



A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF REPORTING VERBS USED IN LITERATURE REVIEW CHAPTERS OF BACHELOR'S AND MASTER'S THESES OF CHINESE ENGLISH MAJORS



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ABSTRACT

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Reporting Verbs (RVs), a crucial aspect of citations in academic writing, are used to report the work of other researchers. A Literature Review Chapter, as a key part-genre of any thesis, or a bigger genre where it is embedded, is the main place that has the highest number of RVs. Accordingly, this study aimed to analyze and compare the use of RVs between 30 bachelor's thesis (BT) Literature Review Chapters and 30 master's thesis (MT) Literature Review Chapters of Chinese English majors in terms of denotation and evaluation of RVs based on Hyland's (2002) classification framework. The findings reveal that the RVs used in the BT Literature Reviews were smaller in amount and narrower in range compared with those in the MT counterparts. Regarding the denotation of RVs, Discourse Act RVs were found to be the most predominant in the BT corpus, while Research Act RVs prevailed in the MT corpus. Cognition Act RVs were the least used in the two corpora. Regarding the evaluation of RVs, factive RVs were the most frequently used in the BT Literature Reviews, while non-factive RVs were the most prominent in the MT counterparts. However, negative RVs were infrequent in both corpora. This study would increase the thesis writers' knowledge on the significance of RVs, raise their awareness of employing RVs, and help them use RVs appropriately and effectively in writing their thesis and other academic writings. This paper also provides practical implications for teaching RVs in preparing research dissertations.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature on reporting verbs by analyzing and comparing their use in bachelor's theses and master's theses of Chinese English majors. This study would increase our knowledge about the reporting verbs and raise our awareness of using them in academic texts.

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic writing plays an indispensable role in a student's academic life (Hyland, 2000; Yeganeh & Boghayeri, 2015). Students are expected to learn to write essays, research proposals, research articles, theses or dissertations, or other texts, adopting a style of writing appropriate to their academic field and the genre they are writing. One of the key features of evidence-based academic writing is to cite diverse sources of knowledge by which writers refer to the disciplinary community to which they belong (Hyland's, 2002; Jalilifar & Dabbi, 2012; Yeganeh & Boghayeri, 2015). In writing for academic purposes, it requires writers to construct a coherent and credible representation of themselves as well as their research and negotiate their relationship with the disciplinary discourse community by connecting their work to the existing literature in the field and demonstrating how the work builds on and reworks past contributions (Hyland, 1999).

Reporting Verbs (RVs) (e.g., suggest, argue, find, show), as a crucial aspect of citation in academic writing, can be used to introduce the work of other researchers, as illustrated in Sentences 1-3 below.

1. Grafstrom et al. have *studied* photothermal currents ...
2. Jerry Fodor *thinks* that it is irredeemably disjunctive.
3. Eckstein *criticizes* psychological reductionism, rational choice, and ...Hyland's (2002).

From the three examples above, RVs allow the writers to clearly convey the kind of activities reported and to precisely show an attitude to that information (Hyland, 1999; Hyland's, 2002; Thompson & Ye, 1991). Firstly, according to Hyland's (2002) classification framework, RVs are used to indicate the kind of activities referenced; namely, experimental activities (in Sentence 1), mental processes (in Sentence 2), and discourse activities (in Sentence 3). In addition, in Sentence 1, the Research Act RV (study) is employed to refer to the procedural aspects of the previous researcher's investigation and allows the writer to neutrally attribute the evidence to the source text. In Sentence 2, the Cognition Act RV (think) is used to show a positive attitude to the cited material, accepting it as true or correct. In Sentence 3, the Discourse Act RV (criticize) is employed to show the author's reservations or objections to the reported message. Therefore, RVs are used to achieve the rhetorical impact of an academic paper that often rests on the connections that writers make between their works and others' works through evaluating the cited information and showing their own attitude toward it, signaling whether they are to be taken as accepted or not (Hunston & Thompson, 2000; Hyland, 2000). Furthermore, academic genres are by their nature rhetorical instruments whose main purpose is to interact with readers, aiming to convince them that the writer's work is justifiable and significant. As Hunston (2000) affirms, the use of RVs can require a great deal of exactness to establish the credibility of the writers and the claims as well, so that there is a greater likelihood that the reader will accept the position the writer is taking. In other words, the use of RVs can provide an appropriate context of persuasion throughout the process of building "writer-author engagement" and "writer-reader engagement". Following the convention established by Thompson and Ye (1991) "writer" refers to the person who is citing the previous work, and "author" is the person who is being cited.

Given the significance of RVs in academic writing, previous research has investigated the different ways in which RVs are used in academic discourse. Most studies have analyzed the use of RVs in a single discipline (e.g., (Agbaglo, 2017; Un-udom & Un-udom, 2020)) across disciplines (e.g., (Hyland, 1999; Hyland's, 2002)) and across cultures (Jafarigohar & Mohammadkhani, 2015; Yeganeh & Boghayeri, 2015; Yilmaz & Özdem Erturk, 2017). Some studies have revealed how RVs are used in bachelor's theses (BTs) (e.g., Santos (2018)) master's theses (MTs) (e.g., (Manan & Noor, 2014; Nguyen, 2017; Nguyen & Pramoolsook, 2015)) and doctoral theses (Charles, 2006; Soler-Monreal & Gil-Salom, 2011). In addition, a few studies have compared the use of RVs between different genres, for example, Jalilifar (2012) made a comparative analysis of RVs between MTs and research manuscripts.

There is no dearth of research in the field of RVs that have proved the importance of the use of RVs in academic writing. However, little attention to BTs has been relatively given. There are two reasons why this discipline was neglected. First, it is due to the inaccessibility of texts. As Paltridge (2002) claims, research theses are often difficult to obtain in university and even more difficult to obtain from outside the university. Second, it is the belief that undergraduate research transmits received wisdom rather than creating new knowledge (Xu, Huang, & You, 2016). Furthermore, no study has revealed the general picture of RVs used in BTs and MTs, which are two texts of the same genre but represent different levels of education. Writers of BTs and MTs might exhibit distinct preferences for different RVs due to the different roles they play in the academic community. Furthermore, undergraduate students and master's students might have different levels of control over and awareness of how to use RVs in texts. Therefore, the comparison of RVs used in BTs and MTs can shed some light on the features of RVs used by these two different writer groups. It will help mark their similarities and differences and might provide a more standardized writing model and specification for undergraduate students and guide them to conform to the

standards of the discourse community. To the best of the present researchers' knowledge, no study has been conducted to compare the use of RVs in BTs and MTs in the Chinese context till date.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In China's tertiary education, in a foreign language learning context, writing a thesis in English is recognized as the last but most important task that English-majors are required to fulfill in a university. Thesis writing is seen as a critical factor to reinforce and test English majors' comprehensive abilities, including their scope of knowledge, language competence, basic theories, and academic capacity; their scientific research ability; and their creation and innovation spirits. Significantly, thesis writing is also regarded as an essential assessment method since it is submitted as a partial fulfillment of the requirements to determine English majors' academic achievement for obtaining a corresponding academic degree. According to *English Teaching Syllabus for English Majors* issued by Teaching Advisory Committee for Tertiary English Majors (2000), in order to graduate with a bachelor's degree, undergraduate students need to write a BT in English of 3,000-5,000 words in a smooth language, by using clear idea and a well-organized structure, and substantial contents, in their final year of the university. To graduate with a master's degree, master's students are required to complete a MT in English of 20,000 words in length in their final year of the university. These regulations may vary from university to university.

However, during the process of composing a thesis, a complex interaction between lexical choices and rhetorical purposes of RVs could pose challenges for Chinese English majors, and they could often find it difficult to choose appropriate RVs for reporting sources that satisfied both the syntactic requirements and expressed their stance toward the claims (Cao, 2017; Lou, 2013; Wei & Liu, 2019; Zhang, 2018). In the first place, Chinese English majors possessed little knowledge about the functional features of RVs when composing a BT or MT because of the lack of systematic guidance and supervision on teaching how to use RVs.

What is more, due to the restriction of learning resources, there were not enough authentic English materials in the university libraries and information on the latest academic trends in the university databases. As a result, students always lack resources to learn RVs and how to make the subtle distinctions between syntactic features and rhetorical functions of RVs. De Beaugrande (2001) confirms that relying on simple dictionary definitions is not always a useful strategy for expressing a writer's stance toward a claim since there is sometimes a disconnection between the meanings of words found in a dictionary and how they are commonly used in actual rhetorical contexts. In this case, Bloch (2010) demonstrates that "even if the student can make grammatically correct choices, the rhetorical impact of their claims may suffer if the RV is not appropriate" (p. 220).

In addition, students often seem concerned with varying their lexical choices by randomly choosing a RV or substituting one RV for another without adequate consciousness of the subtleties of language necessary for reporting sources (Bloch, 2010; Pecorari, 2008; Yeganeh & Boghayeri, 2015). Therefore, there is no doubt that the difficulties it poses for Chinese English majors in using RVs are one of the critical issues that need to be solved.

Realizing the need to bridge the research gap and to search for a possible solution to the problems, this study aimed to analyze and compare the use of RVs in the Literature Review Chapter of BTs and MTs produced by Chinese English-majored students; finding out first how RVs are used in BTs and MTs, and second, their similarities and differences in using those RVs.

To be more specific, the issues in focus included (1) how the writers used RVs to report previous studies (denotative functions) and (2) how they evaluated the cited information (evaluative functions) based on Hyland's (2002) classification framework. Accordingly, to fulfill the objectives of this study, the research question posed was as follows: What are the similarities and differences in the use of RVs in Literature Review Chapters in BTs and MTs by Chinese English majors?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. The Corpus and Text Selection

The corpus used in this study consisted of 60 theses in the fields of linguistics/applied linguistics and teaching methodology produced by Chinese English majors during the 2018-2020 period. To be more specific, 30 of the theses were BTs selected from a pool of 140 BTs collected from a university in southwest China; in addition, the other 30 were MTs selected from 15 universities in various regions of China by downloading them from *China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI)*, a key national online repository in China under the lead of Tsinghua University. The reason for the selection of the two different corpora was to keep it manageable based on their accessibility and availability since a problem in carrying out this study was accessing BTs from more universities.

To fulfill the objectives of this study, the final corpora were compiled only from the Literature Review Chapter of these theses because this chapter was a crucial part-genre of a thesis, whose purpose was to review the existing knowledge on what has been done in the context of a topic, and it was proved to be the reporting-dense chapter (Nguyen, 2017; Soler-Monreal & Gil-Salom, 2011). Ultimately, 30 BT Literature Reviews and 30 MT Literature Reviews were drawn to build a corpus for this study to investigate the use of RVs in these two different texts. It is worth noting that the visual elements and textual elements outside of the main texts were discarded, such as images, diagrams, figures, tables, and footnotes. The resulting corpus of 30 BT Literature Reviews contained 42,336 words and that of the 30 MT Literature Reviews consisted of 160,867 words. Afterward, for the ease of reference and subsequent analysis, 30 BT Literature Reviews were randomly coded from BT01-BT30 and the 30 MT Literature Reviews from MT01-MT30.

3.2. Analysis Framework

The analysis framework that underpins this study was Hyland's (2002) classification of RVs. It is the most comprehensive and clearest taxonomy for classifying RVs, which includes both the author's research activities and the writer's evaluative judgments, containing the key factors in reporting process of academic writing. This framework is shown in Figure 1 and elaborated below.

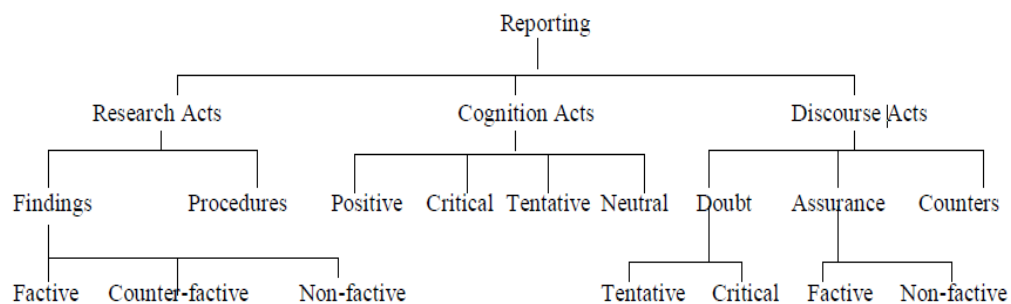


Figure-1. Hyland's (2002) Classification of Reporting Verbs (p. 119).

In terms of their denotative functions, Hyland (2002) classified RVs into three distinguishable processes according to the type of activities they referred to: 1) *Research (Real-World) Acts* (verbs that represent experimental activities or actions carried out in the real world, e.g. *discover, notice, observe, show*), 2) *Cognition Acts* (verbs that are related with the researcher's mental processes, e.g. *assume, believe, conceptualize, suspect, view*), and 3) *Discourse Acts* (verbs that indicate the verbal expression of cognitive or research activities, e.g. *ascribe, discuss, hypothesize, report, state*).

Regarding their evaluative functions, each of the process categories has a sub-set of evaluative categories. Within the *Finding* category of *Research Acts*, writers can acknowledge their acceptance of the author's claims with *factive verbs* (e.g., *confirm, demonstrate, establish, show, solve*), portray the authors' judgments as false or incorrect to show a *counter-factive* stance (e.g., *fail, misunderstand, ignore, overlook*), or comment on research findings in a non-

factively manner using *non-factive RVs*, giving no clear attitudinal signal as to their reliability (e.g., *find, identify, observe, obtain*). In addition, verbs that refer to the *Procedure* category carry no evaluation in themselves but simply report research procedures neutrally.

RVs in *Cognition Acts* can handle evaluation differently, not only allowing writers to take a personal stance on the reported information, but also attributing a particular attitude to the cited author (Hyland, 2002). There are four options viz., writers can portray the author as having a positive attitude and accepting it as true or correct with verbs such as *agree, concur, hold, know, think, or understand*; secondly, they can take a *tentative* stance with verbs (e.g., *believe, doubt, speculate, suppose, suspect*); thirdly, they can take a critical view toward the reported matter (e.g., *disagree, dispute, not think*); and finally, they can hold a neutral attitude toward the reported proposition (e.g., *anticipate, conceive, picture, reflect*).

Employing *Discourse Act* verbs allows the writers to either take responsibility for their interpretation by conveying their uncertainty or assurance of the correctness of the claims reported, or attribute a qualification to the author (Hyland, 2002). *Discourse Act* verbs, which express the writer's view directly, are divided into *Doubt* and *Assurance* categories. *Doubt* verbs can be further separated into *tentative* verbs (e.g., *hypothesize, indicate, intimate, postulate, suggest*) and *critical* verbs (e.g., *evade, exaggerate, not account, not make point*). *Assurance* verbs introduce cited materials by either neutrally informing readers of the author's position (*non-factive*) (e.g., *answer, define, describe, discuss, report, state, summarize*) or supporting the writer's own position (*factive*) (e.g., *affirm, argue, claim, explain, note, point out*). *Counters*, another sub-category of *Discourse Act* verbs, can be employed by writers to express to cite author's own reservations or objections to the correctness of the reported message instead of taking responsibility for the evaluation (e.g., *attack, challenge, critique, deny, question, refute, rule out, warn*).

3.3. Analysis Procedure

Once the corpus was compiled, the next step was to retrieve RVs. AntConc (version 3.5.8) concordance software (Anthony, 2019) was used to extract all instances of RVs, which can save time and ensure the accuracy of the research results. Based on Hyland (2002) study, 67 RVs were identified as target RVs that appeared in the two corpora, and they were entered in the search column of AntConc to retrieve RVs with all possible lemmas. For the concordance software to search all RVs that occurred in the two corpora, the regular expressions for the conventional ways of reporting clauses (e.g., APA and MLA styles starting with one or many authors' surnames, followed by the year of publication or page in round brackets) were created. A thorough checking was then conducted manually to eliminate those retrieved verbs that did not function as RV. Thereafter, all retrieved RVs were classified using Hyland's (2002) classification framework. Finally, the frequencies of occurrences of RVs were calculated and analyzed qualitatively to answer the research question.

To increase the reliability of the analysis, one inter-rater who shared knowledge and expertise in the field of discourse analysis was invited to analyze the data with the first author of this study. After completing the coding and training for mutual and correct understanding about the categories and coding process, the two coders independently analyzed the data and produced 91.5% agreement. In terms of the disagreements, the second author of this paper with extensive experience in discourse analysis was consulted for a final decision.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Overall Use of RVs in the BT and MT Literature Reviews

Table 1 below provides an overall picture of RVs used in the 30 BT Literature Reviews and 30 MT Literature Reviews. As shown, Chinese English-major undergraduate students used 469 tokens of RVs in the BT Literature Reviews in total, and master's students employed 1,947 tokens of RVs in the MT Literature Reviews. Since the sizes of the two corpora were not exactly equal, the raw frequencies (RFs) of occurrence of RVs and normalized frequencies (NFs) of the number of occurrences per 10,000 words were considered and shown in Table 1.

Accordingly, undergraduate students used 110.8 RVs per 10,000 words, while master's students used 121.0 RVs per 10,000 words.

Table-1. Number of RVs used in BT Literature Reviews and MT Literature Reviews.

	RF	NF
BT Literature Reviews	469	110.8
MT Literature Reviews	1,947	121.0

The findings reveal that RVs used by Chinese English-majored undergraduate students were smaller in number when compared with those by the master's students. It can be inferred that these master's students had a wider range of linguistic options to draw on and they were likely to show a high share of knowledge in applying different types of RVs to report the work of other researchers. Moreover, it also showed that these master's students possessed higher awareness to use RVs frequently than the undergraduate students during the process of composing their theses.

4.2. Denotative Categories

As shown in Table 2, in terms of the denotative categorizations in the BT Literature Reviews, RVs from the *Discourse Act* category had the highest frequency, representing 53.5% of the total RVs identified in the data, *Research Act RVs* with more than a quarter (28.4%) ranked second, followed by *Cognitive Act RVs* (18.1%). This trend in using RVs is in line with the findings of using RVs by Agbaglo (2017); Hyland (2002) and Loan and Pramoolsook (2015) and. In addition, Hyland (2002) explains that this tendency characterizes the discursive nature of soft disciplines to which the fields of this target corpus belong, i.e. linguistics/applied linguistics and teaching methodology.

Table-2. Distribution of RVs used in BT Literature Reviews and MT Literature Reviews.

Category/Sub-category	BT		MT	
	NF	% of total	NF	% of total
Research Acts	31.4	28.4	58.7	48.5
Findings	15.8	14.3	23.2	19.2
Factive	5.0	4.5	5.6	4.6
Counter-Factive	0	0	0	0
Non-Factive	10.9	9.8	17.6	14.5
Procedures	15.6	14.1	35.5	29.3
Cognition Acts	20.1	18.1	12.4	10.3
Positive	7.6	6.8	7.1	5.9
Critical	0	0	0	0
Tentative	12.0	10.9	5.0	4.1
Neutral	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.3
Discourse Acts	59.3	53.5	49.9	41.2
Doubt	16.8	15.1	11.9	9.8
Tentative	16.8	15.1	11.9	9.8
Critical	0	0	0	0
Assurance	42.3	38.2	37.7	31.1
Factive	25.3	22.8	20.5	16.9
Non-Factive	17.0	15.4	17.2	14.2
Counters	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.3
Total	110.8	100	121.0	100

Regarding the use of RVs in the MT Literature Reviews, RVs from the *Research Act* category were the most prominent, taking up 48.5% of the total number of RVs recorded in the data, followed by *Discourse Act RVs* which were used as the second priority (41.2%), and *Cognitive Act RVs* (10.3%) which accounted for the least used category.

Although this finding contradicts the results of the BT Literature Reviews, it accords with those of Manan and Noor (2014) and Un-udom and Un-udom (2020) where *Research Act RVs* were found predominant.

Hyland (2002) explains that the greater use of *Discourse Act RVs* is more appropriate in an argument schema that more readily regards explicit interpretation, speculation, and arguments as “accepted aspects of knowledge” (p. 126). In addition, the use of *Discourse Act RVs* allows writers to expedite the verbal exploration of related issues, facilitating qualitative arguments that rest on finely delineated interpretations and conceptualizations. As illustrated in Examples 1-3, the undergraduate students preferred to employ *Discourse Act RVs* such as “*discuss*”, “*point out*”, “*indicate*” and “*claim*”, to verbally report the claims of other researchers, which can construct factual reliability and establish a specific context of the knowledge.

(1) Nation (1990) *discussed* the relationship between semantic component analysis and English vocabulary teaching, and *pointed out* that in order to let students understand the semantic relationship within the vocabulary system and enhance the ability of vocabulary analysis and understanding, teachers can... (BT25) (*Discourse Acts*).

(2) Chen (2020) *indicated* that the classroom atmosphere is one of the external factors determining students' learning. (BT28) (*Discourse Acts*).

(3) Krashen (1989) *claims* that mother tongue acquisition and language learning are two different concepts. (BT11) (*Discourse Acts*).

On the other hand, Hyland (2002) also claims that the predilection for *Research Act RVs* helps to convey an experimental explanatory schema, which regards research activity as “an inductive, impersonal and empirically-based endeavor” (p. 126). Our finding demonstrates that Chinese English-major master's students tended to use *Research Act RVs* to report experimental activities or actions carried out by the previous researchers, emphasizing that the reported facts are shown to emerge from experimental activities rather than discursive practices, and the legitimacy of the information rests securely on the non-contingent, socially invariant standards of research procedures (Hyland's, 2002). As can be seen in Examples 4-6 below, *Research Act RVs*, “*study*”, “*explore*”, and “*show*”, were employed in reporting previous research in statements of findings or procedures.

(4) Following Özçalışkan and Slobin (2003); Chen (2020) also *studied* the manner verbs and alternative manner expression in nine Chinese novels. (MT04) (*Research Acts*).

(5) Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) *explored* the characteristics of the environment situation needs analysis from seven parts. (MT10) (*Research Acts*).

(6) Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert (1999) research *showed* that students with high anxiety had less language output due to lack of confidence during their writing process. (MT21) (*Research Acts*).

It is noteworthy that although the master's students preferred *Research Act RVs* to *Discourse Act RVs*, the frequency of the use of *Discourse Act RVs* was close to *Research Act RVs*. This tends to indicate that the master's students can adopt a wider range of RVs and have higher awareness to use different RVs in their MTs than undergraduate students do.

Cognition Act RVs were employed with the lowest percentage of the three main categories in both corpora. Although *Cognition Act RVs* have a great effect on personal interpretation in knowledge negotiation, as explained in Hyland (2002) they are employed to depict previous literature in terms of the cited author's theorizing and mental activities, thereby giving prominence to the role of human agency in constructing claims, and often the fallibility. Furthermore, Liu and Wang (2019) pointed out that Chinese writers' low frequency of *Cognition Act RVs* use might be related to the fact that the subjective feature of this behavior did not conform to the requirements of academic writing. Therefore, both Chinese undergraduate and master's students were far less likely to employ *Cognition RVs*. In Examples 7-10 below, Chinese English majors used *Cognition RVs* such as “*think*”, “*believe*”, “*realize*”, and “*hold*”, to represent previous research as proceeding from the interpretive operations or verbal accounts of researchers, which can emphasize the role that reasoning and argument play in the construction of knowledge.

(7) Goodman (1967) a psychologist from American, *thinks* that reading is the answering riddles in the psycholinguistics. (BT12) (Cognition Acts).

(8) However, Aida (1994) *believes* that Foreign Language Anxiety is a special emotion in the process of language learning, which is... (BT27) (Cognition Acts).

(9) Dörnyei (1990) then also *realize* that the nature of human motivation is dynamic and it is a changing process influenced by external and internal factors. (MT06) (Cognition Acts).

(10) Pawley and Syder (1983) *held* that chunks are ready-made constructions stored in learners' mind, which... (MT24) (Cognition Acts).

Finally, based on Hyland's (2002) classification framework, *Research Act RVs* can be divided into two sub-categories in terms of the statements of findings or procedures. As can be seen in Table 2, the undergraduate students preferred to employ *Finding RVs* (14.3%) to *Procedure RVs* (14.1%), which reveals that they tend to report the findings gained from the previous studies. On the contrary, the master's students used *Procedure RVs* (29.3%) more than *Finding RVs* (19.2%) in the MT Literature Reviews. This tends to indicate the master's students' preference for *Procedure RVs* to report what prior researchers have done, emphasizing the procedures conducted in the previous research.

Regarding the differences in the use of *Research Act RVs* in BTs and MTs, it can be inferred that these two writer groups have different tendencies for different RVs. Undergraduate students, as novice learners of academic discourse, are inclined to use more *Finding verbs* to express their neutral stance toward the reported research, avoiding explicit judgment on previous research and their research processes. In contrast, master's students, as novice researchers, prefer employing *Procedure verbs* to refer to the procedural aspects of previous researchers' investigations, emphasizing their concrete objective research procedures.

4.3. Evaluative Categories

Regarding the evaluative functions of RVs, *factive RVs*, which accounted for 27.3% of the total RVs identified in the BT Literature Review Chapters, were found to prevail. This finding accords with the study by Loan and Pramoolsook (2015) who attributed the prominent use of *factive RVs*. It revealed that these Chinese English-major undergraduate students tended to take an explicit stance toward the cited sources through their preference of *factive RVs* in both describing the findings and supporting their own arguments by attributing a high degree of confidence to the proposition by the original author. In Examples 11-12, undergraduate students tended to employ *factive RVs* such as "*demonstrate*" and "*emphasize*" to show their positive attitude toward prior cited research, signal their acceptance of them, and directly bolster their own views on the reported claims.

(11) Tian (2003) *demonstrated* the necessity and effectiveness of metacognitive strategies to improve listening skills based on empirical evidence. (BT17) (Research Act Finding Factive).

(12) Gao (2013), a scholar of Jilin Normal University, *emphasized* that language is the tool first, then the culture. (MT04) (Discourse Act Assurance Factive).

In 30 MT Literature Review Chapters, the master's students were far more likely to use *non-factive RVs* to report the work of others, with 28.7% of all RVs in the corpus. This finding is consistent with those of previous studies (Hyland, 2002; Jalilifar, 2012) in which *non-factive RVs* were found to prevail. As shown in Examples 13-14 below, RVs "*reveal*" and "*state*" were employed to report the previous message neutrally, giving no clear signal to express their stance toward the reported message. It can be concluded that their preference for *non-factive-RVs* helped Chinese English-major master's students neutrally comment on the cited sources and inform the readers of the writers' positions to the reported information, providing an acknowledgment of prior research without appearing to corrupt it with personal judgment.

(13) Pajares, Johnson, and Usher (2007) *revealed* that writing apprehension had relationship with student self-efficacy beliefs by analyzing the self-efficacy beliefs of elementary, middle and high school students. (MT18) (Research Act Finding Non-factive).

(14) Bandura (1991) *states* that self-efficacy refers to learner's confidence in their abilities of achieving their learning targets. (MT22) (Discourse Act Assurance Non-factive).

Finally, both Chinese English-majored undergraduate students and master's students avoided explicit rebuttal or confrontation with previous researchers through the avoidance of *critical RVs* (in *Cognition Acts* and *Discourse Acts*), their rebuttal of employing *counter-factive RVs* (in *Research Acts*), and few instances of *counter RVs* (in *Discourse Acts*). Hyland (2002) states that explicit rebuttal of other researchers is "a serious face-threatening act in academic writing, and such violation of interpersonal conventions is likely to expose the writer to retaliation or the disapproval of publishing gatekeepers" (p. 128). In this study, the result showed that only one instance of RVs (0.2%) was found in the BT Literature Reviews. As exemplified in Example 15 below, the *Discourse Act Counter RV* (*oppose*) was employed to express the original author's objection to the topic (teacher as the center) and then to support the writer's view on the reported topic (child-centered teaching model).

(15) Dewey, an American child psychologist and educator, first came up with a child-centered idea... Dewey strongly *opposes* the teacher as the center. (BT03) (Discourse Act Counter).

In addition, only six instances of negative RVs (0.3%) such as "*criticize*", "*rebut*", and "*refute*", were found in the MT Literature Reviews as illustrated in Examples 16-18. It is noteworthy that students' preference for this category of negative RVs was to attribute the position of responsibility for the evaluation to the cited author's objections to the correctness of the reported information instead of taking responsibility for the evaluation.

(16) Nuttall (2002) *criticizes* such phenomenon that most teachers always resort to the traditional grammar-based teaching method to teach students. (MT12) (Discourse Act Counter).

(17) Truscott (1996) *rebutted* that the truth is that there are some longitudinal studies and their findings are also in line with his conclusion. (MT08) (Discourse Act Counter).

(18) Schmidt (1983) *refutes* Krashen's comprehensible input by the research on... (MT26) (Discourse Act Counter).

In general, both Chinese English-majored undergraduate students and master's students realized the importance of using RVs to report previous works in their thesis writing, which indicated the writers' understanding of the previous works, made them as member of that disciplinary community, and helped them promote their works. Concerning the similarities and differences in the use of RVs in BT and MT Literature Reviews, it reflects the following points.

Firstly, the different tendencies to RVs may be due to the different roles they play in the academic community. In the Chinese context, BTs are regarded as the first piece of disciplined writing, and they are also students' first writing attempt into a field. Undergraduate students, therefore, are regarded as novice learners of academic discourse. In contrast, master's students have completed an undergraduate study and undertake further study at a more advanced level in order to raise their academic level of learning and specialized knowledge, so they are regarded as novice researchers. Therefore, the findings show that these two writer groups have different preferences for different RVs when reporting the work of other researchers, which shed some light on their different features of using RVs in the two texts of the same genre. Moreover, the findings indicate that master's students have a better mastery in the use of RVs than that of the undergraduate students and have a greater tendency to establish strong support for their claims and make their research more persuasive within the text by employing appropriate and effective RVs to report the work of others and use them in the cumulative construction of knowledge.

Secondly, the way that RVs are manifested in the two texts might reflect the context in which RVs are used by these two writer groups. One of the determining elements of this context is audience. In the Chinese context, undergraduate students write the BTs to convince the thesis defense committee that they are qualified to obtain

their academic degrees, so their potential audience includes their supervisors and thesis committee members. When it comes to MTs, in addition to the thesis committee members, in most universities in China, master's students' MTs will be uploaded to CNKI where they address a wider research community and face a variety of audiences at home and even abroad. Therefore, to a certain degree, master's students have a greater awareness of employing RVs than undergraduate students do, so they need to construct factual reliability of their own claims by reporting the work of other researchers, and at the same time express their own views toward the reported message to show they are prepared to stand behind their words.

Finally, as argued by Jalilifar and Dabbi (2012) the size of the discourse community writers address determines the way they shape their intentions. Undergraduate students address a small discourse community compared to master's students who address a greater and more diverse discourse community. To some extent, master's students are required to meet a higher degree of conformity to academic forms with more expectations than undergraduate students are. Therefore, these two writer groups exhibit differences in their overall use of RVs, their preferences for particular categories, and in the frequencies of individual verb forms they employed.

The present study has thus suggested that identifying rhetorical similarities and differences in RV practices in BT and MT Literature Reviews mark the underlying rationale for choosing different RVs to create a maximum effect and suits the writers' different citations in BT and MT writing contexts.

5. CONCLUSION

The present study has explored the similarities and differences in the use of RVs in the Literature Review Chapters between BTs and MTs composed by Chinese English majors by employing Hyland's (2002) classification framework. The findings reveal a general picture of the two writer groups' different preferences in the use of RVs in BTs and MTs, two texts of the same genre but represent different levels of education. Based on the findings, the following conclusions could be drawn from this study. Firstly, regarding the overall features, the use of RVs by undergraduate students is smaller in amount and narrower in range when compared with those used by master's students. Secondly, in terms of denotative functions of RVs, the *Discourse Act RVs* were the most prominent, followed by *Research Act RVs* and *Cognition Act RVs* in the BT Literature Reviews, while the *Research Act RVs* recorded the highest occurrence in the MT Literature Reviews, followed by *Discourse Act RVs* and *Cognition Act RVs*. Furthermore, regarding the sub-categories of *Research Act RVs*, undergraduate students tended to give greater prominence to *Finding verbs* while master's students preferred using *Procedure verbs*. Thirdly, in terms of evaluative functions of RVs, *factive RVs* were found to prevail in the BT Literature Reviews while non-*factive RVs* were the most prominent in the MT Literature Reviews. However, both undergraduate students and master's students avoided employing negative RVs such as *critical* and *counter-factive RVs* to refute or criticize previous research.

The findings of the present study, to a certain extent, can lend useful guidance to thesis writers and teachers in the Chinese context or similar EFL contexts. Firstly, this study can enhance thesis writers' understanding of what lies behind the RV choices and equip them with the increased knowledge on the importance of RVs in academic writing. Furthermore, these writers can become familiar with the lexical features and rhetorical functions of RVs and then raise their awareness of using RVs appropriately and effectively throughout the whole process of academic writing as accurate and appropriate use of RVs is a cost-effective way to increase their writing credibility among discourse community members. Secondly, the similarities and differences identified in RV practices in BTs and MTs shed some light on the features of how RVs are used by Chinese English-majored undergraduate students and master's students. Meanwhile, it provides undergraduate students with a broad view of how RVs are employed by those more advanced students, and they can recognize the gap between them and write to confirm to more standardized writing mode and specification. Finally, this study could also benefit teachers who are teaching or supervising students' thesis writing since studying the use of a particular language in a natural setting can lead to a reliable resource for instruction tools.

With the increasing attention to RVs, teachers might realize that explicit instruction on the accurate and appropriate use of RVs should be introduced into the classroom, and emphasis should be placed on teaching the usage of RVs that have various functions and rhetorical effects on academic writing. In addition, a better understanding of the similarities and differences in using RVs can help teachers find out the problems or difficulties students have, adjust their ways of BT or MT instruction, and provide effective guidance and supervision on their thesis teaching.

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