master's theses*. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* Volume 6, Issue 3, P. 238-253. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1475158507000379>.
- [30] Ramoroka, B. (2014). *Integration of sources in academic writing: A corpus-based study of citation practices in essay writing in two departments at the University of Botswana Affiliation*. *Reading and Writing*. 5. 10.4102/rw.v5i1.41.
- [31] 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, 299–310.
- [32] Shi, L. (2008). *Textual appropriation and citing behaviors of university undergraduates*. *Applied Linguistics*, 31, 1-24.
- [33] Soler-Monreal, C., Carbonell-Olivares, M., y Gil-Salom, L. (2011). *A contrastive study of the rhetorical organisation of English and Spanish PhD thesis introductions*. *English for Specific Purposes*, 30 (1), 4-17
- [34] Street, B. V. (2015). *Academic Writing: Theory and Practice*. *Journal of Educational Issues*, v1 n2 p.110-116 2015
- [35] Sun, Y. (2008). *Citation problems of Chinese MA theses and pedagogical implications*. *The Journal of ASIA TEFL*, 5 (1), 1-27.
- [36] Swales, J. (1986). *Citation analysis and discourse analysis*. *Applied Linguistics*, volume 7, issue 1, 39–56. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/7.1.39>
- [37] Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- [38] Swales, J. M. (2014). *Variation in Citational Practice in a Corpus of Student Biology Papers: From Parenthetical Plonking to Intertextual Storytelling*. *Written Communication*, 31, 118-141.
- [39] Thompson, P. (2000). *Citation practices in PhD theses*. In L. Burnard & T. McEnery (Eds.), *Rethinking language pedagogy from a corpus perspective*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- [40] Thompson, P. (2005). *Points of focus and position: Intertextual reference in PhD Theses*. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 4, 307-32.
- [41] Thompson, P. & Tribble, C. (2001). *Looking at Citations: Using Corpora in English for Academic Purposes*. *Language Learning and Technology*, 5(3), 91–105.
- [42] Zhang, G. (2022). *The citational practice of social science research articles: An analysis by part-genres*. *Journal of English for Academic Purpose*. Volume 55, 101076