

Articles

Stance-taking: reporting verbs in citations in EFL undergraduate theses

Tomada de postura: relatando verbos em citações em teses de graduação em inglês

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ABSTRACT

L2 writers tend to have difficulties in using reporting verbs (Bloch, 2010) because the choosing of reporting verb needs some considerations: the stance of the author whose claims are being reported, the stance of the writer, and the interpretation of the writer (Thompson and Ye, 1991). This article explores stance-taking in reporting verbs in the context of citations in undergraduate theses written by Mexican students in English as a Foreign Language. The corpus consists of thirty undergraduate theses written by non-native speakers of English in the field of English Language Teaching. I use corpus linguistics tools, i.e., concordances for the analysis of stance-taking which makes the expressions observable in their context. The findings show that undergraduates use reporting verbs to express their stance in their theses and that this varies depending on the chapter. This paper suggests a category of reporting verbs that is commonly used in EFL academic writing within the ELT discipline. I propose some educational implications, stressing the need to make students and their instructors aware that the choice of reporting verbs is not just a matter of stylistic choice, but it can be an expression of authorial identity.

Keywords: *EFL writing; reporting verbs; stance; undergraduate thesis.*

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RESUMO

Os escritores L2 tendem a ter dificuldades em usar verbos de relato (Bloch, 2010) porque a escolha do verbo de relato requer algumas considerações: a postura do autor cujas afirmações estão sendo relatadas, a postura do escritor e a interpretação do escritor (Thompson e Ye, 1991). Este artigo explora a tomada de posição ao relatar verbos no contexto de citações em teses de graduação escritas por estudantes mexicanos em inglês como língua estrangeira. O corpus consiste em trinta teses de graduação escritas por falantes não nativos de inglês na área de ensino da língua inglesa. Eu uso ferramentas linguísticas de corpus, ou seja, concordâncias para a análise da tomada de posição que torna as expressões observáveis em seu contexto. Os resultados mostram que os alunos de graduação usam verbos de relato para expressar sua postura em suas teses e que isso varia de acordo com o capítulo. Este artigo sugere uma categoria de verbos de relatório que é comumente usada na redação acadêmica de EFL dentro da disciplina de ELT. Proponho algumas implicações educacionais, ressaltando a necessidade de conscientizar os alunos e seus instrutores de que a escolha dos verbos de relato não é apenas uma questão de escolha estilística, mas pode ser uma expressão de identidade autoral.

Palavras-chave: Redação EFL; relato de verbos; postura; tese de graduação.

1. Introduction

The undergraduate thesis is usually the first formal piece of academic writing research that a student faces because that might determine the obtainment of their degree. In thesis writing, writers are expected to show knowledge of the domain of academic discourse, genre, their field, and research skills (Read, et al. 2001; Bartholomae, 1985). Stapleton (2002) and Helms-Park and Stapleton (2003) argue that the integration of voice in the L2 classroom has been overstated and present criticism that undergraduates fail to express their individualised voice in their academic papers. Academic writing practices still demand that writers express their voice in their academic disciplinary community and show their position towards their topic, i.e. take a stance.

There are several linguistic manifestations for the writer to show their stance, e.g. attitude markers, hedges, boosters, evaluative

adjectives, modals and reporting verbs, among others (Biber, et al., 1999; Biber, 2006; Conrad and Biber, 1999; Charles, 2009). In academic writing, where the writer has to express their stance in relation to theory, reporting verbs are the key to analyse how they engage and express their stance in their field. That is, writers use citing to position themselves in their disciplinary community. The linguistic choices they make regarding the verbs they choose to report citations carry evaluative elements and, within these, the expression of their stance. For example, when the writer uses *observe* instead of *believe*, he/she is making a difference in the stance he/she takes, i.e. in *observe* he/she just notes something is happening, whereas with *believe* there is an evaluation process of what is being reported and the author him/herself believes the claim being reported. Thus, the writer's stance is reflected in the selection of the reporting verb.

Reporting previous literature is usually referred to as citing. Citing as we know nowadays is also an indicator to measure scholars' reputation in academia (Swales and Leeder, 2012). Literature has, however, also evidenced some common problems when citing is not properly done especially by students who are non-native speakers of English. Some of these problems are, for example, not knowing the conventions of how to cite and therefore accused of plagiarism (Howard, 1995; Pecorari, 2010; 2015), lacking of evaluation by doing excessive quoting or attributing fully authority to the sources themselves to the point of having "a collection of others' views" (McCulloch, 2012: 57), failing to engage in their text and express themselves in a more rhetorical and persuasive way (Hyland, 2001; 2004), and therefore, failing to claim their stance.

This article explores how undergraduates show their stance-taking in their theses written in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) by looking at reporting verbs in a corpus of theses. I argue that undergraduates use reporting verbs in an interesting way to express their stance, and therefore, I centre my attention in how they claim such stance. My study also investigates whether the use of reporting verbs varies from chapter to chapter in undergraduate theses. I use corpus linguistics tools, i.e. concordances and plots, across the whole corpus and discourse analysis in context. Reporting verbs imply a very broad category, but I focus on a narrower set of these verbs in the context of citations.

2. On Reporting Verbs

My understanding of reporting verbs in this study concerns the linguistic items that writers use to report others' ideas, while positioning themselves in relation to previous literature. Reporting previous literature is usually referred to as citing. Swales (2014:119) alludes to citing as a clear indicator that a text is academic and through citations the writer "can establish membership" of the disciplinary community. In early studies on reporting verbs, Thompson and Ye (1991:365) explicitly refer to them as "a specific subset of lexical items (...) used in citations" and whose "reporting status depends on the context of use" (1991: 379). Their function allows the writer to report other authors' ideas (Thomas and Hawes, 1994). While doing so, the writer should integrate their own arguments with the literature. In this way, the writer can better engage his/her audience in their research and start establishing themselves in their discipline. In this light, Thompson and Ye (1991) suggest that the writer's stance can be analysed in two ways, a) the stance of the authors whose claims are being reported, and b) the stance of the writer, i.e. the interpretation the writer gives to the literature. Choosing appropriate verbs to report the writer's own claims and the claims of other authors is an important part of establishing the credibility of such claims, and it has often been a means of taking a rhetorical stance towards a claim (Charles, 2006; Bloch, 2010). The author's stance can be analysed on two levels: first, the way he/she explicitly claims his/her own position; and second, the way in which the writer reports and evaluates others' claims.

Thompson and Ye (1991) focus their study on verbs used in citations in academic papers. They suggest reporting verb categories based on the denotation and evaluative potential of verbs. They show that reporting verbs express evaluations in three ways: a) the stance of the author (the reported/ cited one), b) the stance of the writer (the reporting/ citing one), and c) the interpretation of the writer (the report itself). For example, using the verb *repeat* indicates that the information appears more than once in the text; however, if the writer uses the verb *reiterate*, he/she acknowledges the author's repetition of information, and emphasis of it; this way of choosing a reporting verb exemplifies the third way of evaluating a claim, the interpretation of the writer.

Thompson and Ye clearly describe and explain these categories; however, they warn that they do not constitute a clear-cut division for classifying reporting verbs as some of them might overlap, functioning as authors' acts as well as writers' ones. Thus, I refer to their main distinction of author's and writer's stance to differentiate when undergraduates report others' claims (citing), and who is taking the stance in a reporting verb. I keep my focus on writer acts, as they will reveal how undergraduates claim their authorial stance by using reporting verbs.

The selection of appropriate verbs to convey the desired message might be, however, a challenge for writers when they are writing in English as an L2 (Cadman, 1997; Thomson, 2000; Fløttum et al. 2006; Hyland, 2001), especially when reporting in academic discourse (Thompson and Ye, 1991; Jiang and Hu, 2010). The literature has pointed to a lack of vocabulary (i.e. reporting verbs), a lack of understanding of their function as rhetorical devices that can be used to express their stance towards citing sources (Hyland, 2005), the lack of instruction in how to use linguistic devices to express their stance (Hyland, 1999), and the pedagogical problems behind reporting (Bloch, 2010; Thompson, 2000) as some of the issues and challenges when using reporting verbs.

My study here follows the line of analysing reporting verbs in academic papers (Thompson, 1994, 1996; Hyland, 2001; Bloch, 2010), and especially reporting on theses (Charles, 2006; Thompson, 2000; Jiang and Hu, 2010). The focus of these studies ranges from disciplinary variation (Hyland, 2004) to the analysis of reporting structures (Charles, 2006) and reporting on citations (Thompson, 2000), and shedding more light on other reporting elements, e.g. impersonal constructions and passives. As discussed in previous research (Hyland, 2004; Charles, 2006), there are disciplinary variations from the hard sciences to the social sciences. The citation practices are thus influenced by the discipline as it is the literature the writers read and cite. In this study the undergraduate students are in the social human sciences and their practices might show a reflection of the discipline.

3. Methods

This article aims to explore how Mexican undergraduates express their stance specifically in their use of reporting verbs in citations in their theses. I use a discourse analysis corpus-assisted approach which allowed me to identify the reporting verbs and then analyse them in context. That is, the methodological tools are CL, specifically concordances and plots, and the discourse analysis was done by looking at their context, i.e. the use of concordances allowed me to look at the context, so I extracted the co-text and analyzed the function of the reporting verbs in context and how stance was taken or not. I now turn to describing the data and methodological procedures of collection and analysis.

The Corpus

The texts included in my corpus are undergraduate theses written by students in the languages department in a public university in central Mexico. Students are majoring in English Language Teaching (ELT), so they are a good sample because they receive their training in EFL and will become EFL teachers; the assumption is that they are aware of the use of reporting verbs as rhetorical devices. In this institution, the students write their thesis during the last two modules of their programme and receive credits for passing them, i.e. they should have a final draft of their thesis to pass the modules. There are 10 different instructors who teach the course, but students enrol in a class with only one of them which usually becomes the students' supervisor. Thus, the sample in my corpus comes from thesis led by different supervisors; this fact implies variety in terms of the required/ recommended writing style, research tradition and working supervision-schemes. Theses do not receive a mark; their function is to determine whether students should be awarded a degree when presenting at a thesis defence. All the theses in my corpus have been written by students approved at their defence. Table 1 presents a detailed description of the 30 theses.

Table 1 – Description of the 30-thesis corpus

Thesis	Student	Words	Qualitative/Quantitative	Supervisor
1	A1	20,126	Mixed	A
2	A2	13,749	Qualitative	A
3	A3	11,352	Quantitative	A
4	C1	9,721	Qualitative	B
5	C2	23,216	Mixed	D
6	C3	17,810	Quantitative	E
7	D1	11,611	Mixed	H
8	D2	19,502	Qualitative	G
9	D3	16,621	Qualitative	A
10	D4	10,719	Quantitative	F
11	E1	18,706	Mixed	A
12	E2	13,786	Qualitative	A
13	E3	13,332	Qualitative	H
14	G1	12,198	Quantitative	F
15	G2	16,132	Quantitative	F
16	H	23,812	Quantitative	A
17	I	18,488	Qualitative	B
18	J1	13,174	Quantitative	F
19	J2	11,218	Mixed	H
20	K	13,825	Quantitative	A
21	L	19,803	Qualitative	A
22	M1	15,723	Mixed	A
23	M2	19,796	Qualitative	A
24	N	13,178	Mixed	I
25	R1	11,986	Qualitative	A
26	R2	11,172	Mixed	A
27	S1	6,549	Quantitative	C
28	S2	14,252	Qualitative	A
29	T	14,049	Quantitative	A
30	Y	11,366	Quantitative	J
Total of words		446,972		

My sampling technique was via self-selection, i.e. an invitation was sent to several former students and those who wanted to participate responded to the email and signed a consent form. In the institution in which these theses were written, no word limits are specified in the requirements. This variability seems to be related to the type of research, e.g. qualitative studies tend to be longer than quantitative ones. The corpus was encoded systematically with mark-up and annotation. I only considered the following chapters of the theses: introduction, literature review, methodology, results/ discussion and conclusions. Paratext sections (acknowledgements, dedications, tables of contents,

references and appendices) were omitted (their word counts are not included in my corpus).

Some of the theses contain lengthy quotations in Spanish and/or indigenous languages (they were omitted to avoid false searches); these quotations are shown in quotation marks or in quotation form. The function is quoting literature as well as reporting results from interviews. Some words may be confused with English, e.g. the pronoun *me* functions equally in English and Spanish: ‘Give *me* the book’ vs ‘*Dame* el libro or *Me* das el libro’. The function may be the same in this case, but the person who utters it might not be the author of the thesis, but a participant in the study instead. Thus, all quotations in quotation marks were searched and tagged as <QUOTE> for an opening quotation mark and </QUOTE> for a closing one; block quotations were replaced by <BLOCK>. Inconsistencies in using straight or curly quotation marks, e.g. “meaning”, were also standardised. This procedure was also used to avoid generating false keywords and concordance lines in the data analysis.

Tables and figures were very common in most theses, and some also included some Spanish instances. Thus, they were bracketed off from the text to be analysed, since they include strings that would confuse the statistics generated by the corpus software. The symbol used to replace figures and tables is: * (x3), i.e. ***. This marking-up procedure was done to each of the 30 theses.

Special symbols were used when preparing the data for part-of-speech tagging using the CLAWS7 Tagset (Garside, 1987; Garside and Smith, 1997), so that such special elements would not be confused with ordinary English words, which would affect the reliability of automatic annotation. Once the texts were tagged, such symbols were then converted into XML markup for use with XML-aware concordance software, such as WordSmith Tools (Scott, 2010) and Antconc (Anthony, 2015).

All the sample theses included in the corpus have the same organizational structure, including introduction, literature review, methodology, results/discussion and conclusion. As I analysed variance in stance-taking in the chapters, I developed sub-corpora for each chapter. I identified the beginning and end of each chapter

and tagged them with the name of the chapter, e.g. for the opening <INTRODUCTION> and for the closing </INTRODUCTION>. The same was done for each of the chapters and theses. Table 2 shows the size of each sub-corpus based on individual chapters.

Table 2 – Corpus Size and Sub-corpora

Chapter	Number of Words
Introduction	44,329
Literature	217,810
Methodology	29,996
Results	108,989
Conclusions	45,848
<i>Overall</i>	446,972

The size of the chapter sub-corpora varies significantly from chapter to chapter. The literature review sub-corpus is the largest component and comprises nearly half of the overall corpus size. The introduction and conclusion chapters each make up 10 per cent of the total size, and the results/ discussion chapter represents 24 per cent of the whole corpus. The methodology chapter on its own contributes, surprisingly, to only 7 per cent to the corpus size.

Procedure: Data Analysis

My working definition of a reporting verb, as understood in this research, is the linguistic item a writer selects to report someone else's idea, while he/she claims his/her stance in relation to that idea and positions his/herself within the existing literature of their disciplinary community. To provide a list of the verbs used in these undergraduate theses in the discipline of ELT, I used Swales' (2014) and Brezina's (2012) pre-existing lists of reporting verbs, which were extracted from the discipline of Applied Linguistics (These lists are shown in the Appendix). I searched these two lists of reporting verbs in my corpus to finally provide a list of verbs characteristic of the research corpus. These lists and the list of verbs characteristic of my corpus of undergraduate theses are: *discuss, report, say, state, observe, believe,*

agree, disagree, suspect, assume, view, claim, define, mention, show and explain.

There are two stages of analysis. The first part is a concordances analysis to find the reporting verbs, and then a qualitative analysis of the concordances of each verb to see whether they function as reporting verbs in this instance. I used Antconc to carry out searches for verbs. I used an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. Each line was labelled according to the verb used. I analysed examples of each reporting verb to see the kinds of stance-taking done in these instances: research, cognition and discourse acts. In this case, the concordance search specifically targeted the verbs classified in such acts and those that were present in the undergraduate theses. I randomly selected some examples; in some cases, the complete list as there were few instances, and I provide some extracts to illustrate the writer's stance expression in context. There were cases in which the reporting functions only reported facts, and some other cases where there was interpretation from the author, i.e. there was an investment in and attitude towards the idea being reported.

The second part uses plots to analyse the distribution of these terms throughout the different chapters. Antconc (Anthony, 2015) tools through specific querying of the corpus allow the identification of reporting verbs in thesis chapters to analyse whether and how the use of reporting verbs varies according to chapter within the theses. The search for plots only in citations was restrictive to the formula and no exceptional cases, an example of a query is NP1 *_* discuss* which follow the structure Author + year (typically) + reporting verb. I followed the line by changing the reporting verb and completing all from the list; the verbs were all searched at once, so the plots appear for each section. These searched verbs are later analysed in context to verify that they are working as reporting verbs in the way this study defines them.

4. Findings

Section 4.1 addresses the expression of stance-taking using concordances and analysing reporting verbs in context. This exposes how undergraduates claim, or do not claim, their stance. Section 4.2

explores the variation in stance expression across the chapters using plot analysis.

Expression of Stance in Undergraduate Theses

Following Thompson and Ye's (1991) study and considering the distinction between authors' and writers' acts, Hyland (2001:119) suggests three main process functions: *research*, *cognition* and *discourse*. He calls them reporting acts. The 'research acts' in this classification encompass verbs which imply an action or activity in the real world. For example, when reporting findings, verbs such as *observe*, *discover*, *notice* and *show*, or reporting procedures, verbs such as *analyse*, *calculate*, *explore* and *recover*; among others, enter this category. 'Cognition acts' include verbs which relate to the researcher's mental processes, e.g. *believe*, *conceptualise*, *think*, *suspect*, *assume* and *view*. 'Discourse acts' involve linguistic activities and focus on the verbal expression of cognitive or research activities, e.g. *ascribe*, *discuss*, *hypothesise*, *report*, *state* (Hyland, 2001: 118). They can have different functions to reporting discourse.

Using these different kinds of reporting verbs is inherently stance-taking because they all imply the evaluation and denotation of the citation being reported. As noticed, reporting verbs in the three categories above denote diverse evaluative and denotative levels; these, however, as warned by Thompson and Ye (1991), do not have absolute boundaries and sometimes some verbs might fall into two categories. These functions and how stance is claimed can only be analysed in context (Thompson and Ye, 1991; Hyland, 2001). Thus, this section includes an analysis of the three categories and how stance-taking is involved. The typical structure of a reporting verb sentence has a subject (usually an author), a complement (with or without 'that') and a citation.

For example, the verb *state* is one of the most frequent reporting verbs found in the corpus. There were 258 concordance lines of this verb functioning as reporting verb in citations; 199 of these instances were with *state* that*, and these also include the clusters² with the greatest

2. There were diverse clusters as they include all forms of the reporting verb, i.e. *state*, *states*, *stated* + *that*.

frequency. With this form being the most common, in Example 1, I present the first 10 instances of *state that* in the complete concordance list for the verb when working as a reporting verb in citations.

Example 1: Concordance for the lemma state with a reporting function

line	left co-text	Verb	right co-text	thesis
368	interlanguage. Gass and Selinker (2001)	state	that a learner might	K1.txt
369	Quitman, et al. (1990:112)	state	that a paragraph of	A3.txt
370	Osburn & Mulling (1998: 55)	state	that a research project	A3.txt
371	lucky few. Clark (1980) also	states	that a student is	E1.txt
372	(1989, cited in Yule 1997:1)	states	that a task is	L1.txt
373	Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1993)	stated	that Acquisition and Learning	C1.txt
374	by Hamer (1991:266) who	states	that activities are a	L1.txt
375	Davies & Pearse (2000: 205)	state	that activity is something	L1.txt
378	is structuralism. Brown (2000: 8)	states	that an important axiom	D4.txt
379	(2000) and Aebersold and Field (1997)	state	that another important factor	A1.txt

These examples paint a general picture of how reporting occurs in the theses. There are lines in this category using the reporting clause *that clause+ complement*. The use of *that clause* immediately builds the report and possibly develops the argument. For example, Extract 1 contains a complete sentence which reads:

Extract 1. Thesis 29

Furthermore, according to their study, Sommers (1994) *stated that* women are who tend to give everybody a chance to speak; they express their ideas without interrupting one another.

In this sentence, the writer reports the author's (Sommers') idea by referring to it as a fact and summarising his/her ideas. There are many cases which follow this scheme, and some others do not really develop the claim with the writer's interpretation, as seen in the following case:

Extract 2. Thesis 10

Rost (2000:117) *states that* teaching methodology “involves any aspect of instruction that entails a choice of learning environment, teacher, students and student-student relationship, classroom language, input, procedures,

outcomes, feedback and assessment”. Teaching methodology involves all the elements that teacher and students do to create a good rapport in the classroom. However, language teaching methodology is “the need to develop learners’ awareness of the processes underlying their own learning so that, eventually, they will be able to take greater and greater responsibility for that learning” (Richards & Renandya, 2002:240).

I extracted three consecutive sentences to show there is evaluation in the sense that the student chose the citation and considered relevant to include it; however, there is no evaluation on the part of the writer to express stance. In the first sentence, the student reports on an author’s idea by quoting him, and then ends the sentence. In the second sentence, he just summarises the quotation, not adding any sort of interpretation; and finally, the third sentence starts with an adversative connector, *however*, and opens another quotation. This pattern seems to be common in the literature review of the theses. I took a closer look at them in plain text and analysed how paragraphs are constructed. A typical structure shows a topic sentence in which the concept is defined, followed by consecutive use of sentence-quotations, and the concluding sentence comes either with a summary of these views, an interpretation of them or a summary with an interpretation. This case is an example of the practices McCulloch (2012) refers to as packing citations, i.e. having a collection of others’ views (quotes or paraphrasing) and not really integrating one’s own views. The summary or concluding sentence of the paragraph might add some sort of evaluation and the writer’s stance, but as seen it is unmarked. Since this pattern seems to occur in several theses, I can suggest three things: 1) it is a cultural issue involving respecting what the literature says (Hyland, 1999), i.e. it is challenging for some Mexican teachers to teach to be critical and criticise what is published, so this learnt practice gets transmitted to the students; 2) the structure of using “*that*” might be an influence of the Spanish language which is used to extend on explaining something; 3) or it might be a case of a supervisor’s influence on the undergraduate’s writing for my participants. The latter suggestion is due to the theses containing this pattern being supervised by the same supervisor.

As observed, the structure that each verb usually follows is 1) subject (usually an author), 2) reporting verb (a complement, with or without ‘that’, and 3) a citation. This structure can be assigned to each

one of the three categories of verbs. Thus, in this section, I include an analysis of verbs in the three categories, i.e. research, cognition and discourse acts, and explore if and how undergraduates claim their stance.

Discourse acts

In terms of ‘discourse acts’, the verbs *discuss* (7), *report* (10), *say* (74), *claim* (67) and *state* (258) are frequent among the reporting verbs used by undergraduates. As mentioned, these acts comprise linguistic activities focusing on the verbal expression of cognitive or research activities. These verbs show no stance-taking, but an unmarked position of the writer. On the positive side of stance-taking, there are a few cases where the structure *state that* is used merely to include the writer’s stance when reporting, i.e. the student used the *that* to express their stance about the citation. For instance, the undergraduate student is here paraphrasing and showing affiliation with the author.

Extract 3. Thesis 7

According to Sevilla (2004), conveying information is the main pragmatic characteristic of scientific texts. Concerning their discursive nature, they are descriptive in the sense that they describe concepts, phenomena, substances, equipment, etc., and they are objective due to the fact that authors tend to employ some linguistic resources like impersonal verb forms. In his further exploration of the morphosyntactic characteristics, a number of impersonal forms and passive constructions—especially the *pasiva refleja*—are found in Spanish scientific texts. Some authors *have stated that* these characteristics are not proper of the scientific register but they are overused structures that are the result of the influence of English over Spanish (Gutiérrez, 1998, cited in Sevilla, 2004:143).

There are also impersonal constructions where the cited author is emphasised, e.g. “(...) as *stated by* Kenneth, McKethan and White (2005), it is (...)”.

Further to these categories, Hyland (2001) argues that there might be verbs which can fit into two categories. For example, the verb *agree*

(19) is a mental process but can at the same time be a verbal one; stance-taking suggests an inclination or not towards the idea being reported. There is actual stance-taking plus no added reason; the verb shows whether the writer follows the same line of thinking or not as what is cited. The verbs *agree* and *disagree* are frequent reporting verbs in the corpus, mostly when reporting findings or literature. Example 2 shows 6 lines of concordance.

Example 2: Concordance for the verb agree with a reporting function

line	left co-text	verb	right co-text	thesis
181	Bloor (1997), and Eggins (2003)	agree	that linguistic choices are	J2.txt
185	self-confidence. Brown (2002) also	agrees	that proficiency refers to	M2.txt
189	their neighbors'. Dalton (1994:32)	agrees	that 'stress refers to	G2.txt
192	Clark, et al. (2007:31)	agree	that tense ness and laxness	G2.txt
274	speak'. Roach (2000: 45), also	agrees	with both authors saying	G2.txt
275	by Roach (2000:44) who	agrees	with Carr and defines	G2.txt

The concordance lines for the verb *agree* reveal its function in reporting an author's claims, specifically in reporting literature. The citation they are referring to is further discussed as they introduce a clause with *that*. These examples were found in the literature review. The context of the concordance of line 181 reads,

Extract 4. Thesis 21

Linguists as Halliday (1985), Bloor (1997), and Eggins (2003) agree that linguistic choices are appropriate depending on the situational and cultural context of the speaker's communication labelled as register and genre. It is because of the dependence of appropriacy on genre that the awareness and mastery of the notion can be best achieved in language learners by teaching them how to use the target language in various genres.

In this example, we can notice the writer is engaged with the literature and comparing the ideas of the authors he is writing about. This is an example of stance-taking since the writer is interpreting and integrating the views of three different authors in the literature. In the sentence following this, he goes on explaining the reasons for his thinking.

Research Act

This category includes verbs that involve research, either for reporting findings, verbs such as *observe* (5), *show* (5), *discover* and *notice*, or reporting procedures, as *explore* (2), *analyse* and *calculate*, among others, enter this category. Surprisingly, all these verbs were used in the theses, but not to report literature, but rather research findings. Therefore, I only included in parentheses the number of occurrences for each verb, if any.

As an example of a ‘research act’ to report procedures, I retrieved the concordances for the verb *observe* and included only those examples in which it is functioning as a reporting verb in a citation. There were 5 concordance lines of reporting instances with this verb. These are shown in Example 3.

Example 3: Concordances for the lemma *observe*

line	left co-text	reporting verb	right co-text	thesis
1	Rea-Dickins & Gemaine (1993)	observe	about evaluation.	C3.txt
2	Lievrouw and Livingstone (2002)	observe	that media culture	D3.txt
3	Rea-Dickins & Gemaine (1993)	observe	that evaluation can	C3.txt
4	another. Baker (1989)	observes	that the purpose	C3.txt
5	In this concern Hinkel (1999)	observes	that: </s> </p> <	I1.txt

In all the concordances, the writers choose an integral citation, i.e. he/she makes the cited author part of the sentence, and in all the lines except line 1, the reported claim is preceded by the particle *that*. The choice of making the author part of the sentence gives direct responsibility to the author who is being cited. The citation is presented as a fact; no real evaluation is taking place, so the writer’s stance is merely of reporting/ denoting. Example 3’s concordance lines also exhibit that it is three writers who use this verb. This means it is not a common choice among these undergraduates when citing.

When retrieving the concordance lines, I found one example where the writer did not follow the pattern “author (date) + reporting verb + that”. Rather, the student uses the verb *observe* to report literature review by providing a summary of others’ ideas. See extract 5.

Extract 5. Thesis 22

From these studies *it can be observed* that motivation plays an important and crucial role in the language learning process, and it has become an essential factor in the classroom.

The example is in the passive voice. Here, the writer chose not to be the subject of the one who observes such facts and used an impersonal form. However, the writer shows integration of authors' ideas, the writer summarises studies previously reported with other verbs and then integrates their points of view with the verb *observe*. Student's stance shows an unmarked position, just signalling what the literature points to. However, the assessment of sources and synthesising as observation by him show his engagement with the literature.

The concordances with the verb *show* are very similar in terms of the structure "author + shows + that" in four of the five concordance lines. There was a concordance line that shows a different structure, but it also works as a reporting verb when citing a non-integral citation. The context of the line is in Extract 6.

Extract 6. Thesis 17

Furthermore, a research carried out in the higher education system of Peru, *shows that* indigenous students do not always possess enough competence in their skills in Spanish, and that the deficient educational training before attending higher education institutions and the problems of adaptation are also the main affecting factors of their academic performance (Chirinos & Zegarra, 2004).

Here, the author gives more emphasis to the actual study than to the authors who did it. His engagement with the literature is noticeable in the construction of his argument which helps him to contextualise his own study.

Cognition acts

The researcher's mental processes ('cognition acts'), e.g. *believe* (9), *think* (7), *view* (4), *suspect* and *assume*, may also denote stance-

taking. There were a total of 13 concordance lines from which I pick the first two lines of each verb and include them in Example 4. Thus, this example shows concordance lines in which the writer uses mental process verbs to report other authors' ideas.

Example 4: Concordance lines for mental processes for reporting authors

line	left co-text	verb	right co-text	thesis
1	The Greek philosophers	believed	that if an individual	D2.txt
2	in Mexico. However, scholars	believe	that not only in	I1.txt
3	(1978, cited in Hadley, 1993, p.84)	believes	that relaxation skills	R1.txt
4	Krashen and Terrell (2000)	believe	that the basis of	E3.txt
5	there are researchers who	believe	that the input received	C1.txt
6	Canale and Swain (1980) strongly	believed	that the study of	Y1.txt
7	Correspondingly, Canale and Swain	believe	that the work of	Y1.txt
8	decades ago some researchers	believed	that vocabulary acquisition	E3.txt
9	Rutherford (cited in Ellis, 1995: 249)	believes	they are described as	C1.txt
10	Aebersold and Field (1997)	view	testing as to	A1.txt
11	Eysenck (1970, cited in Skehan, 1989)	views	anxiety as the	H1.txt
12	study carried out by Heath (1996)	views	literature from another	A1.txt
13	However, Lazar (1993)	views	literature as body	A1.txt

The reporting verb *believe* as used by the students follows, in all cases except line 9, the same pattern with the particle *that*. In most of the lines, the writers use integral citations, except in lines, 1, 2, 5 and 8. In line 5 the writer summarises previous authors and concludes with their general view. See the following extract:

Extract 7 – Thesis 4

Evidently, integrationist theories seem useful in explaining language acquisition; however, there are researchers who *believe* that the input received is not enough to make learners reach good results. And therefore, they *think* that learners should pay more attention to their innate abilities rather than the input.

In Extract 7, the writer is closing one of his literature review sections, he does not offer more citations but summarises and organises the views of the authors previously discussed. In this extract the author also uses the verb *think* as a reporting verb. The selection of two verbs

in the cognitive act category shows his high-level of engagement with the literature aside from the adverbs and connectors he uses to stress his stance.

In lines 1 and 8, the case is different. The writers use the verb in a topic sentence to start their section and the discussion. This idea is subsequently reinforced with citations. Line 2, for its part, is a non-integral citation. See Extract 8.

Extract 8 – Thesis 17

However, scholars *believe* that not only in this country but also in all Latin America education faces important challenges such as the broadening of pre-school, basic and middle education, the incorporation of indigenous population into the academic system, and the improvement in quality and results of basic competences particularly among the poorest population (Brunner, 2000:1).

The nature of the verb *view* implies an object following, and this is observed in lines 10–13 in Example 4. It is also noticeable that the structure after this uses the comparative *as*, e.g. line 13, Lazar (1993) *views* literature *as* a body of written works, such as novels, plays, essays, short stories, poems and even articles in magazines and newspapers (Thesis 1, italics added). The writer uses a comparative to compare the idea of the point of view to something. Interestingly, none of the lines follow a quotation, but they all paraphrase the authors' views.

The verb *think* presents interesting cases when reporting literature, as it is mostly used in the past tense and the passive voice. In Example 5, I include the first three concordances. The use of the passive voice and modals in these cases reduce the strength of the verb *think*, yet they are still reporting literature, either as an integral citation (line 2) or non-integral citations (lines 1 and 3).

Example 5: Concordance lines for the verb think

line	left co-text	verb	right co-text	thesis
1	learning environment (Keefe, 1979, p. 4). Motivation is commonly	Thought	as an inner drive, impulse, emotion or desire	M1.txt
2	According to McDonough (1993, p. 59), they can be	Thought	of as a range of learnable and practical	D3.txt
3	Rubin 1987, p. 6). Learning style: Learning styles might be	Thought	of as a 'cognitive, affective, and physiological traits	L1.txt

Among the same cognitive acts, I yield more concordances for the rest of the verbs listed in this category. Their examples, however, do not function as reporting verbs in citations but verbs reporting research findings. The latter are, consequently, out of the scope of this study as they are not used in citations, and the way of reporting findings will mostly depend on the type of thesis research, e.g. qualitative or quantitative.

Engaging with the literature is, however, something that all the undergraduates had to do. The interesting cases in this section were when there was interpretation from the writer because the student shows engagement with the literature and the idea being reported. This could be seen in some of the extracts presented where the writer gives an explanation after the reporting verb or reporting clause. The clause sometimes reduced the writer's responsibility for the claim being made, but in some cases, the student continued developing the idea, and constructing their stance. The discourse, cognitive and research acts show how much engagement there was in these theses on the part of the undergraduates and the literature. In the examples provided and the most common types of verbs used by the undergraduates, it seems that they strategically pick verbs in each act that denote evaluation less and, in that way, they distance themselves and keep an unmarked position. For example, the most common verb in discourse acts was *state*; those most used in the research act were *observe and show*, and lastly in cognition acts the verbs most used were *believe, think and view*. Still the use of a verb in the cognition acts category was not common in these theses. These verbs imply greater evaluation and major engagement with the literature. There were, nonetheless, exceptional cases such as theses 13 and 17, whose writers show more engagement with the literature and the way they integrate themselves into it. Their position is clear and situates them in the discipline. Most

of the undergraduates still show their stance-taking with a lower level of evaluation, given the verbs selected. However, many of them continue developing the idea with the clause *that-* after a reporting verb. I have shown in this section the way undergraduates claim their stance-taking when citing. Despite the limited repertoire of the verbs they use compared to the lists of Swales (2014) and Brezina (2012), I argue that the fact that the structure “reporting verb + that clause” is common, undergraduates use other strategies to further develop their ideas and engage with the literature.

Distribution of Reporting Verbs

This section explores whether stance is claimed differently in the different sections of the theses. For this, I analyse the plots of the concordances of the verbs in my list that are typical of these theses. As mentioned in the methodology, the searches for these verbs follow the formula NP1 *_*reporting verb*. The concordance plots show that most theses do include reporting verbs in at least three sections, and the occurrences vary significantly in each of the theses. The maximum (376) occurrences of reporting verbs are in thesis 16, and the minimum (42) in thesis 27. In Figure 1, I present a selection of plots of the theses with more occurrences, with the least and ones that can be considered in the media; the complete plots for all the theses are available upon request.

Figure 1 – Sample of thesis plots on reporting verbs

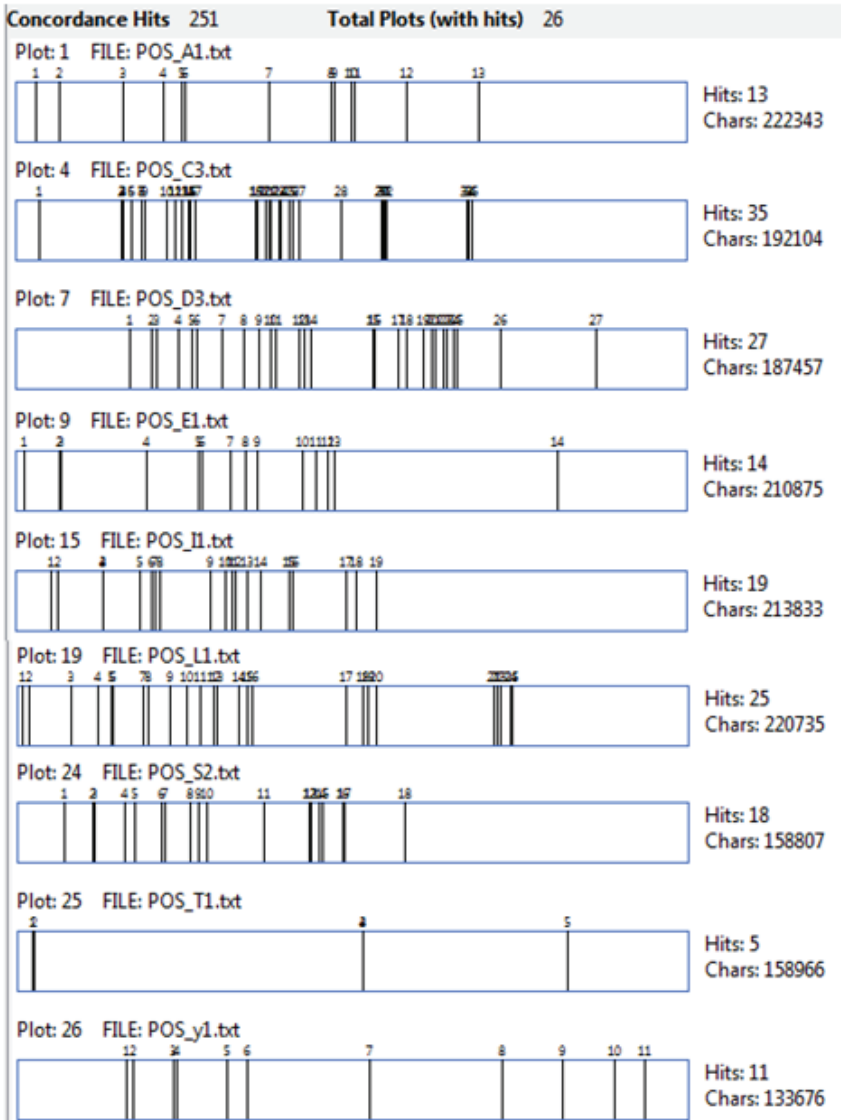


The theses show variability among the chapters regarding the use of reporting verbs. At first glance, the figure shows the occurrences in blocks as if these chapters were quite marked; however, the boundaries between chapters are not clearly visible or marked in the plots. Thus, it was necessary to take a close look at the actual concordances to see where a chapter begins/ends. Occurrences within these plots happen, in most cases, in the literature review and results/ discussion chapters. Nearly half of the theses corpus comprises the literature review chapter (see Table 2), and due to its nature of discussing the literature behind the study, it is not surprising that it contains a high number of reporting verbs.

This distribution happens when including reporting verbs in their reporting function of citing and presenting results. However, as my interest in this paper is to show the use of reporting verbs in citations, I removed the concordance lines in which the verbs were not functioning as reporting citations, and then I got the plots. In this case, I only searched the verbs identified as occurring in these theses, as discussed in section 3.2. And I restricted it to concordances following the search pattern *NPI *_* reporting verb** which narrowed down the search to those verbs which follow the structure Author + year (typically) + reporting verb. The plots with the reporting verbs used specifically in citations are in Figure 2, below.

The distribution plots show the different figures for these verbs' usage among the theses. At first, the frequency of occurrences is noticeably less, with the maximum of occurrences in Thesis 6 (35 occurrences) and the minimum of 1 occurrence in Theses 7, 8 and 15. These plots, I must remind the reader, are with a restrictive search for integral citations. Because of this one instance and apparently no reporting verbs in four other theses, I produced plots only with a verb search, and then identified those plots not reporting citations. All the plots contain reporting verbs in citations, integral, non-integral and in peculiar cases, as explored in the previous section.

Figure 2 – Sample of thesis plots for reporting verbs in citations



As Figure 2 shows, the distribution seems to be spread among the chapters; however, each thesis is different in total length, and chapter length as well. Thus, I look at chapters and analyse how reporting verbs vary among them.

The introduction chapters, which are equal in corpus size to the conclusions chapter, have more occurrences of reporting verbs. I looked at these chapters, and these occurrences happen in two specific sections of the introductory chapter, i.e. when they refer to previous research setting up the niche of their study, and in a subsection where they define key terms which will guide their research.

The literature chapter aims to do a review of the literature to support the research. Therefore, it is in these chapters where citing occurs the most. This was the longest chapter in most theses. Plots 4, 7 and 19 in Figure 2 contain more occurrences; taking a close look at them, they occur in the literature review. For example, in plot 4, with 35 occurrences, 29 of them are in the literature review. Then, a new chapter begins in the boldest bar in plot 4 (see figure). Similar cases are theses 7 and 19. Their literature chapters are long, and most reporting verb occurrences happen there.

Surprisingly, the methodology chapters contain very few instances in four theses only. The writers of these theses show awareness of the importance of presenting their analytical framework or the principles on which they are basing their analysis, and they describe these in this chapter. The rest of the theses satisfy the principle of briefly describing the method, instruments and participants.

The results chapters are the next chapter with more occurrences of reporting verbs, if considering reporting results. However, considering the presence of reporting verbs in citing, there were very few instances in a few theses (1, 3 and 7). These writers use reporting verbs when citing to reinforce their point in the findings and strengthen it with a source. This awareness can then be one indicator of stance-taking as they are positioning their research in relation to their discipline.

The conclusions chapters, for its part, have a few occurrences, mostly placed in the directions for further research section. Exceptionally, three theses contained reporting in their concluding chapter. The function was to report literature to strengthen their claim.

Three of the theses contain instances of reporting verbs in each of their chapters. Two of these theses used a mixed-methods approach, and the other a quantitative approach. This might not be a relevant claim,

given the number of theses under analysis; it is, however, worth pointing out that the type of approach might also influence reporting practices.

The dispersion has shown where reporting verbs are concentrated and looking at the concordances, we can relate their function to the place they occupy in the thesis chapters. This fact shows an awareness not only of the functions of each chapter, but also of the individuality of the writer, as each thesis presents an individual case – as noted in the dispersion. The latter point points to an aspect of authorial identity as it suggests the individual choice of the writer (Ivanič, 1998).

5. Conclusions

This research has demonstrated the ways in which undergraduates show their stance in their EFL undergraduate theses by using reporting verbs. First, undergraduate citing practices tend to be formulaic. They mostly follow the integral citation structure. However, they do seem to select verbs, in some cases, to take a stance on the propositions reported. This was shown in the first part of the analysis by taking a closer look at the contexts that the concordances pointed to as being relevant. If it is observed that they do not claim a strong authorial stance, it is also evident that they are aware of it. The use of integral and non-integral citations was present and, in some cases, some of these undergraduates used other strategies to still report the literature, e.g. summarising it once a citation took place, and using other linguistic devices, such as adverbs, connectors and hedging, which could be part of a further study. The distribution of verbs across the thesis chapters shows that they restrict their use to specific sections of theses where citation is required. This suggests that these writers are aware of the rhetorical function of each chapter. Predictably, the literature review was the one that contained more citing occurrences, and thus more reporting verbs. The writers show their stance-taking in their choices of reporting verbs, and by deciding where to include a citation and strengthen their argument. Thus, some theses contain reporting verb instances all through their theses, while showing variability in each of the chapters, and with this their stance-taking.

This research contributes to research on a category of verbs that are commonly used in EFL academic writing at the undergraduate level and in the TESOL area. I emphasise this discipline as the undergraduates are future English teachers, and they need to be aware of the use of rhetorical devices to express their voice and stance when writing. If this is what they do without explicit teaching of reporting verbs, such teaching could do more to make them aware of the broad range of choices available, taking as example Swales (2014) and Brezina (2012) lists shown in the Appendix. If students are aware of the choices, they will be able to engage themselves more with the literature and how to discuss it in light of their findings. Their position will then be clearer and stronger. In this way, their stance-taking will engage their audience to follow their argument and at the same time they will be positioning themselves in their discipline.

The pedagogical implications apply to instructors of academic writing classes as well as students and supervisors. My argument supports making them aware of the importance of authorial identity expression as constructed in written discourse. This awareness could benefit instructors and supervisors in making students reflect on their academic practice and their option to insert their stance in the discipline and belong to an academic community.

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Conflict of interests

(x) *The authors declare they have no conflict of interest.*

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APPENDIX: Lists of Reporting Verbs in Applied Linguistics

Brezina (2012)	Swales (2014)	Olmos-Lopez (2016)
state	show	discuss
explain	find	report
claim	suggest	say
say	propose	state
remark	argue	observe
maintain	note	believe
define	hypothesize, do (as in “studies were done ...”)	agree
highlight	demonstrate, point out	disagree
mention	report, state, describe, study	suspect
advocate	consider, attempt to	assume
anticipate	analyze, conduct, assume, predict, discover	view
ask	accept, claim, conclude, indicate, observe, reveal, test, believe, introduce, think	claim
caution		define
comment		mention
contend		show
deny		explain
document		
identify		
illustrate		
postulate		
recount		
remind		
write		