

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RHETORICAL FUNCTIONS OF CITATION IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS RESEARCH ARTICLES

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### Abstract

Citation as one of the distinguishing features of scholarly papers or academic writing can be considered a central issue in English for academic purposes. Given the fundamental role of citation in academic writing and the widespread recognition of academic writing generally and citation specifically as situated literacy practices (Bazerman, 1988; Hyland, 2013; Taylor & Chen, 1991), this study intends to focus on the comparative study of well-rated Applied linguistics research articles across English and Persian discourse communities to find out the probable similarities and differences regarding their citation functions.

To this aim, 60 research articles were examined based on Petric (2007) and Thompson and Tribble (2001) frameworks. The findings showed that Persian research articles unlike the English ones tend to use integral more than non-integral citations according to Thompson and Tribble's (2001) framework, indicating that they emphasize the writers rather than information. The Analysis of citations based on Petric's (2007) framework demonstrates that the use of citation for non-attribution functions is found to be considerably lower in Persian research articles than in English articles, both in the whole articles and in individual sections. The Data also reveal that there is a relationship between articles' sections and type of citations use. As a final point, the study argues that functions of citations should receive more attention in ELT courses in order to raise the awareness of researchers and avoid the practice of plagiarism.

**Keywords:** Citation, Rhetorical function, applied linguistics

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Citation can be considered a central issue in academic writing. Smith (1981) believes that "a citation implies a relationship between a part or the whole of the cited document and a part or the whole of the citing document" (p. 83). All researchers need to know how to cite the prior publications or authors in their work, because "researcher writers do not want only to show their own credibility in research" (Jalilifar & Dabbi, 2012, p. 91). Citation as one of the central features of academic writing draws the attention of not only EAP scholars but also sociologists of science and information scientists (Thompson, 2001, 2005; Petric, 2007).

Though there are several frameworks introduced for citation functions, many novice researchers are not aware of such crucial areas simply because there isn't any particular course for teaching citation. Thompson and Tribble (2001) state that we should sensitize students regarding the choices that are available to them when they decide to refer to other texts. A number of studies have been conducted in terms of citation and related areas (Sweals, 1986; Hyland, 2000; Belcher, 1994; Hyland, 2002; Thompson, 2005; Petric, 2007; Jalilifar & Dabbi, 2012; Ange'lil-Carter, 2000; Pecorari, 2002, 2003, 2006; Borg, 2000; Groom, 2000, just to name a few among others) with the intention to highlight the crucial role of this practice in the realm of

research article writing. With regard to the above argument on the fundamental role of citation in academic writing, the present research focuses on the comparative study of applied linguistics research articles across English and Persian discourse communities. It is intended to study different sections of research articles in terms of patterns of citation functions in Iranian and English well-rated journals to find out the probable similarities and differences regarding their functions. A two-way distinction is drawn between research articles written in English by non-Iranian writers selected from the English Journals published in English-speaking countries, and articles in Persian by Iranian writers selected from well-rated journals in Iran. Such a distinction has been found useful in producing more specific results on any similarities or discrepancies between the two writer groups (Mauranen, 1993). Moreover, the relationship of each section and citation types will be also divulged. Studying all the sections of an article give us the advantage of comparing the types of citation functions employed in each section of a research paper. Such an inspection would help to discover the overall pattern of citation practice throughout the body of a research article at national and international level. The results of the present study can guide researchers into the correct path, and make them be aware of the complexity of citation functions in order to use them accurately. The correct use of citation leads them to be “against literacy piracy” (Jalilifar & Dabbi, 2012, p. 91).

The study therefore addressed the following research questions:

Q1: Is there any significant difference between Persian and English Applied linguistics well-rated research articles in terms of rhetorical functions of citation?

Q2: What types of rhetorical functions of citation are used more often in Persian and English Applied linguistics well-rated research articles?

Q3: Is there any significant difference between frequencies of rhetorical functions of citation use and articles sections in Persian and English Applied linguistics well-rated research articles?

## 1.1 Citation Frameworks

The present study used two main frameworks, which were proposed by Thompson and Tribble (2001) and Petric (2007).

### 1.1.1 Thompson and Tripple's (2001) Frameworks

Thompson (2001, 2005) divided integral and non-integral citations into sub-types:

#### *Non-integral Citation*

In a non-integral reference, the author's name appears outside the structure of the sentences.

The following subsections comprise the non-integral citation:

- a) Source: it indicates where the idea or information is taken from.
- b) Identification: it identifies an agent, or an actor within the sentence it refers to.
- c) Reference: it is usually shown by the word “see”, referring to work containing further information.
- d) Origin: the originator of the product, method, or concept is cited according to this kind of citation.

#### *Integral Citations*

An integral reference includes the author's name in the structure of your own text and the year is between the parentheses. The following subsections comprise the integral citation:

- a) Verb Controlling: the citation controls a verb.
- b) Naming: citation is included in noun phrase or a part of it.
- c) Non-citation: the reference is cited in this type without the following data particularly the year.

### 1.1.2 Petric's (2007) Framework

Petric's (2007) framework consists of nine rhetorical functions:

- a) Attribution: it is used to attribute information or activity to an author.
- b) Exemplification: The information always precede or follow the citation by the terms 'for example, or 'such as', or 'e.g.'

- c) Further reference: it occurs in parentheses or a footnote and preceded by the word 'see'.
- d) Statement of use: it is used to state what works are used in the research and for what purposes.
- e) Application: it makes connections between the cited and the writer's work in order to use the arguments, concepts, terminology or procedures from the cited work for the writer's own purposes.
- f) Evaluation: it evaluates the works of other authors.
- g) Establishing links between sources: it points to link between or among different sources used.
- h) Comparison of one's own findings or interpretation with other sources: it shows the similarities and differences between the writer's own work and the works of other authors.
- i) Other: it is used when the relation between the citing and cited document is not obvious.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Corpus

To address the research questions a corpus of 60 articles comprising two parallel subcorpora was constructed: applied linguistic research articles written in Persian (PAL), applied linguistics research articles written in English (EAL). The same numbers of research articles were selected in order to have a more objective outlook. As Jalilifar and Dabbi (2010) asserted that generic and rhetorical structures are subject to variation across time, then the present study selected those articles which were published between 2010 and 2014.

### 2.2 Procedure

Two theoretical frameworks were adopted in this study. Thompson and Tribble's (2001) framework was used to analyze and compare the materials in terms of integral and non-integral citations. The main categories which Thompson and Tribble (2001) set are as follows: a) integral citation consisting of three sub-classes; b) non-integral citation consisting of four sub-categories. The second framework used in this study was driven from Peric (2007) who proposed 8 rhetorical functions identified as attribution, exemplification, further reference, statement of use, application, evaluation, establishing links between sources, and comparison of one's own work with that of other authors.

### 2.3 Data analysis

The first step in the analysis of citation functions was to run a word count to determine the length of the corpus. Afterwards, the identified data based on Thompson and Tribble (2001) and Peric's (2007) frameworks were classified according to the citation functions. The number and types of citation used in each part of the articles were counted as well. The analysis also included textual elements outside the main text, such as epigraphs and explanatory footnotes. The frameworks that were used in the study were both functional, allowing us to look at the contextual nature of citations, and formal, helping us to analyze the syntactic position of citations within the clause. Thus, the present study provided analyses at both quantitative and qualitative levels. To ensure the objectivity of the analysis, the preliminary analysis on ten research articles in applied linguistics (five from each language) were carried out by two coders. The initial analyses were then discussed until full agreement was reached on the classification of the categories.

## 3. RESULTS

### Word Count

The first step taken in the analysis of citation types in different sections of applied linguistics research articles was to run a word count to determine the length of the corpus. A total of 1263 citations were identified in 161508 words of Persian applied linguistics research articles and 1716 citations were identified in 195518 words of English applied linguistics research articles.

Table 1. Citations in Persian applied linguistics research articles

	Av.per work	Per 1000 words	Total
Persian articles	42.1	7.82	1263

Table 2. Citations in English applied linguistics research articles

	Av.per work	Per 1000 words	Total
English articles	57.2	8.77	1716

Table 1 and 2 indicate the importance of citations in academic writing, with an average of almost 42.1 in each Persian applied linguistics research article and 57.2 in each English applied linguistics research article.

### *Persian Applied Linguistics Research Articles*

Different types of citations are used in different sections of research articles. Table 3 demonstrates the variation in the ways Persian researchers refer to Citation. As can be seen in Table 3, the information in "introduction" part is cited more frequently than the other parts (43%).

Table 3 shows that there is, then, variation in the density and type of citations used in different rhetorical sections of an article. It is noted that most researchers seldom use citation in abstract section of the article.

Table 3. The Number and Percentage of Citations in Different Sections of Persian applied linguistics research articles

Article Sections	Number	Percentage
Abstract	7	1%
Introduction	540	43%
Literature review	250	20%
Methodology	160	12%
Result	49	4%
Discussion	220	17%
Conclusion	37	3%

Percentages of different functions of citations (see Table 4) show that among Persian applied linguistics research articles, the most common rhetorical function of citations is attribution. Attribution can therefore be considered "an unmarked citation function since it is the most common and rhetorically the simplest one" (Petric, 2007, p. 247). Data in Table 4 also shows that the percentage of attribution citations is considerably higher than other more complex rhetorical citation functions which require more analytical skills to be used.

Table 4. The Number and Percentage of Citations Types in Persian Applied Linguistics Research Articles According to Petric's (2007) Framework

Type of citation	Number	Percentage
Attribution	729	58%
Exemplification	53	4 %
Further reference	21	2%
Statement of use	40	3%
Application	83	7%
Evaluation	5	0%
Establishing link	265	20%
Comparison	67	5%
Other	0	0%
Total	1263	100%

"Establishing link between sources" is the second most popular citation function in Persian researchers, and "application" takes the third position.

Table 5. The Number and Percentage of Integral Citations in Persian Applied Linguistics Research Articles According to Thompson and Tribble's Framework (2001)

Integral	Number	Percentage
Verb controlling	371	51%
Naming	356	48%
Non-citation	6	1%
Total	733	100%

A total of 733 citations were identified as integral citation in Persian applied linguistics research articles and 530 as non-integral citations. The sums of these two types of citations are 1263 which is equal to the sums of citation counted in Petric's (2007) framework. Table 5 illustrates that both "verb controlling" and "naming" are welcomed by Persian researchers while "non-citation" ones are somewhat ignored by them.

Within non-integral citations (Table 6), greater emphasis was given to "source" citation by Iranian researchers.

Table 6. The Number and Percentage of Non-integral Citations in Persian Applied Linguistics Research Articles According to Thompson and Tribble's Framework (2001)

Non-integral	Number	Percentage
Source	360	68%
Identification	115	22%
Reference	23	4%
Origin	31	6%
Total	530	100%

As shown in Table 6., the "identification" type occurs second in rank of the most frequent citations used in Persian applied linguistics research articles.

#### *English Applied Linguistics Research Articles*

As Table 7 shows, low use of citation in the "abstract" and "result" sections of the articles, and a markedly high use of citations in "introduction", "literature review" and "methodology" section can be seen.

Table 7. The Number and Percentage of Citations in Different Sections of English Applied Linguistics Research Articles

Article Sections	Number	Percentage
Abstract	3	0%
Introduction	785	46%
Literature review	345	20%
Methodology	250	15%
Result	67	3%
Discussion	144	9%
Conclusion	122	7%
Total	1716	100%

Close analysis of the different citations functions based on Petric's (2007) framework in the English applied linguistics research articles reveals interesting similarities in the use of citation functions between the English

and Persian groups. The use of “attribution” function is much more frequent than the other functions. The second rank is given to “establishing link between the sources”, and “application” goes into the third rank.

Table 8. The Number and Percentage of Citation Types in English Applied Linguistics Research Articles According to Petric's (2007) Framework

Type of citation	Number	Percentage
Attribution	770	45 %
Exemplification	101	6%
Further reference	72	4%
Statement of use	78	4%
Application	123	7%
Evaluation	62	4%
Establishing link	387	23%
Comparison	113	6%
Other	10	1%
Total	1716	100%

The difference between the “exemplification” and “comparison of one's own finding or interpretation with other sources” is not much. The “statement of use”, “further reference”, and “evaluation” with percentage of below 5 were among the less frequently used functions.

Table 9 demonstrates that “naming” is much more commonly used in integral citation functions in English applied linguistics research articles. “Verb controlling” takes the second rank and enjoys more popularity comparing to “non-citation” function.

Table 9. The Number and Percentage of Integral Citations in English Applied Linguistics Research Articles According to Thompson and Tribble's Framework (2001)

Integral	Number	Percentage
Verb controlling	274	42%
Naming	317	48%
Non-citation	67	10%
Total	658	100%

Table 10. shows that non-integral citation was mostly realized by English researchers in the form of “source” function. “Identification” with 33 percent holds the second rank. “Reference” and “origin” stand in third and fourth ranks though their occurrences were much less.

Table 10. The Number and Percentage of Non-Integral Citations in English Applied Linguistics Research Articles According to Thompson and Tribble's Framework (2001)

Non-integral	Number	Percentage
Source	582	56%
Identification	353	33%
Reference	84	8%
Origin	39	3%
Total	1058	100%

Findings show that “reference” and “origin” are used less often than “source” and “identification” among the non-integral citations in English applied linguistics research articles.

### 3.1.1 Comparison of Persian and English Citation Types

Table 11. The Percentage of Citation Types in Persian Applied Linguistics Research Articles Sections According to Petric's (2007) Framework

	Abstract	Introduction	Literature	Methodology	Result	Discussion	Conclusion
Attribution	86%	61%	78%	42%	41%	50%	54%
Exemplification	0%	6%	5%	1%	2%	~0%	0%
F. Reference	0%	1%	~0%	2.5%	4%	~0%	0%
S. of Use	0%	0%	~0%	24.5%	2%	~0%	0%
Application	14%	4%	3%	14%	14%	6%	16%
Evaluation	0%	~0%	~0%	0	2%	0%	0%
Linking	0%	27%	13%	16%	16%	24%	22%
Comparison	0%	1%	1%	0	19%	20%	8%
Other	0%	~0%	0%	0	0	0%	0%
Total (number)	7	540	250	160	49	220	37

Table 12. The Number and Percentage of Citation Types in English Applied Linguistics Research Articles Sections According to Petric's (2007) Framework

	Abstract	Introduction	Literature	Methodology	Result	Discussion	Conclusion
Attribution	33%	49%	51%	23%	52%	41%	32%
Exemplification	0%	6%	5%	3%	8%	5%	19%
F. Reference	0%	4%	2%	10%	0%	2%	3%
S. of Use	67%	1%	0%	24%	8%	1%	0%
Application	0%	6%	6%	15%	15%	7%	6%
Evaluation	0%	3%	3%	1%	0	8%	7%
Linking	0%	27%	30%	18%	7%	15%	14%
Comparison	0%	4%	3%	6%	7%	21%	15%
Other	0%	~0%	~0%	0%	3%	0%	4%
Total (number)	3	785	345	250	67	164	124

As Table 11 and 12 shows, both English and Persian applied linguistics researchers do not tend to use citations in the abstract section and if they are going to use any kinds of citations, Persian researchers prefer attribution. In the Introduction section, Both Persian and English researchers give greater prominence to “Attribution” and “establishing links between sources” functions. In the “literature review” section, again, the “attribution” and “establishing links between sources” are the most commonly used functions though Persian researchers used “establishing links between sources” much less than English ones. Within the “methodology” section, after “attribution”, which occupies the first rank in all sections, greater emphasis can be given to “statement of use” and “application” functions in both groups. While these two functions were rarely used in previous sections, it seems that the moves of “methodology” section, made the researchers to use some other functions than “attribution”. It is worth mentioning that “Comparison of one's work with that of others” is used in English articles much more than Iranian ones. In the “result” section both groups tend to use “attribution”, “application”, “comparison of one's work with that of others”, and “establishing links between sources”. However, the use of “comparison of one's work with that of others”, and “establishing links between sources” increased in “Discussion” section comparing to the “result” section. In the “Conclusion”

section, Persian researchers preferred the “attribution” as their main function, While English researchers used “comparison of one's work with that of others”, and “establishing links between sources” along with “attribution”, which seem can better fulfill the moves of “Discussion” section. Moreover, English researchers tend to use more citation than the Persian ones in this section. Persian researchers used 37 citations in this section while the English ones used 124 citations.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The comparison of the rhetorical citation functions revealed that English researchers tended to use citations more than Persian researchers. One justification might be related to different length of the analyzed texts. The number of words used in Persian research articles was less than the English ones. As Thompson and Thribble (2001) stated shorter texts presumably need a more condensed style of writing” (p. 93). The most common rhetorical function of citations found based on Petric's (2007) framework is “attribution”. As the definition of “attribution” implies, the only job of the writers is attributing the information to authors. So, it is not a great burden on the shoulders and researchers in both communities prefer to use this simple function widely.

The complexity of purposes in the literature review serves a variety of complex purposes proposed by Ridley (2000) and Swales and Lindemann (2002), including “justification of the focus of the research and the choice of the theoretical framework, operationalization of major concepts and establishment of the grounds for the analysis that follows” (as cited in Petric, 2007). This complexity of purposes entails the use of a variety of rhetorical functions of citations in these two sections. The findings show that English researchers evaluate the works of others more freely than Iranian ones. Iranian researchers tend to report previous research rather than evaluate it. Taylor and Chen (1991) also reported that the absence of evaluation of previous research can be attributed to the unacceptability of argumentative styles and self-promotion in the cultures considered. The descriptive rather than argumentative nature of Iranian journal writers may stem from the lack of competitive publishing environment and avoidance of self-promotion in the Iranian culture. (Kamahi, Ghonsooly, & Mahdavi, 2014). The frequency of citations in introduction and literature review sections of articles showed that though “attribution” still stands the first rank of functions in both groups, English researchers made use of “establish links among sources much more than Persian researchers especially in the “literature review” section. English researchers used this function to refer to the works of others and their relevance to the writer's own research article. This strategy will change “literature review” section from a selection of studies summarized and presented without much elaboration on the links to a collection of information which bridges the works of others and their relevance and importance to the researchers own study. In the “Conclusion” section, Persian researchers preferred the “attribution” as their main function, while English researchers used “comparison of one's work with that of others”, and “establishing links between sources” along with “attribution”, which basically help the readers how a piece of research relates to other previous works and how much they are in line or different from the previous literature. Focusing on “attribution” function and ignoring the other functions which can better fulfill the moves of “Discussion” section is not desirable. Persian researchers use the non-integral “source” citations and integral “naming” and “verb controlling” much more frequently, while English writers made far greater use of integral “naming” citations and non-integral “source” citations. Charles (2006) believes that “the choice of integral and non-integral citation is a complex product of a number of factors including citation convention, genre, discipline and individual study type” (p. 317). Iranian researchers' less use of non-integral citation showed that they usually emphasize the authors in their writing rather than the information, leading the researcher of the present study to conclude that they “focus upon linguistic and grammatical features of theses and ignore functional characteristics” (Jalilifar & Dabbi, 2012, p. 101). On the contrary, the greater tendency of English researchers to use non-integral citation indicated that the center of their attention is on the information. The preference for a special type of citation (i.e. integral) is in accordance with the findings of Jalilifar and Dabbi (2012) which revealed the familiarity of researchers with formal features of citation, for instance understanding the grammatical points and knowing how to put the author in the subject position and unfamiliarity with the “functional” feature of citation.

The proportions of “comparison of one's work with that of others” function in the “conclusion” sections is obviously higher in the English group comparing to its equivalent. This might be reasoned as English researchers' eagerness to challenging and struggling with the findings of other authors, while Iranian researchers are satisfied with their own findings and not willing to take up the challenge.

The result of the present research can guide novice researchers and help with awareness raising to get the grasp of the complexity of citation functions for more accurate usage. “To understand the importance of citation in the academic setting it would be enough to say that citation, if used properly, would be against

literacy piracy” (Jalilifar & Dabbi, 2012, p. 91). Apart from the very important role of being aware of citations rhetorical functions, Petric (2007) clearly stated that it does not mean that “effective citation strategies can compensate for the lack of knowledge or analytic ability” (p. 251). She continues “effective use of citation may help highlight the knowledge and abilities highly valued by thesis graders and may thus contribute to students’ academic success” (p. 251).

Appropriate citation use can be considered as an important strategy to avoid plagiarism. The results of present study can be helpful for ELT teachers, researchers, and students. The typology of rhetorical functions outlined in the study can be used for developing classroom activities, such as exercises where students are given clear examples of different rhetorical functions of citation and asked to match them with the corresponding function, or text analysis tasks where students discuss the writer’s intentions behind citation use (Petric, 2007). The present study can provide the necessary information teachers might need regarding citation and can enable teachers to provide recommendations for their students who can in turn improve their writing skill.

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