Stefania Consonni / Larissa D'Angelo / Patrizia Anesa (eds.)

Digital Communication and Metadiscourse

Changing Perspectives in Academic Genres

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Citation machines: The use of evidentials in the academic writing of Japanese university students

Abstract

The digital medium has transformed communication and the way that knowledge is presented. This influences many spheres of life including academia where digital literacy skills are of major importance in the composing of academic texts. Technology is allowing for an ease of access to information and this is affecting the use of citation as writers begin to more frequently use sources which are available electronically (Pérez-Llantada, 2016). In recent decades, the citation practices of academic writers have been widely-researched (e.g. Hyland,1999; Pecorari, 2006; Petrić, 2007) but, while many of these studies have focused on expert writers at the postgraduate and professional level, there has been less written about novice student writers writing in an EFL environment. Therefore, this study analyses a corpus of research papers written by Japanese university students writing in English. The corpus was examined for the use of evidentials and their form and function assessed. By understanding more about how student writers use this important metadiscoursal feature we can assist learners in developing the resources and strategies necessary to successfully integrate sources in their writing.

1. Introduction

Writing remains the most important way in which students in academic life demonstrate their understanding of their subjects. This importance adds to the significance of the instruction that students receive in EAP academic writing classes as this will shape their future university lives. However, fundamental issues remain, especially when we consider exactly what academic writing is. In her review of EAP writing manuals, Bennett (2009: 52) found that there was a broad consensus as to what English written academic discourse is and this was distinguished by a number of general principles:

> As regards the *general principles* underlying this discourse, it is clear from the emphasis upon clarity, economy, rational argument supported by evidence, caution and restraint, and the incorporation of accepted theory through referencing and citation, that the scientific paradigm still dominates, even in subjects like literature, history and law.

There is therefore the impression, reinforced by these manuals, that academic writing is a monolithic entity whose practices learners must adhere to in order to be successful. However, work by Hyland (2001, 2004, 2008, 2012) has shown that this is not the case and writers in different disciplines represent themselves in very different ways. The instructional materials used by many EAP writing classes in universities portray academic writing as a single entity where it is in fact more diverse, causing a number of problems for student writers, especially if their L1 is different and they also have to accommodate writing conventions which differ considerably from their own language.

This raises another issue of how to teach academic writing. If academic writing is discipline-specific should we be teaching it as one entity or focussing on the specific disciplinary needs of the students? Spack (1988, as cited in Cooper/Bikowski, 2007: 207) maintains that "the disciplinary needs of EAP students are simply too diverse to be practically taught in EAP courses, and moreover, EAP instructors are generally not qualified to teach such discipline-specific tasks." However, Hyland (2011: 53) believes that academic literacy needs to be "embedded in the beliefs and practices of individual disciplines" and that EAP should allow students to contextualize their writing allowing them to argue their claims persuasively. The pedagogy to teach

academic writing does not match the findings of the research and this is clearly a contentious issue but precisely which is the best way to teach academic writing is not clear. This lack of clarity causes problems both for the students trying to learn and the instructors trying to teach academic writing.

Another issue, connected to EAP pedagogy, is the different genres and writing tasks that the students are required to write in university. In their study of the writing tasks assigned in graduate courses at an American university, Cooper/Bikowski (2007) found that a number of different assignments were set, including a research paper, book review, report on an experiment, case study, summary, essay, etc. These different tasks and genres would require differing academic writing skills and varying levels of discipline-specific knowledge. In fact, in the university in which I carried out my research, the students in my study had not yet decided their major so any discipline-specific teaching would be difficult. Hyland's premise that knowledge of the discipline is important, especially in postgraduate courses where students are more aware of the disciplinary practices of their area, is acknowledged, but for many undergraduates the tasks they are asked to perform do not always require this awareness.

Whether disciplinary practices are taught or not it is clear that research has indicated that academic writing is not a monolith and by teaching students that it is we are restricting their abilities to express themselves. This leads to confusion and especially for L2 students who have an identity as a writer in their L1 it is difficult for these student writers to express themselves as they are constrained rather than engaged by academic writing.

Based on this dilemma it is no surprise that L2 students writing their academic papers on computer in English are relying more and more on easy-to-access digital sources to support their ideas and complete their assignments. However, while technology has brought many advantages, its ease of use has also brought problems. It is becoming much more important for university students to be digitally literate to write academic papers that are clearly sourced and avoid the pitfalls that a 'cut and paste' convenience bring to writing. This has implications for how we teach academic writing and as Belcher (2017: 84) argues:

> The critical question that teachers should pose to themselves may be less about whether or not to actively bring technology into the classroom, and, instead, much more about how to help language and literacy learning writers approach technology use in mindful, reasoned ways that support their communicative goals while engaging with digitally accessible real-world audiences.

Rather than just leaving the students adrift in the sea of information available online we need to provide a 'raft' on which they can navigate through the tricky waters and enable them to use the information and position their arguments as credible, reliable sources of knowledge.

In order to find out more about the use of digital technology by student writers in an EFL environment to find sources to use in their academic writing, this paper examines the use of evidentials in the research papers of Japanese university students writing in English. Evidentials are features of metadiscourse which refer to the source of information from other texts (Hyland/Tse, 2004: 169). A pedagogical approach which involves the explicit instruction of evidentials is also examined to discover if it would have an effect on the citation practices of the student writers. To this end, these research questions were formed to guide this study:

1.   How do student writers obtain and use sources to support their ideas in the writing of academic research papers?

2.   What is the effect of the explicit teaching of evidentials on the citation practices of these student writers?

2. Method

A year-long academic writing course was taught to second-year university students studying English in a four-year program at a Japanese university. The students in this department receive two years' instruction in academic writing: in the first-year the basics of essay

writing are covered, and in the second, they are expected to write research papers. In this case, the participants wrote four research papers in a year-long course. These research papers formed the basis of a corpus which was examined for the features of metadiscourse including evidentials. The final corpus consisted of 188,565 words and there were 21 participants.

The researcher coded the corpus for features of metadiscourse but to improve reliability a second coder who was familiar in its features and definitions according to Hyland/Tse (2004) independently coded a sample of the corpus. Miles/Huberman (1994) suggest a figure of 80% agreement on the consistency of coding as being reliable and we found that when we compared results we had achieved a figure of 83%.

The coded-research papers were then used to stimulate recall in interviews as to how and why the participants used the evidence in their writing i.e. their personal citation practices.

In order to examine the pedagogical effect of the explicit instruction of metadiscoursal features including evidentials, another corpus was collected. This class also wrote four research papers over the course of a year, but they received no explicit instruction into the features of metadiscourse whereas the first did. This corpus had 20 participants and consisted of 163,557 words. The form and function of the evidentials used by the two groups were then compared to ascertain what effects explicit instruction had had.

3. Findings

3.1 How do student writers obtain and use sources to support their ideas in the writing of academic research papers?

Figure 1 shows the sources of the information used by the participants in the study, and it clearly shows that the majority of them are using the internet, especially Google.
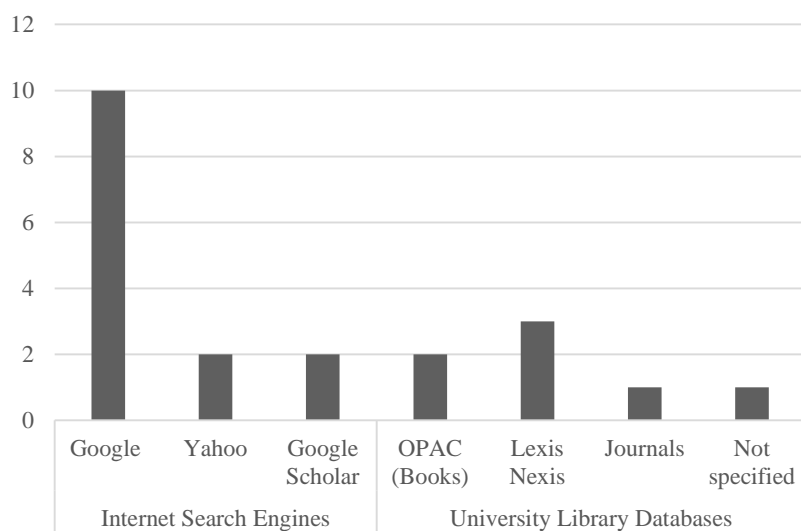
Figure 1. Sources of citations used in participant's research papers.

In a study by Thompson et al. (2013), when they also examined the research-based assignments of L2 university students, they found similar results with the use of internet sources and the criteria for guiding the selection of sources were very similar. The criteria given for selecting sources included:

- authoritativeness
- reliability
- academic
- supporting the writer's opinion

However, when the participants in my study were interviewed about this, although many commented it was not good to use blogs and Wikipedia, they did not have particularly strong justifications for what actually constituted 'reliable' and 'authoritative'. Some of their criteria included:

- If it's a big company…

- If the source is a newspaper…
- A very famous (source) like the BBC, *New York Times*…
- I try to get a resource from a website which seems to be organized by some institution…

As their instructor I found this quite problematic as one of the issues about the use of the internet is the sheer volume of information that can be accessed and it seems clear that the students were not critical enough about this information. Our pedagogy needs to provide students with guidance as to what makes a source 'reliable' and 'authoritative' and, therefore, worthy of using in academic writing.

In respect of the use of digital media it is not only the finding of sources but how to use them that is being affected. Figure 2 represents the sources of the information used by the students to format their citations and 43% referenced online databases such as Citation Machine, Bib Me, and Easy Bib. In itself this is not a problem but it does tend to add to the impression that students are relying too much on the technology without actually understanding how and when to cite. In composition classes we focus on writing skills but digital literacy is becoming more and more important.
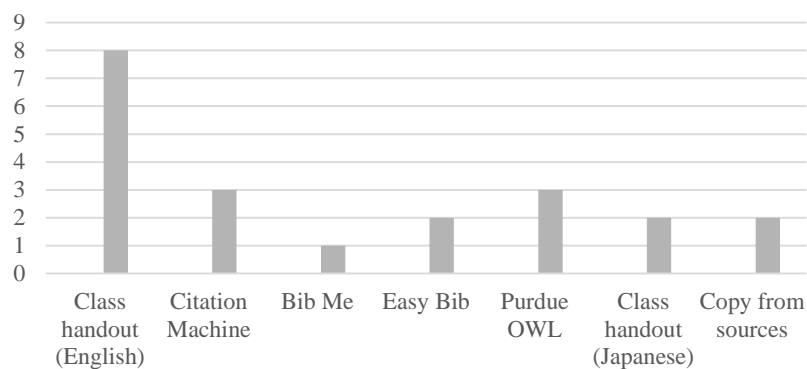

Figure 2. References used by participants to format their citations.

This possible lack of understanding of citation practices could be seen in the overuse of information in the in-text citations of some of the participants. In the two examples below the students use the source, the title, the author, and the date in the citation and much of this information is only necessary in the reference list at the end of their papers.

(1)   According to New York Time's article, "Why won't Hollywood cast Asian actors?" by Keith Chow, 2016, Hollywood mentions that appointing non-white actors is risky.

(2)   According to (Korean mother-in-law's mantra: Please cook for my son. Lee, C. 2016, July 11), Kim Eun-ji a 39-year-old wife and also a registered nurse at the Korea Herald told her story of her 9-year marriage life with her husband and the relationship with her mother-in-law.

In these examples from the corpus, 'according to' is used to cite the sources and, as can be seen from Table 1, it was the most frequently used evidential.

Evidential	Raw number
ACCORDING TO	432
SHOW	79
SAY	79
STATE	53
CLAIM	44

Table 1. Most frequent evidentials used in the corpus

In fact, nearly half (47%) of all evidentials, were 'according to' and the five most frequent as shown in Figure 3 represented 74% of all evidentials used. This is also interesting because these evidentials are all integral citations which place the author in the subject position, which reinforces the previous comment that one of the reasons for the participants to use sources was the authority of the writer. The use of integral citations signalled the authority of the source. Hyland (2005: 161) examined the use of evidentials in different disciplines and noticed that more integral and subject citation forms were used in social science and humanities papers. He hypothesizes that these are "helping to construct an authorial self by positioning the writer in relation to other

views." However, while this is plausible in his corpus of expert academic writers with knowledge of the conventions of their discipline, in the case of this study of student academic writers, it is far more likely that they simply see the author as being an authority on the subject whose ideas support what they want to argue.

Also, in the example below the student has used the author's name several times, both in the sentence and in the citation. It seems that they are not sure about how to cite and therefore, to 'be safe' they add too much information.This could be caused by reliance on the online citation software because the students simply input the information without realizing what is required in an in-text citation and in a reference list and what the differences are.

(3)   Hodal also explains about a study from the World Bank suggesting, that by women making as much money as men, global economy would "enrich" by approximately \$160tn (Hodal, 2018). Not only will it benefit just a country, but by making gender equality possible, it could create global wealth boost of \$23,620 (Hodal, 2018). Both Japan and the United States could take advantage of such economic jump.

Another aspect of the possible confusion of in-text citation and reference/works cited list is highlighted by this example below:

(4)   In April 2017, AI and facial recognition technology were introduced to survey the jaywalkers. The Shenzhen Police set a big screen beside every crosswalk to project the jaywalkers' faces and documents. The jaywalkers were not only publicly shamed and named, but also this information was sent to the center of the city's government. This technology, providing to display the violators' faces on screen is continuing to evolve. The local government is now concurring with social media like WeChat. They aim to make a system where the violators immediately receive a text message when the jaywalk.

In this example the writer uses specific information and was told it needed to be cited. However, in the extract from an email sent by the writer below they are clearly confused as they believe that the information was correctly cited. If you look at the corpus extract, there were no in-text citations and the writer was referring to the fact that they had referenced the source at the end of their paper.

(5)   If I was to say one thing, you said that the Shenzhen part is specific and needs
        citations, but the article called "In China's new surveillance state, everyone will
        be watched, reviewed, and rated" was used as information (as to research
        fundamental basics, and the same information in Japanese was just used for
        further research), and this one is clearly referred.

In this instance as the instructor I advised the student that if they did not cite correctly they would be plagiarizing and therefore would fail the assignment. The student re-submitted a new draft but still did not cite their sources and was failed. However, were they 'innocent' or 'guilty' of plagiarism? After they had received a warning, would they purposefully attempt to deceive or was it simply that they still did not know how to cite properly? As Casanave (2017: 186) writes: "novice writers tend not to see that they are interacting with other authors when they write from sources, but instead see sources as authoritative funds of information that just need to be transferred into their own writing."

This is even more problematic for L2 writers as language proficiency is an issue. They may not have sufficient language resources to paraphrase or summarize the original sources and therefore unintentionally plagiarize. L2 student writers can have issues with citation practices and language, but there have also been studies which suggest problems caused by the use of the internet. Sutherland-Smith (2005) examined the use of internet sources by ESL students in Australia and, when interviewed, some of them believed that information on the internet was common knowledge and did not need citing. As was mentioned earlier, while the use of digital media seems to make writing easier, it also brings challenges for student writers who face issues with how to use the technology responsibly to avoid problems such as plagiarism. This class used Turnitin (the plagiarism detection software which was required to be used by the university) to submit their assignments, but whereas this use of technology does detect 'textual borrowings', it does not detect the intention of the writer to purposefully use the information as their own. Both ourselves as educators and our students are relying on technology to help us complete our tasks, but we need to be more circumspect and instead of submitting to the machines learn how to use them to support our needs.

3.2 What is the effect of the explicit teaching of evidentials on the citation practices of these student writers?

In order to examine the effects of explicitly teaching evidentials on the citation practices of the student writers, another corpus of student writing was collected. The writers in corpus A and B both wrote four research papers (RP) over the course of a year's class in academic writing, but whereas A received instruction in the features of metadiscourse including evidentials, B received no instruction. As can be seen in Table 2, the student writers in A used evidentials more frequently than those in B.

	RP1	*RP2*	*RP3*	*RP4*	*Total*
A	4.8	4	5.9	4.9	4.9
B	3.4	3	4.5	4.3	3.8

Table 2. The frequency of evidentials used in the corpora (per 1,000 words).

It could be hypothesized that as the writers in corpus A were exposed to the features of metadiscourse they were more aware of the features of academic discourse, and therefore used more evidence from academic sources to support their ideas, and subsequently more evidentials. This is supported by the frequency in usage of self-mentions as in corpus A. the frequency per 1,000 words was 1.3, whereas it was more than double in B at 3.3. The more frequent use of self-mentions in corpus B can be seen in the example below as the writer uses a more personal tone and examples from their own experience to support their ideas.

(6)   Watching movies are one of my favorite things to do in my free time. Whether it is an action, a romcom, a drama on Netflix series, I prefer anything but mostly foreign films with foreign actors. Maybe this is because I spent my elementary school years in L.A and grew up watching Hanna Montana or Sponge Bob rather than the Japanese TV shows. Even today, watching films in English feels right for me.

Although there was a difference in the frequency of the evidentials used between the two corpora, there was no significant difference in the problems of their usage, as the writers in corpus B had many of the same issues with their citation practices. For example, in the extract below the writer includes too much information in the text, most of which would be expected to be used at the end of the paper in the list of references.

(7)   For example, according to the article by Eugene Scott posted on "The Washington Post" on March 15th, 2 police officers responded to an 911 call and shot 20 bullets at an unarmed black man, Stephon Clark ending up to killing him in his backyard. The police say they shot him, because they saw an object in the black man's hand. The Washington post by Julie Tate on "Police shooting data," revealed that from the police tracking footage installed from 2015, that 987 people have been killed in 2017 by police using fatal force. Although the data from the article "Nationwide, police shot and killed nearly 1000 people in 2017" posted on January 6th 2018, showed that the number of black males being killed by police have slightly decreased, there is still high rates as statistics show.

In the next extract the writer uses specific information which should have been cited but was not.

(8)   Even after refugees get out of their country, it doesn't mean that they can definitely go to Europe and not all of them can go to Europe. There are about 4million refugees caused by the civil war in Syria. 1.94 million people is in turkey, 1.11 million in Lebanon, 630 thousands in Jordan and 250 thousands in Iraq. This means that only few people went to Europe. This is due to their economic status, it takes lots of money and they have to pay hundreds and thousands of dollars to employ a person that helps them to illegally enter the country. Most of the refugee therefore choose to go to the nearby country. Only 14 percent of the refugees in turkey are able to enter the refugee camp that is ran by the government.

The problems in citation practices were similar between the writers in the different corpora, but apart from the more frequent usage of evidentials, there was little evidence to suggest that there had been an effect in explicitly teaching the use of evidentials to the writers in corpus A.

In their study of argumentative essays in a L2 English composition class, Taguchi et al. (2013: 428) discovered that the 'higher-rated essays used both specific author reference as well as attributive language more frequently than the lower essays.' Therefore, to investigate a potential effect of explicitly teaching about evidentials a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated. The two variables were the frequency of evidentials per paper and the grade the writer received for the paper. The hypothesis being that in the experimental group (Corpus A) as they had used evidentials more frequently this should have an effect on their grades, whereas no effect would be seen in the control group (Corpus B) who had not been taught about evidentials and had used them less frequently. The Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.16$, $p = 0.14$ (N=89) was found for the experimental group (Corpus A), and for the control group (Corpus B) the figure was $r = 0.00$, $p = 0.99$ (N=80). This means that although there was a weak correlation between the frequency of evidentials and grade in Corpus A, there was none in Corpus B. However, the statistical difference between them is not significant, which is clearly shown in Figure 3.
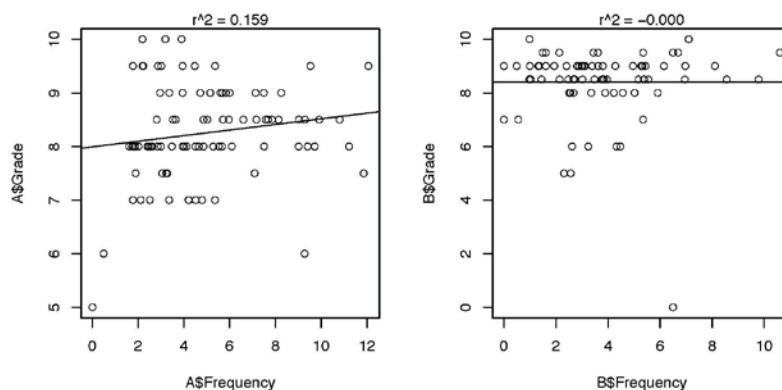

Figure 3. Scatterplot representing the correlation between frequency of use of evidentials and grade (out of 10) of the papers in the corpus

In Figure 3, the correlation values, and regression line for Corpus A is shown on the left, and for Corpus B on the right, and this graphically represents the lack of correlation.

4. Conclusion

This study has described the effect of the use of technology on the citation practices of student academic writers in an EFL environment. It has highlighted the widespread use of the Internet by these writers to find sources to support their ideas, and reference sites which are used to cite them correctly in appropriate styles. This use of technology has facilitated the academic writing of the students in the study, but this convenience has also brought problems. There is a danger that the student writers rely on their 'machines' rather than actually knowing how and when to cite. Many composition programs focus on the importance of academic literacy, but it is clear that this must involve the use of technology and how it can be used ethically to support our students' writing.

In this paper, I have introduced an attempt to explicitly teach the use of evidentials to help in the student writers' citation practices but the effects of this were limited. However, I do believe that the explicit instruction of other features of metadiscourse, not just evidentials, would have a positive effect on the academic writing of my students. This is an area of future research and I completely agree with Wette (2017: 111) who wrote that "sustained, explicit instruction and discussion, supported by a variety of task types contextualized into specific disciplines and outputs, and constructive, targeted feedback are needed to build confidence and skill." However, this instruction in academic literacy must take into account the digital literacy skills that are now so important for our students.

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