Graduate School of Education

The Development of Use of Reporting Verbs in Academic Writing:

A Case Study with Two Chinese Students

To the University of Exeter as a dissertation towards the degree of Masters of Education in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

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Abstract

In view of the complexity of reporting and the central role it plays in academic writing, the present study focuses on the most clear signal of reporting, i.e., reporting verbs. Specifically, a case study was carried out with two Chinese students during their studies at the University of Exeter in the UK with the aim to investigate their development of use of reporting verbs in essay writing over the course of one academic year.

The study follows the interpretive paradigm. Multiple data sources included a corpus of six assignments (three from each student), semi-structured interviews with the students, and questionnaires for a panel of two experts to judge on the level of appropriacy.

Findings of the study indicated that the two Chinese students showed no sign of improvement over time in terms of the appropriate use of reporting verbs. In addition, the evaluative aspect of these rhetorical devices was not yet made clear to them. Some implications for the teaching and learning of reporting verbs have arisen from the interpretation of findings.

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List of Abbreviations

L1 – First Language

L2 – Second Language

EAP – English for Academic Purposes

TESOL – Teaching English to Speakers' of Other Languages

TEM – Test for English Majors

Chapter 1

Introduction

Students studying for their master's degrees face a variety of tasks, e.g., listening to lectures, engaging in group discussions, taking notes, reading academic articles, and in particular writing assignments for most modules on which assessment is based. The type of writing at master's level is probably different from students' previous experience in that it requires to be presented in an academic style, not just to do with the structure and technical aspects, but more about making one's claims with sufficient evidence normally based on ideas from reading sources which need to be acknowledged. This feature of English for academic purposes (EAP) writing could be foreign to novice writers, especially in the case of second language (L2) students, who come from different cultural and educational backgrounds with different writing conventions. In terms of making citations or reporting on the work of other authors, previous research has examined its functions in research articles (e.g. Swales, 1990), different forms of citation in L2 essays (e.g. Petric, 2012), disciplinary preferences for citation (e.g. Hyland, 1999; 2004), different citation practices across cultures (e.g. Zhang, 2008), and even specific students' development of source use (e.g. Davis, 2013). Specifically, a substantial amount of attention has been attributed to the verbs which a writer uses to introduce citations (e.g. Thompson and Ye, 1991).

1.1 Rationale for the Study

L2 students are considered to disregard their lexical decisions on the incorporation of sources. As an illustration, Thompson and Ye (1991:366) describe the following situation:

> *It is a common experience for EAP teachers to have great difficulty in identifying the point of view that a NNS (non-native speaker) writer is intending to convey towards cited authors; or even to assume, on the basis of apparently clear signals, that a certain point of view is being conveyed only to find this view unexpectedly contradicted in a subsequent explicit evaluation.*

The above mentioned communication breakdown is clearly not derived from what is being reported, but from the manner in which the cited information is integrated into the text mainly by using a reporting verb. In this regard, the role reporting verbs play in academic writing is significant. In a practical sense, they have an impact on the clarity of one's claim, and thus, in the end affect the overall writing performance which students are assessed on. From a rhetorical point of view, the use of one reporting verb rather than the other determines how the audience takes a

writer's opinion, i.e., it affects one's credibility. Reporting verbs therefore needs to be employed with due care and consideration.

1.2 Aims of the Study

Given the importance of reporting verbs in academic writing, the present study aims to investigate how L2 students deal with these devises, specifically Chinese students studying in the UK and their development of use of reporting verbs over time.

1.3 Organisation of the Dissertation

The rest of the dissertation is structured as follows: a brief description of the teaching and learning contexts in Chinese and UK universities is presented in the next chapter. Then, relevant aspects of reporting verb are drawn on from the literature, following which the research questions and design of the study are revealed and described. What come afterwards are the presentation and discussion of findings. The final chapter concludes the dissertation with some implications and recommendations.

Chapter 2

Background of the Study

This chapter describes the background information in relation to different requirements for the incorporation of sources between Chinese and UK universities. Both of the two participants in the present study majored in business English in China prior to their studies at the University of Exeter in the UK.

2.1 English Writing in Chinese Universities

English is an obligatory course in higher education in China which is taught under the guidance of College English Curriculum Requirements (2007).The nationally unified benchmark divides English teaching into three levels, i.e., basic, intermediate, and higher levels with different demands for English writing, yet the prescriptions are quite ambiguous and they do not seem to involve the requirement for teaching students how to incorporate ideas from sources (appendix 1).

For the Chinese students who major in English, passing the Test for English Majors Band 4 (TEM-4) is a graduation requirement. The TEM-4 writing task consists of two sections with a major focus on argumentative composition which mainly involves one's personal views without the need to refer to different sources (appendix 2). This type of essay and marking criteria suggest that Chinese university students are mainly trained to deal with general English writing and they have little exposure to the concepts of reporting and reporting verbs.

2.2 Academic Writing Courses in UK Universities

International students are required to reach a particular competence level in English at their entry to the master's programmes of UK universities; otherwise they need to attend EAP courses such as the pre-sessional programme provided by INTO University of Exeter. The pre-sessional course at INTO includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing with a specific focus on English in academic settings, e.g., listening to lectures and reading academic texts. As far as writing is concerned, the incorporation of quotations is a requirement which can be found in the course book yet with no explicit instruction on the use of reporting verbs (appendix 3). At the end of the course, students are assessed on their writing on different discipline-specific topics in relation to their future master's programmes. A prospective student who majors in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), for example, may choose to write an essay on the process approach to teaching writing, or vocabulary learning strategies.

Optional in-sessional support is also available during students' studies at the University of Exeter. The academic writing course specifically aims at assignment writing at master's level. It covers such areas as academic language, the process of writing student essays, structures of different sections, incorporating sources, and editing. One of the hand-outs presented by the lecturer suggests that students are introduced to the use of reporting verbs in class (appendix 4), e.g., classification based on their functions and strengths, the integration of different reporting verbs into texts, and their tense aspects.

2.3 Assignment Writing in MEd TESOL at the University of Exeter

Students doing the master's programme in TESOL at the University of Exeter are assessed solely on their assignments and the final dissertation. There are in total six assignments throughout the one academic year (appendix 5). Except for two essays for the core modules which require 7000 words, the rest are of the same requirement of 3750 words. Assignment descriptors and brief instructions on possible outlines and key aspects are normally given in class. In addition, students are provided with an assignment writing guide at the beginning of the programme mainly on the writing style and conventions, such as punctuation, bibliography layout, and in-text citation style.

According to the assessment criteria for master's in education included in the guide (appendix 6), students need to take into account different aspects in relation to reporting, e.g., the range and selection of sources, critical engagement with literature, and the conventions for referencing. All assignments are marked against the criteria and afterwards returned to the students with scores and formative feedback. Both general comments and corrective feedback are provided by the lectures.

It can be seen that for Chinese students coming from an educational background in which the incorporation of sources is not a must, they are quite foreign to this idea and their uses of reporting verbs would be expected to develop during their studies in the UK. The following chapter will draw on the literature concerning various aspects of reporting verbs.

Chapter 3

Review of the Literature

This chapter reviews relevant literature on reporting verbs from which research questions of the present study will emerge at the beginning of the next chapter. The first section introduces the idea of reporting in academic writing. What come afterwards are different aspects in relation to reporting verbs including the classification and tense usage. Specific problems for L2 students and the acquisition of reporting verbs are presented at last.

3.1 Reporting

The ability to incorporate ideas from different sources is one of the basic requirements for master's students. The central role it takes in academic writing is self-evident.

3.1.1 Definition of reporting

Since Swales' (1990) pioneering study on the typical features in research article introductions, there has been a growing interest in the phenomenon of reporting in academic writing. Reporting is defined by Thomas and Hawes (1994:129) as:

> *The attribution of propositional content to a source outside the author of the article in the current situation, and the marking of this by the presence of any of a number of signals of attribution.*

It is worth noting that the concepts of citation and reporting are not identical. They serve the same function as to making references to previous research. Citation, however, focuses on the explicit form in which the information is integrated into a text. In order to clearly illustrate the difference, Zhang (2008:5) provides the following examples:

1. Some scholars have found that learning strategies are crucial in second language learning.
2. Kasper (1981) showed that native speaker norms in German and English differ.
3. Previous research has shown that native speaker norms in German and English differ (Kasper, 1981).
4. Native speaker norms in German and English differ (Kasper, 1981).

Example 1, although with no citation form, is reporting, in that it incorporates signals of attribution to external source with the presence of a reporting noun phrase (some scholars) and a reporting verb (have found). The last three examples are both citations and reporting, due to the fact that they include obvious references in which the surname of author and the year of

publication appear. In this regard, most citations are reporting, but not the other way around. In terms of signals that determine whether a statement is counted as reporting or not, Thomas and Hawes (1994) differ from Swales (1990) in the way that they consider reporting to be signalled not only by reporting verbs, but also by other elements such as reporting nouns (e.g. previous studies, scholars in this field), reporting adjectives (e.g. so-called, concerned), and reporting adjuncts (e.g. according to, in the words of). The present study follows Thomas and Hawes and considers reporting in a general sense.

3.1.2 Functions of reporting

In addition to the face value of making attributions to previous research, reporting has other functions as well. Hyland (1999, 2004), for example, takes a sociolinguistic perspective and addresses the social aspect of reporting, which is concerned with the construction of disciplinary knowledge. He argues that "the construction of academic facts is a social process" (Hyland, 1999:342) and research studies have to be situated in the academic community by acknowledging and referring to the work of previous researchers.

The most influential work of reporting is that of Swales (1990) who investigated the introductions of research articles in which the incorporation of sources frequently occurs. He examined 158 introductions in diverse fields and proposed a three-move model known as the Create-A-Research-Space (CARS) model. By making references to items of previous research, which Swales (1990) believes is an obligatory step in research article introductions, writers tend to establish a research gap for their studies to reside in, and afterwards to occupy by proposing their own work. Despite the fact that the model has been criticised for restricting the placement of references to previous research (Samraj, 2002), and for the failure in realising different reporting practices across cultures (Hirano, 2009), the general three-move framework is on the whole proved to be valid even when applied to the latest published research articles (Xie, 2013).

3.2 Reporting Verbs

One well-researched area of reporting in academic writing is the verbs which a writer uses to introduce citations.

3.2.1 Reporting verbs in academic writing

The function of a reporting statement is not only revealed from the source information itself but from the clear signal of a reporting verb as well. The employment of reporting verbs, according to

Thompson and Ye (1991), enables a writer to express their own evaluation towards what is being reported. Swales and Feak (2004:164) reiterate this idea and state that the selection of a reporting verb "reveals your personal stance toward the source material". That is to say, reporting verbs carry the rhetorical functions to show writers' evaluation on the cited information, either to agree to, to critique, or to remain neutral, which implies that the use of one verb rather than the other is not a random decision but one that needs to take into account the writer's attitude towards the information. Swales and Feak go further and maintain that some reporting verbs tend to carry more evaluative connotations than others by providing an example and distinguishing between the words "say" and "mention", i.e., the replacement of "mention" for "say" will attach less importance to the information than it is supposed to because "'mention' is used for information that was most likely given without detail or support" (Swales and Feak, 2004:166). This aspect of reporting verbs therefore needs to be covered in class and be made clear to L2 writers.

3.2.2 Classification of reporting verbs

The first study on the categories of reporting verbs is that by Thompson and Ye (1991). They adopted a corpus approach to their research of over a hundred journal introductions in diverse fields, and afterwards classified the reporting verbs in terms of their semantic differences, which they argue perform the functions of denotation and evaluation. Under the first main category of denotation, author acts and writer acts were distinguished depending on who the responsibility of process is attributed to, i.e., whether the point of view comes from the author or the writer. The present study is going to follow Thompson and Ye and refer to the reporting person as writer, the reported person as author. To clearly illustrate the difference between these two acts, it is helpful to take a look at examples provided by Thompson and Ye (1991:370-371):

1. A longer list of feasible levels of questions is exemplified by Adams-Smith (1981), using the Bloomian taxonomy (Alderson and Urquhart as cited in Thompson and Ye, 1991:371).
2. Berman's main thesis, that syntax presents difficulties to the FL reader, would seem to contradict one of Cooper's findings, namely that neither practised nor unpractised readers were strong on syntax (Alderson and Urquhart as cited in Thompson and Ye, 1991:370).

In example one which was classified as author acts, Adams-Smith, the reported author, was objectively referred to as the person who was actually responsible for the cited information, i.e., to give examples of "a longer list of feasible levels of questions". In example two, on the other hand, the conflict between the two reported authors, Berman and Cooper, as shown in the reporting verb "contradict", was deliberately created by the writer for their own specific rhetorical

purpose from neither of the authors' perspectives, and therefore was identified as writer acts. As a result, it is necessary to discriminate between author's and writer's views when it comes to attribution of stance.

A summary of the complete classification of reporting verbs proposed by Thompson and Ye is provided below:

Figure 3.1 Classification of reporting verbs by Thompson and Ye (1991)
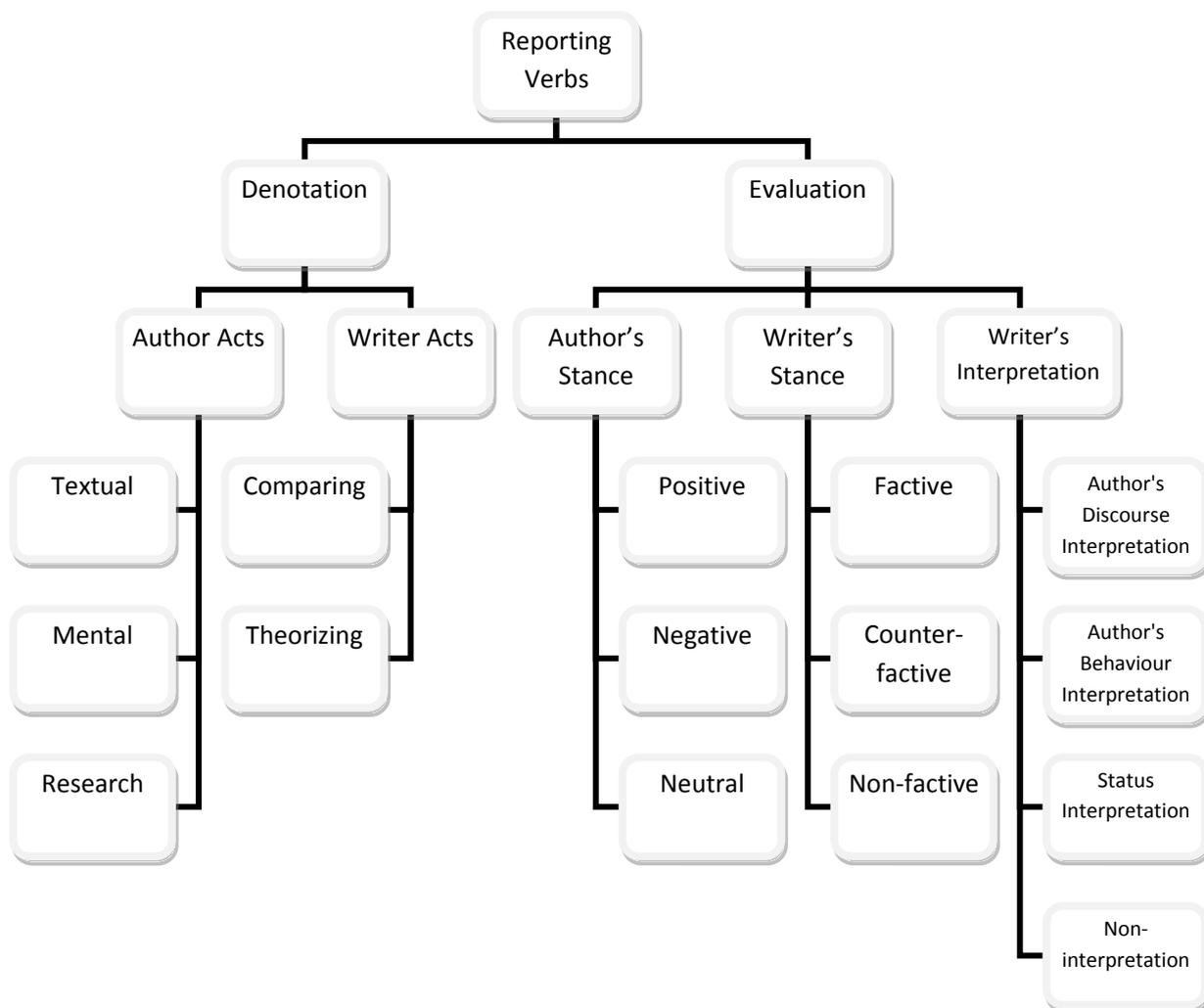
As complex as the figure shows, Thompson and Ye admit that the classification is not watertight in that there is a certain degree of overlap between these categories which leads to some reporting verbs being identified across two different ones. To sum up, this is a sophisticated study due to the large corpus size and the number of reporting verbs identified from the texts (more than four hundred), not to mention the evaluative potential and the interaction between these verbs.

Subsequent research studies following Thompson and Ye have, to different extents, adapted the framework (Thomas and Hawes, 1994; Hyland, 1999,). Hyland (1999), for instance, investigated

eighty research articles from eight diverse fields in search of disciplinary differences in the field of citation. He eliminated the elaborate distinctions and proposed the following categories:

Figure 3.2 Classification of reporting verbs by Hyland (1999:350)
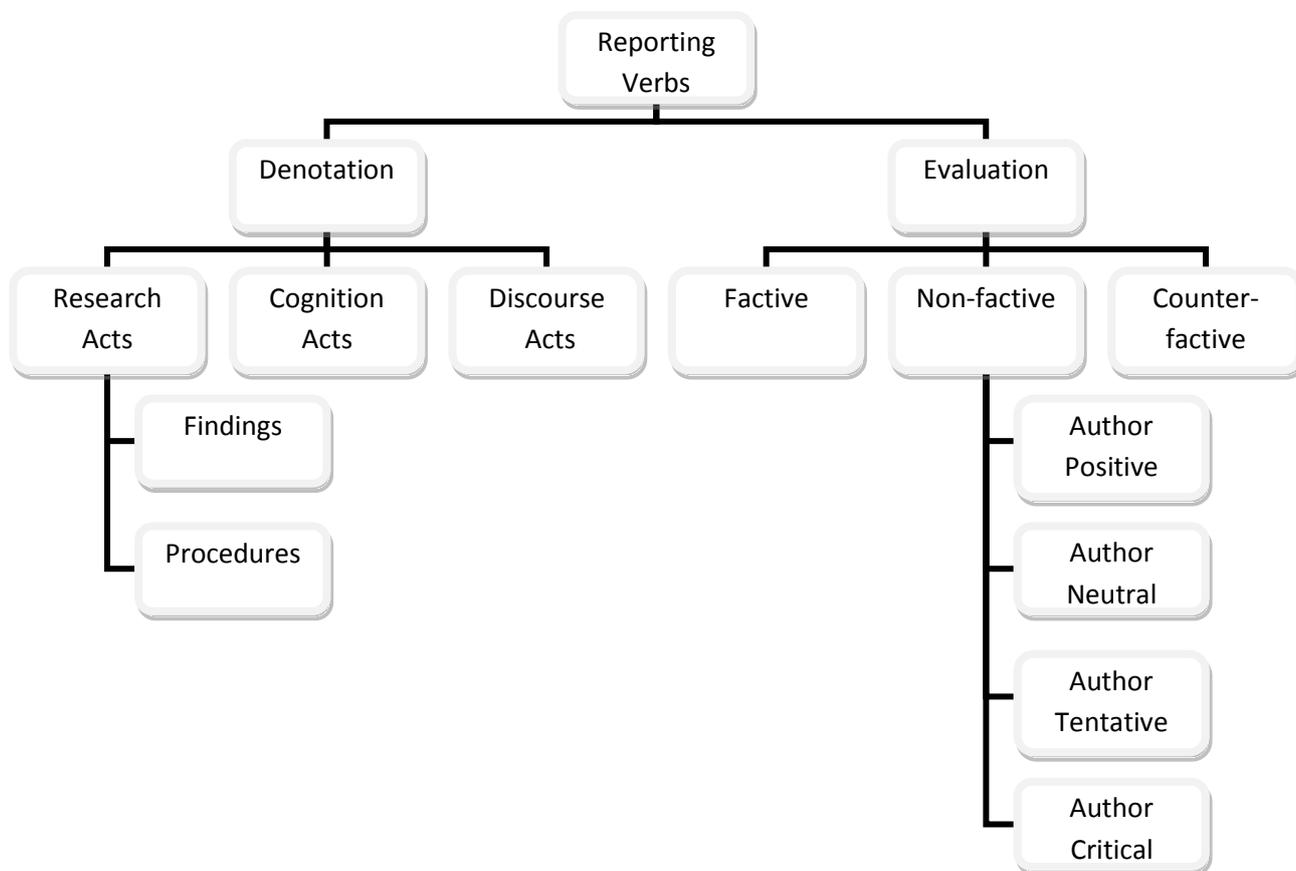
The figure presents a simplified version of classification of reporting verbs, yet as Hyland argues, it still retains the dynamic relationship between the verb choice and the rhetorical function as well as attribution of stance revealed from such a choice. As can be seen, reporting verbs are more than just a list of vocabulary for learners to choose from without any consideration. The prominent role they play in academic writing needs to be made aware of in class, particularly to L2 learners.

3.2.3 Tense of reporting verbs

Another important area of reporting verbs that has been studied by previous researchers is the tense usage, mainly of the past, present simple, and present perfect tense (Malcolm, 1987; Shaw, 1992; Thomas and Hawes, 1997).

It has been proved that the choice of tense is determined by various elements rather than simply by time. One account for the tense usage of reporting verbs depends on different levels of

generalization of the reporting statements. As Swales (1990) points out, from the past tense, to the present perfect, to the present tense, there is an increasing degree of generality, i.e., the statements in which the respective tense occurs make references to a particular study, to the area of inquiry, and finally to a broader and more general domain. Based on the tense choices associated with the main verbs in the reporting sentences from 11 medical research articles, Thomas and Hawes (1997) suggest similar findings. Swales and Feak (2004:254-255) conclude the idea with the following patterns:

Pattern 1: reference to single studies (past tense)	e.g., Jones (1997) investigated the causes of illiteracy.
Pattern 2: reference to areas of inquiry (present perfect tense)	e.g., The causes of illiteracy have been widely investigated (Jones, 1997; Ferrara, 2000; Hyon, 2004).
Pattern 3: reference to state of current knowledge (present tense)	e.g., The causes of illiteracy are complex (Jones, 1997; Ferrara, 2000; Hyon, 2004)

As a general guideline for tense use in academic writing, the generalization rule accounts for most tense incidences in previous research. Another aspect to look at tense is to take into account particular rhetorical ends the writer wants to achieve with such usage. Malcolm (1987:32), for example, argues for "(an) account not only for obligatory constraints on tense usage, but also for the strategic choices that provide authors with the capability of manipulating temporal references for their own rhetorical purposes." That is to say, writer could employ different tense choices to express their own stance towards the external source, rather than simply to concern the reported message itself. According to Swales and Feak (2004), it seems obligatory to use the past tense to refer to what previous researchers did; when it comes to references to their ideas, however, the reporting writer can manipulate different tense choices. The switch from the past, to the present perfect, to the present simple tense indicates the increasing relevance of the reported study to the writer's own research or point of view (Swales and Feak, 2004).

With a small corpus of only two articles from chemical engineering, Oster (as cited in Swales, 1990:152) proposes the principal hypotheses of tense use as follows:

1. The Present Perfect tense is used to claim generality about past literature. The Past tense is used to claim non-generality about past literature.
2. The Past tense is used when it refers to quantitative results of past literature that are non-supportive of some aspects of the work described in the technical article. The Present tense is used when it refers to quantitative results of past literature that are supportive or non-relevant.
3. The Present Perfect tense is used to indicate the continued discussion of some of the information in the sentence in which the Present Perfect tense occurs.

It is among the earliest work on the relationship between reporting verbs and their related tense choices, but it accounts for not only the generalization rule, the relevance aspect, and as in the third hypothesis, another rhetorical function as well which is to signal from a reader's point of view what is expected in the subsequent text. Swales (1990), however, raises the concern over how this model could be incorporated into the EAP classroom as what is counted as "continued discussion" should be clearly explained.

Previous studies have proved the effectiveness of using corpora to obtain evidence of different aspects of reporting verbs not only as isolated items but in rich contexts as well. Given the complex nature of reporting verbs as is discussed above, it may hardly be surprising that L2 learners are always found to have problems in using them in academic writing.

3.3 Problems with Using Reporting Verbs for L2 Students

L2 students' writing has long been of vital interest to EAP researchers. Specific problems regarding the use of reporting verbs identified in their essays include the aspects of accuracy and appropriacy with verb choice, tense use, and syntactic form of the reporting statement.

3.3.1 Problems with verb choice

As far as lexical decision is concerned, some L2 writers may try to expand their repertoire of reporting verbs yet have difficulties in selecting an appropriate one; others may restrict themselves to a certain range of choices, or even randomly use one with no regard for the rhetorical consequences that comes afterwards from such a choice.

In Hyland and Milton's contrastive study (1997) with Chinese L2 writers and their native speaker counterparts, they assessed the students' ability to present their claims by looking into their uses of model expressions and found that the L2 essays not only displayed a restricted repertoire of lexical items, unfamiliarity with academic register by confusing informal spoken forms with those used in academic writing, but also preferred confident prediction when being tentative is more

favourable (Hyland, 1994;1996). The decision of choosing a lexical item rather than another, according to Hyland and Milton (1997:183), leads to "the extent of the writer's conviction in their truth, which may range from uncertain possibility to confident prediction, but also convey a suitable degree of deference and modesty to the audience".

Wette (2010) evaluated an instructional course on writing using sources with L2 students and indicated that the more sophisticated and subtle aspects of reporting were not yet acquired by the students even after instruction, e.g., using the neutral verb "mention" to present a main proposition. One relevant study to the present one is that of Davis (2013), who followed three Chinese students studying in the UK over the course of two years through a pre-master's EAP programme and subsequent master's degree. She analysed four features in their assignments in regard to source use and reported that two of the students failed to show any sign of improvement with problems such as over-citation, insufficient paraphrasing, and limited range of reporting verbs.

3.3.2 Problems with tense usage and syntax

The mastery of reporting verb use involves not only selecting a lexical item but successfully integrating it into the text as well, e.g., using the appropriate tense and correct syntactic form. In terms of tense use, Swales (1990:154) offers the following examples:

1. Malcolm pointed out that there is both constraint and choice in tense usage.
2. Malcolm has pointed out that…
3. Malcolm points out that…

Here, the shift from using the past tense to present perfect to present simple tense, according to Swales, cannot be accounted for by the traditional time-based grammar rules. Rather, it implies the writer's rhetorical purposes, e.g. using the past tense to place the cited information in a historical context and afterwards to prepare for critical discussion. This pragmatic level of tense usage of reporting verbs, which is barely mentioned in EAP course books (appendix 3), is unfamiliar to novice writers, especially to L2 learners. Hinkel (2004), for instance, conducted a contrastive study on the usage of English tense and voice in student essays between L1 and L2 writers, in which she concluded that even advanced L2 writers may not be made aware of the conventional rules of tense use in academic writing.

In order to incorporate the cited information into the text, a reporting verb often appears as part of a lexical phrase in the reporting statement. This fundamental element of academic texts which

indicates the competence level of a writer, however, is pointed out to be problematic. In Schmitt and Li's longitudinal case study (2009), they investigated the employment of lexical phrases in a Chinese student's assignments over one academic year in regard to source of acquisition and appropriateness which was judged on by an eligible panel. They suggested that although there showed sign of improvement across time, the student tended to depend on a small group of already known lexical items. Similarly, by comparing L1 and L2 corpora, Granger (1998:148) found overuse of certain collocations in L2 essays and refers to them as learners' "safe bets". Previous studies have shown that it is beneficial to analyse learner corpora in that it can highlight students' specific problems as well as track their development over time to have insightful pedagogical implications.

3.4 Acquisition of Reporting Verbs

The acquisition of reporting verbs can be accounted for by two major approaches to learning vocabulary, i.e., intentional and incidental learning (Nation, 2001). The distinction lies in whether the focus is directly on enhancing learners' vocabulary knowledge or vocabulary acquisition is treated as a by-product of the language learning activity mainly through the process of extensive reading. On the significance of intentional learning in vocabulary acquisition, Nation (2001:34) particularly insists:

> *The constraints on vocabulary use are more closely related to meaning and would benefit more from explicit learning. That it, the teacher and learner should discuss where and when certain words should not be use.*

The relationship between these two approaches is a complementary one. Schmitt (2008) goes further to maintain that some aspects of word knowledge are specifically responsive to explicit learning such as the form and meaning of a word; while other aspects particularly those which requires the context being taken into account for interpretation as with word register and collocation, seem to be acquired only through sufficient amount of exposure. In other words, the mastery of vocabulary requires a good balance between explicit teaching and incidental learning.

Vocabulary learning is recognised as an incremental process (Schmitt, 2000; Nation, 2001), with the acquisition of reporting verbs being no exception. In order to know a word not just on the recognition level but on a productive one as in speaking and writing, learners need to acquire the depth of vocabulary knowledge. Craik and Lockhart (cited in Hulstijn and Laufer, 2001), for instance, argue for the engagement with vocabulary acquisition. They maintain that it is the depth

of processing rather than the length of time spent in learning a word that determines vocabulary proficiency. That is to say, the more engaged one is in vocabulary learning, the more likely they are going to manipulate a word. To provide a further explanation, Hulstijn and Laufer (2001) take a cognitive perspective and address the importance of depth of processing. From the stage of "need", to "search", and finally to "evaluation" reveals a progressive process to the advanced level of vocabulary acquisition (Hulstijn and Laufer, 2001:539). Based on their scheme, the last stage requires a learner to successfully employ a lexical item in a text. To choose a suitable reporting verb in academic writing and meanwhile to use it in a proper manner, therefore, involve one's active engagement with vocabulary learning and consideration of the context.

In view of the complexity of reporting verbs and the central role they play in academic writing as the literature has uncovered, it would be necessary to understand how Chinese students deal with reporting verbs in their assignments, what problems they would encounter during the process, and how they learn about reporting verbs.

Chapter 4

Design of the Study

This chapter describes the design of the present study. The first section presents the research questions emerging from the literature review. Then, the justification of the methodological approach and research methods comes afterwards. Next, participants' information, data collection procedure and analysis are revealed. The last section addresses the ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

4.1 Research Aim and Questions

The present study aims to investigate two Chinese students in terms of their development of use of reporting verbs in their assignments over the course of one academic year. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do the Chinese students' uses of reporting verbs develop over time?
2. What are the problems with the use of reporting verbs for the Chinese students?
3. What are the Chinese students' sources of acquisition for reporting verbs?

4.2 Methodological Approach

The paradigm employed in the present study is interpretivism since it tries to make sense of human experience from a subjective perspective (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Thomas, 2009), which is believed to be appropriate for my research considering its objective to understand individual behaviours through the eyes of the participants. In order to attain an in-depth understanding of individual development, the case study approach was adopted. A case study, according to Thomas (2009), involves research into a single or a small number of cases in detail with the intention to clearly understand them which agrees with the aim of the present one. Although findings from case studies can hardly be generalized, nor should it be, they provide insights into specific contexts thereby suggesting interpretation of other similar cases (Nisbet and Watt as cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007).

4.3 Research Methods

In order to acquire rich data from a particular situation which is determined by the nature of case studies, it is necessary to examine it from different perspectives through different research methods. The mixed methods approach, or the triangulation of two or more methods, is based on

the idea that "viewing from several points is better than viewing from one" (Thomas, 2009:111). This approach is believed to help researchers make more reliable decisions by reducing the probable bias derived from single method (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Thomas, 2009). Data of the present study came from three research methods, i.e., content analysis, interview, and questionnaire.

4.3.1 Content analysis

To answer the research questions concerning the individuals' development of and problems with reporting verbs, it is best to examine their written products, i.e., student assignments, in which reporting verbs occur the most. Content analysis, as the main data collection method for the present study, can provide specific linguistic features and their meanings in context (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). As Bryman (2008:289) emphasises, one of the primary advantages of content analysis is its "unobtrusive" characteristic because the collected content, particularly student assignments, is produced in a normal setting without any reactive effect and not in the knowledge that analysis may be performed on it. This would in turn ensure the relatively high validity of the study.

The first data set for the present study is a corpus of student essays with sufficient presence of reporting verbs. The corpus was designed to consist of essays finished at different points in time which were far apart enough for noticeable development (Thomas, 2009). Additionally, these essays needed to be of similar length and style for fair comparison in terms of the frequency and range of reporting verbs.

4.3.2 Questionnaire

Development of the use of reporting verbs involves judgement on appropriacy. It is reliable to invite experts in the field of EAP writing to do the job. A panel was introduced in this regard to rate the level of appropriate use. As Bryman (2008) suggests, it is efficient to use questionnaire for the collection of scales of data which was the main purpose of the employment of such method for the present study.

Questionnaires for the panel were designed with rating scales from "appropriate", to "acceptable", to "not acceptable" next to each occurrence of reporting verbs. Specific comments on problems were required for those rated as "not acceptable".

4.3.3 Interview

Interview was employed to reinforce the data from content analysis and to further understand the students' experience of the use and acquisition of reporting verbs. As interviews enables participants to respond in a more intimate manner (Thomas, 2009), they can reveal the process in which the student assignments were composed and might provide unexpected response which the written products fail to expose. The semi-structured interview format was adopted to ensure freedom yet with reasonable control (Thomas, 2009). It allowed me to explore in more depth the participants' writing experience whenever necessary during the interview process without strictly adhering to the prepared question list.

The interview questions in the present study were mainly divided into two parts. The first part was related to the participants' background information, e.g., their IELTS writing bands, and the EAP courses they had attended to prior to or during the master's programme, since the context might be crucial to the understanding of findings. The second part of interview dealt with students' specific opinions on the idea of reporting verbs and their own experience of using them while writing the assignments. The interviews were designed to be carried out after analysis was conducted on both the essays and questionnaires. The idea was to include meaningful text specific questions but not to inform the students of the findings. All questions were kept as open as possible to elicit unbiased responses.

The three data sets from the three different research methods enable relatively reliable and valid answers to the research questions. The written content provided primary source on which the interviews and questionnaires were based. The latter methods in turn assisted in understanding the texts from useful perspectives.

4.4 Participants

Given the aim of the present study, the main participants are two Chinese master's students (pseudonyms JM and HL) doing the one-year TESOL programme at the University of Exeter in the UK. They are native Chinese speakers with the same bachelor's degree in business English. The major difference between them is that HL took the pre-sessional EAP courses while JM did not because she had met the required IELTS level. The reason for choosing them was that they might share some similarities due to their similar background, also differences might be found in their essays since they had different IELTS scores and EAP exposure to start with. Additionally, a panel of two members was introduced to my study to judge on the appropriacy of use of reporting verbs

in the student assignments. They are both considered to be experts in the field of EAP with the same research interest in the development of L2 students' academic literacy, of who one is a lecturer in TESOL the other is a PhD student.

4.5 Data Collection Procedure

This section describes the procedure of piloting and actual data collection.

4.5.1 Piloting

Pilot studies were conducted on both the content analysis and interview. The major problem when I did the analysis on my own three assignments was the identification of reporting verbs. It was difficult to distinguish a reporting verb from the verb that does not function as reporting, and sometimes a reporting verb may appear in a sentence with no clear reference to be made. A clear guideline for the identification was established based on piloting and is detailed in 4.6.1. In addition, the interview questions were tested out on one of my peer students in MEd TESOL who bears close similarity to the participants. Some changes were made to keep the questions as open as possible and the technique of probing was improved to get the interviewees to elaborate on their answers.

4.5.2 Data collection

There are three data sets for the present study. The first one is a corpus with three assignments each from the two Chinese students which were finished respectively at the beginning, middle, and end of the one academic year. They are of similar length and style from three elective modules. All assignments were collected in both electronic forms and printed copies with marks and lecturers' feedback. Once the six assignments were received, they were tagged as JM-1 (appendix 7), JM-2, JM-3, HL,-1, HL-2, and HL-3, also the cover pages, bibliographies and appendixes were deleted.

The second data set came from the questionnaire feedback from the panel. Once the corpus was built, all occurrences of reporting verbs in the assignments were highlighted and afterwards included in the questionnaires (appendix 8). The panel was informed of the aim of the study and the basic idea of reporting verbs to ensure consensus before they completed the questionnaires. The questionnaires along with the highlighted assignments were sent to the panel by email and were collected once they finished them.

One-on-one recorded interviews with the two participants were carried out after analysis was conducted on both the assignments and feedback from the panel. The interviews were in Chinese to ensure that the students could clearly express their ideas. They were required to go through their assignments with highlighted occurrences of reporting verbs before text specific questions were asked. The two interviews were immediately transcribed once finished (appendix 9).

4.6 Data Analysis

Once the corpus was established, identification of the reporting verbs was necessary before further analysis could be carried out. The next two sections describe the detailed procedure of identification and subsequent data analysis.

4.6.1 Identifying the reporting verbs

The following procedures were taken to identify all the reporting verbs from the student essays:

1. Highlight sentences with references and the follow-on sentences where the subject pronouns refer to the aforementioned subjects.
2. Identify reporting verbs from the highlighted sentences.
3. Go through the rest of the essays for other reporting statements with the presence of reporting verbs and highlight them.

It is easy to identify reporting verbs from clearly referenced sentences (if they have any), which accounted for the majority of the highlighted sentences in the corpus. Yet care was taken with follow-on sentences where the previously cited author appears in the form of a subject pronoun without the repetition of a reference, and where a reporting verb may be employed:

> 1. According to Goodman (1967), this process focuses on how learners use their previous knowledge to master the new message. He called it "knowledge based processing"(HL-1).

Example 1 above is from HL-1 and was considered to be reporting due to a clear reference and the use of an adjunct of reporting, i.e. "according to" in the first sentence. The reporting verb "called", however, appears in the following sentence, which begins with "he" referring back to Goodman. In addition, in sentences where clear references are made, it is necessary to distinguish reporting verbs from verbs that are used in the reported information:

> 2. According to Raimes (1983:6), speech was highlighted in the 1950s to early 1960s when the audio-lingual approach dominated second-language learning and writing, for its focus on grammatical and syntactic accuracy, acted as promoter of speech (JM-1).

3. Product approach emphasizes the form of the finished product (Richard, 1990) (JM-1).

Both examples above are reporting and obvious citations with the presence of references, but they do not feature any reporting verbs. Instead, in example 2 the writer employs another reporting signal, i.e. adjunct of reporting as revealed in "according to". As Bloch (2010:220) argues, "reporting verbs cannot be inherently classified as such but rather as words that in the particular rhetorical context are used to report on claims by the writer or of other authors". The verbs in example 2, i.e. "was highlighted", "dominated", "focus on", "acted", are determined by the fact being reported rather than by the nature of reporting itself, likewise the verb "emphasizes" in example 3 does not function as a reporting verb.

As previously discussed, reporting statements could be sentences with no reference as reporting may be signalled by any of the elements, i.e. reporting verbs, reporting nouns, reporting adjectives, and reporting adjuncts, or a combination of them (see 3.1.1). Since the present study merely focus on the most prominent reporting signal, i.e. reporting verbs, only reporting sentences with reporting verbs were identified and highlighted. The following examples illustrate good examples of this instance:

4. In recent years, the positive side of process approach also has been widely realized and accepted (JM-1).
5. However; the disadvantages of podcasting also have been realized by some other researchers (JM-2).

Although there is no reference in these two examples, they are considered to be general reporting statements with clear signals of "some other researchers" functioning in example 5 as a reporting noun, and "has been widely realized and accepted", "have been realized" as reporting verbs.

The last concern over identification of reporting verbs is raised by Swales (1990). He indicates that the verbs "find" and "be associated with" are problematic as they can be read in mainly two ways depending on whether they are interpreted as reporting or not (Swale, 1990:150). Similar problem was encountered during the identification process, yet particularly with the verb "define" in the corpus:

6. Cognitive strategies are defined as 'operating directly on incoming information', then transforming them to make sense (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) (HL-1).

There are at least three possible readings to the example provided above:

6-a. Cognitive strategies are defined by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) as …

6-b. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) define cognitive strategies as …

6-c. Cognitive strategies are … (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

The verb "define" in the first two interpretations apparently functions as a reporting verb. Alternatively, the statement could be read without it as is shown in the last interpretation. The present study considered example 6 and similar instances with the verbs "treat" and "regard", which only accounted for a small number of cases, as reporting verbs simply because there seems to be more possible ways to read them as such. Altogether there were 175 tokens of reporting verbs identified from the corpus. All occurrences have been listed in the questionnaires (appendix 8).

4.6.2 Analysing the three data sets

Data analysis of the present study integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative analysis of the student assignments yielded frequencies of tokens and types of reporting verbs, and proportion of the most frequently employed items against tokens of each assignment (see table 5.3 in 5.2). The occurrences of reporting verb which both members of the panel agreed on as appropriate use against tokens of each assignment generated the percentage of appropriacy (see figure 5.1 in 5.2). Coding the panel's comments into categories revealed the broad patterns in terms of the students' problems with the use of reporting verbs (see tables 5.4 and 5.5 in 5.3). Interview data was analysed to support or explain findings derived from the other two data sets (appendix 9).

4.7 Ethical Considerations

Before any data was collected, consent forms were signed by the participants after they were clearly informed of the purpose and procedure of the study. The two Chinese students were given pseudonyms and assured that measures would be taken to prevent them from being identified from their assignments. Given the sensitivity of the research question concerning the problems with the use of reporting verbs, text specific interview questions were kept as open as possible to minimize the discomfort of the students. Additionally, they were made aware of their rights to withdraw from participation at any stage of the research.

4.8 Limitations of the Study

The major deficit inherent in case study is the fact that it cannot be generalized (Thomas, 2009). The case with two participants may hardly be representative to account for the general development of use of reporting verbs of Chinese students. The insight a case study can provide, however, could assist interpretation of similar cases (Nisbet and Watt as cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Another limitation specific to the present study was the design of interviews. Interviews could have been better carried out immediately after the students submitted their assignments in which case they would more clearly recall their experience. Solution to this problem was to require the students to go through the highlighted assignments before text specific questions were asked. The last limitation came from the panel who did not agree on every single item they rated. Yet except for the minority, they had consensus on the broad patterns.

<center>**Chapter Five**</center>

<center>**Results and Discussion**</center>

The aim of this case study is to investigate the development of use of reporting verbs in two Chinese students' assignments over the course of one academic year. In this chapter, findings based on the data collection and analysis are presented and afterwards discussed in relation to previous research. Interpreting the three data sets, i.e., a corpus of six student assignments, questionnaire feedback from the panel, and interview transcripts, has led to the following themes which will be presented in turn. These are:

1. Development of the use of reporting verbs
2. Problems with the use of reporting verbs
3. Source for the acquisition of reporting verbs

Relevant aspects of the participants' background information are first addressed in the next section.

5.1 Background Information

This section provides the background information of the two Chinese participants, i.e., HL and JM, in terms of their experience of learning English, educational backgrounds, IELTS writing scores, and weeks of attendance at the pre-sessional course.

Table 5.1 Participants' background information

Participant	Years of Learning English	Educational Background	Hours of instruction of EAP in Chinese universities	IELTS Writing Band	Weeks of attendance at INTO
JM	13 years	B.A. in Business English	0	6.5	0
HL	13 years	B.A. in Business English	0	5.5	10

As shown in table 5.1, the two participants have similar backgrounds in that they both have been learning English for 13 years and have graduated in business English in China. Neither of them had the experience of learning EAP before they took IELTS. The differences between them lie in their

IELTS writing scores and exposure to English academic writing. JM had a higher score in IELTS writing (6.5 as compared to 5.5), and did not attend the pre-sessional course prior to her entry to the master's programme. HL, by contrast, had a lower ability in academic writing to begin with based on his IELTS score, but has attended the 10-week pre-sessional courses. HL therefore was likely to have more experience in learning EAP. It seems difficult to compare their academic writing skills at the start of the one academic year.

Table 5.2 Participants' assignment scores

Assignment	JM-1	JM-2	JM-3	HL-1	HL-2	HL-3
Score	57	62	63	62	74	63
Mean score	60.7			66.3		

The table above shows the specific scores of the two Chinese participants' three assignments chosen from the beginning, the middle, and the end of the TESOL programme. Additionally, their respective mean scores are provided which suggest that although with a comparatively lower IELTS writing score to begin with, HL in general appears to perform better during the course. The above mentioned distinctions may be arguably reflected in the subsequently addressed aspects in terms of the two students' development of and problems with the use of reporting verbs.

5.2 Development of the Use of Reporting Verbs

The quantitative analysis of the student assignments and questionnaire feedback from the panel have yielded the first theme of the findings in regard to the overall development of the use of reporting verbs of these two Chinese participants over time.

*Figure 5.1 Summary of appropriacy judgments*
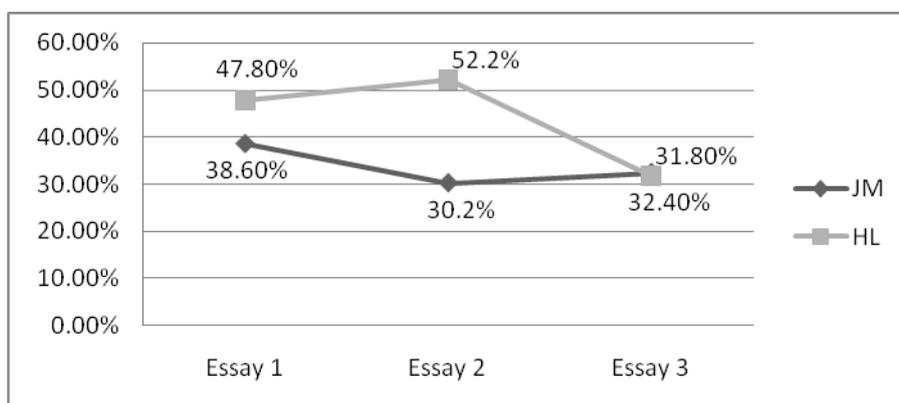
Table 5.3 Overall development of use of reporting verbs

Assignment	Tokens	Types	Most frequently employed reporting verbs in rank order		Percentage of the most frequently used reporting verbs
JM-1	44	17	Suggest (10) say (5) claim (4)	point out (4) express (4)	61.4%
JM-2	30	10	Point out (8) say (5) claim (4)	suggest (3) argue (3)	76.7%
JM-3	34	8	Say (13) point out (7) suggest (6)	describe (4)	88.2%
HL-1	23	11	Believe (5) state (4) claim (3)	mention (2) define (2)	69.6%
HL-2	22	11	mention (6) state (3) claim (3)	find (3)	68.2%
HL-3	22	12	mention (6) summarize (3) explain (2)	treat (2) find (2)	68.2%

5.2.1 Findings

Figure 5.1 above presents the percentage of appropriate use of reporting verbs in each assignment rated by the panel. What is immediately obvious is that, HL in general outperformed JM across the essays. In addition, in spite of fluctuation, both students' performances declined in regard to appropriacy at the end of the academic year, particularly that of HL from 47.8% to 31.8%.

Table 5.3 shows the overall development of the two students' use of reporting verbs in terms of frequencies of tokens and types, as well as the specific reporting verbs with most occurrences and the percentage of their occurrences against tokens of each assignment. It is apparent that in JM's last two assignments and HL's overall ones, the top 5 or 4 items constitute more than two thirds of the total tokens of respective essay. This increasing tendency towards using the most frequently employed reporting verbs is especially revealed across JM's essays from 61.4% to as much as 88.2%. As far as frequency is concerned, there is a clear decrease in both the tokens and types of reporting verbs in JM's writing; HL, on the other hand, tended to be quite stable with his usage of

reporting verbs over the course. To account for such tendency, JM attributed it to the factor of feeling "safe and comfortable" with the ones she was familiar with:

> *"I didn't know which reporting verb to choose from to begin with. I had to refer to the list (provided in the in-sessional course) when I was doing the first few assignments. I couldn't even remember using some of the reporting verbs in my first assignment when I was going through it. I think I was testing out the items on the list, but as it went on, I didn't need it anymore and only used the ones that I felt safe and comfortable with."*

HL commented similarly on his consistent use of reporting verbs:

> *"I didn't consciously control the range of reporting verbs when I was doing the assignments. I tended to trust only a few reporting verbs that I was familiar with. Even though I was taught some new verbs, it just read more smoothly with the old ones."*

When asked about the first time they used reporting verbs, HL indicated that it was in the last assignment of the pre-sessional course which was prior to JM's first experience with JM-1 which was finished at the beginning of the master's programme.

5.2.2 Discussion

The declining rate of appropriacy in both students' assignments indicates that they performed less successfully at the end of the academic year. Although there exists no set rule on the range of reporting verbs one should use in academic writing, it could be seen that the two students restricted themselves to a limited repertoire of lexical choices due to the high proportion of the most frequently used ones. (Hyland and Milton, 1997; Granger, 1998; Schmitt and Li, 2009; Davis, 2013). This is particularly the case with JM with a growing dependence on a few known reporting verbs over time. Triangulating findings of the appropriacy rate and overall frequency development points to the fact that it shows no sign of development of the employment of reporting verbs with these two Chinese students over the course of one academic year.

While Schmitt and Li (2009; see 3.3.2) found evidence of a student's better mastery with lexical phrases in their longitudinal case study, the two participants in the present study showed no improvement in using reporting verbs over time. The fundamental belief that vocabulary learning is incremental in nature (Schmitt, 2000; Nation, 2001) seems to be challenged. It is arguably true, however, that learning lexical phrases, to some extent, is different from the acquisition of reporting verbs. On the one hand, there appears to be more chances for students to be exposed to

lexical phrases on a daily basis which leads to a much better chance of mastery, while the use of reporting verb is more likely to happen in the exclusive setting of academia. On the other hand, as pointed out by both of the Chinese students in the study, the idea of reporting verb is comparatively new to them as they received little instruction on EAP with little experience of academic writing during their bachelor's studies in China. It is possible that given a longer period of time, the two students may show signs of improvement in their uses of reporting verbs.

Taking the counter-argument into consideration might as well shed some light on the students' development. As one of the most common features in academic writing, making reference to the source materials with the signal of reporting verbs is presumably familiar to master's students. During the process of practice with assignment writing and of getting gradual exposure in various academic settings, they might be expected to show some improvement in their essays across time. Findings of the present study, however, suggest the opposite direction which echo those of Davis (2013; see 3.3.1), whose participants failed to show any sign of development either in terms of source use. One possible explanation, as Davis points out, relates to the lack of instruction and support during their studies in the master's programme which will be addressed and discussed in great detail in the following section (see 5.4.2) associated with the source of acquisition.

Another finding of the present study is that HL outperformed JM in using reporting verbs as he had generally higher rate of appropriacy. It might be that HL was relatively early introduced to the idea of incorporation of sources at INTO as the course book suggests (appendix 3), and he had his first experience in using reporting verbs prior to that of JM. As briefly discussed in the background section (see 5.1), HL's more experience in EAP may have contributed to his better but not yet competent performance in manipulating reporting verbs as well as to his higher essay mean score.

In their assignments, both students showed a restricted range of lexical choices and tended to employ only the reporting verbs that they felt "safe and comfortable" with. This idea reiterates what Granger (1998:148; see 3.3.2) refers to as students' "safe bets", as they are reluctant to try out new lexical items which might possibly run the risk of making errors. As is proved by the present study, however, this strategy does not necessarily lead to more successful usage in that students might not even be aware of the appropriate use of items which they assume they have mastered. The limited range indicates their uncertainty in how to effectively use reporting verbs in academic writing.

To further understand the two Chinese students' uses of reporting verbs and the obstacles to their development, specific problems have been identified and discussed in the following section.

5.3 Problems with the Use of Reporting Verbs

In addition to judging on the appropriate use of reporting verbs, the panel was as well requested to give brief comments on those which they rated as not acceptable. Coding the comments into categories has revealed the broad patterns of problems in regard to the students' uses of reporting verbs.

Table 5.4 Problems with reporting verbs in JM's assignments

Comments from the panel	Number of occurrences			Examples
	JM-1	JM-2	JM-3	
Incorrect register	4	5	13	Raimes (1983:11) *says* that writing is a valuable learning tool for our students (JM-1).
				However; as Luoma (2004) *said*, assessing speaking is challenging (JM-3).
Meaning too strong for context	4	4	0	White *claims* (1988:15) that our focus should be shifted from product to process so as to...(JM-1)
				SZE (2006) also *claims* that podcasting is a motivating way for students to...(JM-2)
Incorrect tense	0	12	13	Furthermore, Palmer and Devitt (cited in Abdous, Facer and Yen, 2011) *argued* that podcasting leads to...(JM-2)
				Luoma (2004) also *said* that the specifications contain the test developers' definition of the construct and...(JM-3)
Incorrect syntactic forms around reporting verbs	5	10	9	And Richard (1990) *expressesthat* this is referred to as the product approach since...(JM-1)
				As Li and Walsh (2010) *point out that* computer technologies have played a positive role in...(JM-2)

Table 5.5 Problems with reporting verbs in HL's assignments

Comments from the panel	Number of occurrences			Examples
	HL-1	HL-2	HL-3	
Meaning not strong enough for context	0	4	6	While, Box (2003) still *mentions* that if the technology could become invisible, it would...(HL-2)
				Douglas (2010) *mentions* that when the more suitable items for assessing abilities are, the more suitable candidates will...(HL-3)
Meaning too strong for context	2	0	0	Vandergrift (2004) *claims* listening comprehension is a complex process. (HL-1)
Incorrect tense	5	2	2	In this aspect, Vandergrift (1997) *mentioned* that teacher is almost impossible to...(HL-1)
				Therefore, experts (Hughes, 2003; Alderson, 2000, P. 119) *offered* some guidelines about selecting appropriate texts (HL-3).

5.3.1 Findings

Tables 5 and 6 above present the two students' main problems with the use of reporting verbs based on the panel's comments. In terms of frequencies of occurrence, it is noted that while HL's problems tended to be quite stable across his essays (with 7, 6, and 8 instances in each essay); JM's writing, on that other hand, displayed a growing tendency over time from 13 to as many as 35 instances. Specific problems can be summarized into three aspects, i.e. verb choice, tense choice, and the syntactic form of the reported statement.

In general, there are more problems with JM's assignments than with those of HL. In regard to verb choice, the main problem in JM's essays is concerned with incorrect register as with the verb "say" which accounts for the majority of the total in this category with 22 occurrences across her 3 assignments. The second one is with "claim" which is considered to apply too strong meaning to the contexts. HL's main problem, on the contrary, is using the verb "mention" in an argument in which a reporting verb with stronger evaluative function should have been employed.

The equally serious problem in JM's essays is to do with tense choice with 25 occurrences mainly in relation to the verb "say". The same problem was identified in HL's writing but with significantly fewer occurrences (9). In terms of the problem with syntax of the reported statement which is exclusive to JM, she was found to mistakenly use the lexical phrases "express (+ that)" and "as...+

verb (+ that)", the latter in particular which appeared throughout her three assignments. Examples are also presented in the tables next to each category.

When asked about the general difficulty in the use of reporting verbs in the interview, JM responded without a doubt, "I don't think it's difficult (to use reporting verbs), not at all. I mean I have developed a range of reporting verbs that I constantly use." HL, on the hand, expressed his concern:

> *"I found it most difficult to make sense of the meanings of reporting verbs.*
> *It's not that I don't know the verb, but the subtle difference in meaning*
> *between each verb is confusing."*

In regard to the general rule on reporting verb choice, JM seemed to be quite clear about why she chose a certain item over another. According to JM, reporting verbs can be classified into three categories, i.e., "what the author says, what the author describes, and argues". She proceeded, "In most cases, the author just makes a statement in a normal manner." HL, however, appeared to focus more on his own stance towards the reported information when choosing a particular reporting verb which is to "maintain neutral and objective".

The two Chinese students also responded to the text specific questions. When speaking of their preferences for the specific reporting verbs (the most problematic ones as indicated by the panel), HL accounted for his usage of "mention" with the similar intention to be objective; while JM explained:

> *"As I said, in most cases, the author is just making a statement in a normal*
> *manner. It doesn't have a clear sign of arguing. So that's why I used 'say' a*
> *lot. As for the verb 'claim'...I'm not sure, but if I have used 'say' in the last*
> *(reported) sentence, I would consciously avoid repetition and use 'claim'*
> *and maybe another one instead."*

Despite the serious problem with tense use revealed from JM's assignments, surprisingly, she seemed to be aware of the general rule on tense choice. As for the frequently occurred error with the syntactic form "as...+ verb (+ that)", she were unaware of it as she only commented on the acquisition of this lexical pattern without noticing the error when asked about her idea on such use.

5.3.2 Discussion

The problems revealed from the two Chinese students' assignments echoes the view that the employment of reporting verbs is a challenge for L2 students (Thompson and Ye, 1991; Wette, 2010; Davis; 2013). It seems that the specific problems identified by the panel can be accounted for by the findings of previous research. JM's heavy dependence on the verbs "say" and "claim", for example, is accord with Hyland and Milton's comment on L2 writers' incompetence in employing appropriate lexical items in academic writing which are supposed to be tentative and of formal register (Hyland and Milton, 2007; see 3.3.1). While JM preferred an authoritative tone in her writing, HL, on the contrary, chose to use "mention" to be neutral and impersonal in statements where a reporting verb with a stronger intonation should have been employed. It could be reasonably inferred that the evaluative aspect of reporting verbs is not yet acquired by the participants (Thompson and Ye, 1991; Swales and Feak, 2004). This idea along with the student' awareness in relation to reporting verbs are furthered discussed based on the participants' accounts in the interviews.

In spite of the increasing problems across her assignments, JM seemed quite satisfied with her use of reporting verbs since she made the statement that she did not find it difficult. In addition, her seemingly systematic knowledge of reporting verbs based on her idea of classification is questionable. It could be clearly seen that she was not aware of the difference between "say" and "claim" as she replaced one with the other simply for the sake of avoiding repetition.

What is interesting about JM's accounts is the fact that the above mentioned problems in her assignments were caused by her unconsciousness, the tense errors, however, could be hardly explained by the same reason since she knew the rule yet was reluctant to follow it. Instead, JM ignored what she was told in class and made a rather reckless decision to use the past tense without any justification except for the purpose of easiness:

> "*I remember from the in-sessional course that past tense is used when the claim is not widely accepted; otherwise present tense would be used. But I didn't really pay attention to it when I was writing. I don't think tense is that important. It's confusing to switch between different tenses so I just completely changed the reporting verbs to past tense in the last few assignments. It's easier to do that.*"

It is suggested that although JM was aware of the mistake, she failed to be made salient the important role a reporting verb plays in academic writing. Instead, she might focus more on other

aspects of writing which was indicated by the fact that she did not seem to engage herself enough to pay close attention to her use of reporting verbs when she was doing her assignments. In this regard, the insufficient depth of processing might explain her constantly occurred errors (Craik and Lockhart as cited in Hulstijn and Laufer, 2001; see 3.4).

In contrast with JM, HL appeared to attach more importance to his verb choice as he was aware of the fact that there exist subtle differences in meanings across reporting verbs. Although his interpretation of being "neutral and objective" in academic writing might not be necessarily proved acceptable as a successful writer also needs to communicate their own points of view (Thompson and Ye, 1991; Swales and Feak, 2004), he seemed to at least show involvement in the attempt to make sense of the reporting verbs he used.

5.4 Source for the Acquisition of Reporting Verbs

The last theme in relation to the participants' source for learning reporting verbs emerged from the interpretation of the interview data.

5.4.1 Findings

In general, both of the Chinese students in the study have pointed out instruction on reporting verbs in class and academic reading as two main acquisition sources. As for JM, she only explicitly learnt about reporting verbs at one in-sessional course in which she was offered a list of reporting verbs along with the classification based on functions and strengths, the integration of different reporting verbs into texts, and some rules on tense use (appendix 4). HL attended the same course yet he was briefly introduced to these devises earlier at the pre-sessional course (appendix 3). They both mentioned that academic reading is an important source. HL, for example, elaborated on his experience of learning reporting verbs through extensive reading:

> *"I found it most helpful to learn about reporting verbs from reading academic texts. I have two lists of reporting verbs - one from INTO, the other from the in-sessional course. They are useful but I don't think I've got enough exercises in class. I mean teaching a list of items in one go is too much. I prefer reading. It provides specific contexts from which meanings of reporting verbs can be clearly revealed. Also I found it more reliable to pick up reporting verbs from published academic articles."*

Likewise, JM clearly recalled two lexical items she had learned as a result of reading which were "point out" and "as…+ verb (+ that)". When asked to evaluate the effectiveness of direct

instruction and academic reading in terms of the acquisition of reporting verbs, she seemed to be quite satisfied with the word list because "it's fast and convenient".

5.4.2 Discussion

Both intentional and incidental learning took place in the students' process of learning reporting verbs mainly by the forms of direct instruction and extensive reading. The massive amount of exposure to academic texts in particular seems to benefit the vocabulary acquisition for the two participants (Schmitt, 2000; Nation, 2001). Explicit teaching, however, did not seem to be enough as they were only briefly introduced to reporting verbs in class. As HL explained:

> *"What I was offered in class was a list of vocabulary. I am not quite sure about the contexts in which these verbs can be applied to. On top of that, it is impossible to expect students to successfully acquire a whole list of reporting verbs if the teaching is done in one go."*

It is important to be noted that both the pre-sessional and in-sessional courses spent only one session each on teaching reporting verbs. The extent to which students can learn from this single exposure is doubtful. As Hyland and Tse (2007) argue, an effective EAP programme should systematically sequence vocabulary teaching across different sessions with a mix of explicit teaching and incidental learning. The insufficient instruction and support on source use for L2 students is also addressed by Davis (2013, see 3.3.1) which seems to confirm the earlier discussed explanation for the Chinese students' failure in development (see 5.2.2).

Furthermore, the complementary relationship between intentional and incidental learning points out that both approaches are indispensable and some aspects of vocabulary such as word form need to be explicitly made clear to students in order to assist development from recognition to production (Schmitt, 2008; see 3.4). This suggests a possible account for JM's error with the lexical form "as…+ verb (+ that)" which she encountered in reading and mistakenly used it throughout her essays due to the lack of direct instruction.

Further investigation was carried out in the students' marked assignments. Interestingly, it is revealed that lecturers' have provided corrective feedback on their uses of reporting verbs especially on JM's essays, yet neither of them mentioned it as a source. The following example is taken from JM-2:

As Li and Walsh (2010) point out ~~that~~ computer technologies have played a positive role in improving education and reforming curricula all around the world (JM-2).

This is not the only one instance with lecturers' direct correction on JM's errors, it occurred on her verb and tense choices as well. Reasons for her failure in accurately using reporting verbs could be her inadequate engagement (see 5.3.2), or could be the fact that as explicit as corrective feedback might be, it still seems less effective as compared with direct instruction.

5.5 Summary of Main Findings

The present case study has investigated two Chinese students' development of use of reporting verbs from three different perspectives through looking into their assignments over time, interviewing them, and consulting the panel. In light of the research questions, main findings are summarised as follows.

First of all, the two Chinese students' performances declined as far as the appropriate employment of reporting verbs is concerned. Both of them restricted themselves to a small range of lexical choices which indicates their uncertainty and incompetence in using reporting verbs in academic writing. They had showed no sign of development over the course of the one academic year. Additionally, several problems with the use of reporting verbs were found in their assignments including verb choice, tense choice, and the syntax of the reported statement. The important role reporting verbs play in academic writing, their evaluative aspect in particular, was not yet made aware of to the students. Last but not least, instruction and support on source use provided by the academic courses were insufficient which had a direct impact on the students' development.

Chapter 6

Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusion

The last chapter concludes the dissertation with implications for relevant parties, specific recommendations for the teaching and learning of reporting verbs, and for areas of research future studies can look into.

6.1 Implications of the Study

Some implications have arisen from the interpretation of findings. Problems facing the two Chinese students with the use of reporting verbs as suggested by the present study argue for due significance to be attached to this feature of academic writing. For EAP instructors, more instruction and support on source use are required to be provided for L2 students. As to the students themselves, they have to be made aware of the rhetorical functions of reporting and to be sensitive to their lexical choices when introducing citations. For EAP curriculum designers, they should make sure that effective teaching and learning take place over the course of any EAP writing programme.

6.2 Recommendations for the Teaching and Learning of Reporting Verbs

In practical terms, recommendations are put forward in regard to possible ways to fit the explicit teaching of reporting verbs into the EAP classroom as well as to promote effective learning. To begin with, instructors can address the significance of reporting verbs at the very beginning of the course by emphasising their functions and directing students' attention to their different aspects, e.g., classification, evaluative potential, tense choice, and how they are integrated into texts. In this regard, reporting verbs are made salient and students are likely to focus more on the meaningful elements when they are doing academic reading and writing during which their knowledge of reporting verbs can be built up and consolidated. In addition, when introducing a certain item, the anticipated problems with it, which are found to frequently occur in L2 essays by previous studies, should be explicitly identified to learners. As for the actual errors in student assignments, teachers should point them out in due course in effective manners to raise students' awareness, e.g., drawing their attention to the errors rather than correcting them so as to promote the depth of processing which, in turn, contributes to a better chance of acquisition. Last but not least, instruction and support on reporting verbs should be well planned throughout EAP courses, and may be integrated with the teaching of not only writing, but reading, listening, and

speaking as well. Accordingly, assessment and criteria for the use of reporting verbs need to be specified in order to evaluate the outcome.

6.3 Conclusion

The present case study has investigated two Chinese students' uses of reporting verbs over time and found no development in appropriate use in their essays. In addition, the evaluative aspect of these rhetorical devices was not yet made clear to them.Caution must be applied when interpreting this finding as it came from a small-scale study. A more in-depth explanation could be offered by looking at all their assignments and interviews with lecturers. Future studies may follow participants over a longer period of time or examine to what extent students' uses of reporting verbs can benefit from corrective feedback. The present study has provided further understanding of how L2 students deal with reporting verbs in academic writing in which my own awareness of their values and appropriate usage has substantially developed.

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