Explaining Causality in ELT Research Articles Published in Iranian Local and International Journals

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Abstract

Academic phrasebank is a general resource for academic writers. It makes explicit the more common phraseological 'nuts and bolts' of academic writing. One of academic phrasebanks is developed by the University of Manchester. A section in this academic phrasebank is devoted to "Explaining Causality". Thus, this study intends to see how ELT writers explain causality in research articles published in international and Iranian local journals. To meet this end, 100 research articles (50 research articles making 202906 words from the international journal of "*ELT*" published by Oxford University Press and 50 research articles making 384775 words from *"Journal of Teaching Language Skills"* published by Shiraz University Press) were selected. The research articles were analyzed for the linguistic features or structures suggested by the academic phrasebank for the sake of explaining causality. The results suggested that ELT writers of research articles use some of the suggested linguistic features and structures to explain causality in their research articles. The results also suggested that there are some variations in the frequencies of the used linguistic features and structures across two groups of research articles. The results of this study could act as a guide for ELT research articles' writers in using such linguistic features and structures to explain causality in research articles.

Keywords: Academic Phrasebank, Causality, ELT, Local and International Journal, Research Article

1. Introduction

We generally use language to communicate with individuals or groups of individuals. These groups are gathered into communities (Borg, 2003), or what Swales calls 'discourse community' (1990). Swales defines discourse community as a group of individuals with

common goals and purposes and by using methods of communication, they work toward those common goals (1990). Swales (1988, 1990) proposed six defining characteristics for identifying a group of individuals as a discourse community: a) A discourse community has a set of common public goals, b) A discourse community has mechanisms for the communication of its members; in Herrington's (1985) words, it has 'a forum', c) A discourse community uses the shared mechanisms to give feedback and information, d) A discourse community uses and has one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims, e) A discourse community besides its genres, has some specific shared lexis. This is more evident in the development of community specific abbreviations like those ESL, EFL, ESP, in English language teaching. These abbreviations make it hard for any outsider to understand every word in the conversation between two members of a discourse community. These community specific abbreviations are puzzling to outsiders, and f) A discourse community has a critical mass of experts at the center and aspiring novices at the periphery. Membership in a discourse community is gained through entering as an apprentice individual and leaving by death or other involuntary ways. An example of a discourse community is that of an academic community (Swales, 1990), within which there are disciplinary communities.

Connected to disciplinary studies is the notion of genre. Following Swales (1990), every discourse community may use different methods of communication which results in different genres. Many linguists have incorporated the notion of genre (Bhatia, 1993, 1997, 1998; Swales, 1988, 1990) as an aspect of discourse study. Muntigl and Gruber (2005) go a step further and elaborated on genre as having the following characterstics: 1) genres are staged and goal directed, 2) a set of genre realizes all possible contexts of culture, 3) families of genres are related though the borders are fuzzy, 4) patterns of genres form macro genres, and 5) genres

manifestation is in different semiotic modes such as spoken/written language, image, body language and others. Bruce (2003) classifies genres as social and cognitive (cited in Abdi, et. al, 2010, p. 1670). An example of a social genre in academic context is the research article. Ard (1983) notes that the genre of research article developed from the informative letters written by scientists to each other (cited in Swales, 1990, p. 110). At a more precise level, Jalilifar (2009) defines research article as "a piece of writing about a particular subject that is published in a scholarly journal or book for an intended audience. It is representative of accumulated knowledge of a field and also a report of a particular research study" (p. 7). The research article genre can be further sudivided into three sub-genres: a) theoretical, b) review or state-of-art, and c) experimental (Swales, 2004). An experimental research article is a genre in which the developmental stages of a scientific experiment are documented. It usually has a fixed format of sections and subsections of introduction, literature review, method, results, discussion and conclusion. Sometimes some of these sections are merged, introduction with literature review, result with discussion and discussion with conclusion. This research article mostly follows Swales structure of introduction, method, result and discussion (IMRD) (Jalilifar, 2009).

Academic written genres have received noticeable attention within the last three decades especially regarding the use of academic vocabulary (Coxhead, 2012, Coxhead & Byrd, 2007; Durrant, 2016). Academic vocabulary known as sub-technical vocabulary (Young, 1986), semi-technical vocabulary (Farrell, 1990), or specialized nontechnical lexis (Cohen, Glasman, Rosenbaum-Cohen, Ferrara & Fine, 1988) refers to items that are reasonably frequent in a wide range of academic genres but are not common in other kinds of texts (Coxhead & Nation, 2001). To Lillis (2001) and Jordan (1997), academic vocabulary are considered to be more

advanced than the core 2000-3000 words that are typically make up to 80% of the words that students are likely encounter in EAP and ESP texts (Carter, 1998).

Coxhead (2012) studied the perspectives of 14 English as an additional language students studying at a New Zealand university on vocabulary and writing. The students carried out an integrated reading and writing task and then participated in an interview which focused on the perspectives on vocabulary use in reading and writing task. The results showed that students' overall intention to improve their academic vocabulary for their university studies. They intended to use variety of techniques to incorporate academic or technical words into their writing. It was concluded that ESP students need instructions to include of academic vocabulary in writing.

Olinghouse and Wilson (2013) studied the role of vocabulary in writing across three genres. They asked 50 fifth-grade students to write 3 compositions; story, informative, and persuasive. They scored the compositions for several different vocabulary construct; diversity, maturity, elaboration, academic vocabulary, content words, and registers. They found that students used different vocabulary to develop different genres, for example informative composition included more content words than other two composition types. They concluded that students need to get familiar with the list of specific academic vocabulary that are used in developing specific genre.

Durrant (2016) studied the use of academic vocabulary list (D. Gardner & Davies, 2014) in writings of students from different university levels. Students writing texts were students' assignments taken from the British Academic Writing English (BAWE) corpus. The

assignments were written by students from different disciplines. The results suggested that students from different levels and disciplines showed different intentions to include items from the academic vocabulary list. The differences were more evident considering disciplinary variations. The results also suggested that around half of the words have received very little attention. The results showed that small core of 427 items were found to be frequent across most of disciplines. He concluded that a generic productive academic vocabulary does exist, but that it is smaller in scope than the full academic vocabulary list.

Many researchers have made attempts to gather the academic vocabulary that could help in academic writing genres (Coxhead, 2000; Nation, 1990). Nation (2001) groups vocabularies into three groups; high frequency words (covering up to 80% of most texts), academic vocabulary (covering 8% to 10% of academic texts), and technical vocabulary (covering up to %5 of texts). One of the known academic vocabulary list is developed by University of Manchester entitled as "Manchester academic phrasebank". The reviewed literature indicates that most of the studies have focused on providing academic word lists and little attention devoted to the use of these lists in academic writing genres. This lack of studies becomes more evident when it comes to Iranian EFL context. Thus, this study intends to see first how academic phrase bank provided by the University of Manchester is used in ELT research articles (henceforth RA) published in international high impact journals and second to see if there are possible differences between RAs published in Iranian English journals and those published in international journals. Findings of this study could help Iranian EFL writers concerning implementing academic phrase list while RA writing. As the Manchester academic phrasebank includes too much phrases, researchers narrowed down the focus of this study to phrases presenting causality.

1. What are linguistic items used to present causality in ELT RAs published in Iranian local and international journals with respect to Manchester academic phrasebank?

2. What are the possible differences between two sets of RAs concerning presenting causality with respect to Manchester academic phrasebank?

2. Methodology

2.1 Corpus

This study was run on a corpus of 100 ELT RAs. The RAs were published in Iranian local journals and international journals. The first group of RAs were extracted from international journal of "ELT" published by Oxford University Press (50 RAs) making 202906 words. This journal was selected as it is one of the high impact journals in the discipline of ELT and get published by one of the famous universities in English native countries. The second group of RAs were selected Iranian local journal of "Journal of Teaching Language Skills" published by Shiraz University Press (50 RAs) making 384775 words. This journal was selected as it is published by one of the best universities in Iran and it has been granted the status of type A by the Director of Research Office of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. The selected RAs were published in the regular issues of the target journals in the last five years. Particulars of the corpus are as follow:

Table 1

Particulars of the corpus

	Iranian local journal	International Journal
Title of the journal	Journal of teaching Language Skills	Oxford ELT journal
Number of RAs	50	50
Types of RAs	Regular RAs	Regular RAs
Years of publication	2013-2017	2013-2017
Word count	384775	202906

2.2 Framework

To analyze the corpus for the realization of linguistic items that serves the function of causality, Manchester academic phrasebank was used. This phrasebank includes the more general phraseological "nuts and bolts" of academic writing especially RAs and dissertations. This phrasebank was designed by Manchester University for the sake of helping especially non-native speakers of English to write their academic writings especially RAs and dissertation. One section of this phrasebank is devoted to explaining causality. Explaining causality was used as a focus of this study due to the following rationale: Academic works among which is RA involve understanding and providing solution to problem. This is more evident in disciplines with applied nature. In fact, in such disciplines, writers look at the problem as the main motivation to look for possible solutions. The solutions are not possible unless there is a clear analysis of the problem which requires thorough understanding of the causes. Thus, this phrasebank intends to provide useful phrase or words suitable for explaining causes and effects in academic writing especially RAs.

The list of linguistic items for explaining causality suggested by the Manchester academic phrasebank includes:

A. Verbs indicating causality: *cause, lead to, result in, caused by, resulting from, stemming from, stems from, can give rise to*

B. Nouns indicating causality: *causes, consequence, factor, influence, reason*

C. Prepositional phrases indicating causality: *owing to, because of, as a result of, as a consequence of*

D. Sentence connectors indicating causality: *therefore, consequently, because of this, as a result of this*

E. Adverbial phrases indicating causality: *thus, thereby*

2.3 Procedures

The following procedures were taken to carry out this study. First, corpus was collected from the target journals. Second, the corpus was searched for the realizations of linguistic features presenting causality. It is worth mentioning that only IMRD sections of the RAs were searched for the phrases presenting causality. To increase the reliability of analysis, as sample of 10 RAs were checked by two researchers who have published RAs related to the topic of this study. Negotiation and discussion was done on the disagreements concerning the analysis and finally agreements were met. Third, findings were tabulated, compared, contrasted, and discussed across two sets of ELT RAs.

3. Results and Discussion

The corpus was analyzed and the findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2:

Frequencies analysis of causality in ELT RAs (per 1000 words)

Form	Iranian ELT RAs		International ELT RAs	
	Frequency	Per 10000 words	Frequency	Per 10000 words
Sentence connectors indicating causality	272	7.06	104	6.20
Adverbial phrases indicating causality	158	4.10	105	5.17
Verb indicating causality	101	2.62	54	2.66
Nouns indicating causality	162	4.21	37	1.82
Prepositional phrases indicating causality	88	2.28	34	1.67
Total	781	20.27	356	17.52

The results in Table 2 indicate that in both group of ELT RAs, writers practiced using the five forms of presenting causality in writings suggested by Manchester academic phrasebank. This

could indicate the importance of including these forms in courses of teaching writing RAs in ELT. A closer look at the results could help reaching the following conclusions: First: writers of ELT RAs published in Iranian local journals prefer to show causality in more explicit manner using sentence initial positions such connectors and nouns. Second, writers of ELT RAs published in international journals prefer to show causality in an implicit manner using adverbial phrase in different parts of sentence. Third, in both group of ELT RAs, writers showed similar tendencies concerning using verbs indicating causality. Generally, it could be concluded that academic phrasebank is valuable resource that could be included in courses on teaching academic writings especially RA writings.

Table 3

Frequencies analysis of verbs indicating causality in ELT RAs

Verbs	Iranian ELT RAs		International ELT RAs	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Lead to	62	61%	29	54%
Cause	29	29%	14	27%
Caused by	6	6%	3	5%
Stemming from	3	4%	2	4%
Resulting from	0	-	5	9%
Stems from	0	-	2	1%
Total	101	100%	54	100%

According to the results in Table 3, writers of international ELT RAs used only six verbs from the suggested verbs in Manchester academic phrase bank while in ELT RAs written by Iranian writers only four verbs were used (Example 1-6). As it is evident in Table 3, the verb "lead to" ranked first in the frequency compared to other verbs in both sets of RAs. In both corpora, the verb "cause" ranked second in receiving the writers' attention. These similarities in the use of verbs from the Manchester academic phrase bank could be discussed as the verbs "lead to" and "cause" are more clear in presenting the causality compared to other suggested verbs and it

seems that writers of both sets of RAs prefer to ignore progressive form of verbs as it is not common in formal academic writings. The teaching implication could be that; instructors need to include only verbs used in simple form while teaching writing RA to ELT writers.

Example 1: ……… they have the possibility of more varied patterns of interaction during the tests; and this format can ***lead to*** positive wash back in the classroom by encouraging learners to interact together in preparation for the test. (International Writers)

Example 2: Using single unit titles and being less detailed could ***cause*** Persian title to be also shorter in length than their English counterparts. (Iranian Writers)

Example 3: Such digressions could have been ***caused by*** the common belief prior to the instruction that summary writing involved recalling everything in the source text and writing it down in a shorter version, as reported by five out of the six students in the interview. (International Writers)

Example 4: A translation difficulty is ***stemming from*** lexico-grammatical incompatibility between Hebrew and English. (International Writers)

Example 5: Attributions, which are perceived reasons for success and failure are ***resulting from*** self-questioning such as 'Why did I get a poor grade?', have received surprisingly little attention in EFL research. (International Writers)

Example 6: ……… in Europe (Coleman 2006), but, more generally, ***stems from*** the current pre-eminence of English in academic research and publication, particularly in the fields of science and technology. (International Writers)

Table 4

Frequencies analysis of nouns indicating causality in ELT RAs

Nouns	Iranian ELT RAs		International ELT RAs	
	Fre.	Percentage	Fre.	Percentage
Reason	123	76%	8	22%
Factor	18	11%	4	10%
Influence	13	8%	7	19%
Causes	8	5%	18	49%
Total	162	100%	37	100%

The results in Table 4 indicate that four nouns from those suggested in Manchester academic phrase bank were used to indicate causality in both sets of RAs. The nouns are "reason, factor, influence, and cause" (Example 7-10). As it is evident from the results in Table 4, the

percentage of using two of these nouns are significantly different across both sets of RAs. This difference could be due to the preference practiced by writers. Iranian writers of ELT RAs prefer "cause" while international writers prefer "reason". This difference could be due to direct translation of the nouns indicating causality in Persian to "reason" in English. Thus, instructors need to bring the writers' attention to what nouns used to present causality in English and which one is mostly preferred by international writers in writing ELT RAs.

Example 7: Another ***reason*** is that they seldom begin their titles with prepositions, whereas some English authors do (e.g., *Toward a Taxonomy of Projective Content*). (Iranian Writers)

Example 8: Another ***factor*** which is of importance at the interpersonal level is modality which describes the degree of 'credibility' and 'truthfulness' of a visual text. (Iranian Writers)

Example 9: Another strong ***influence*** is the situation in which the task is carried out. (International Writers)

Example 10: Other ***causes*** which have been found to contribute to Chinese students' low interaction levels were a lack of opportunity to use English for communicative purposes and their lack of English ……… (International Writers)

Table 5

Frequencies analysis of propositional phrases indicating causality in ELT RAs

Prepositional phrase	Iranian ELT RAs		International ELT RAs	
	Fre.	Percentage	Fre.	Percentage
Because of	62	70%	7	20%
As a result of	19	22%	15	44%
As consequence of	7	8%	12	36%
Total	88	100%	34	100%

Table 5 presents the results in relation to the frequencies of prepositional phrases used to show causality in ELT RAs written by Iranian and international writers. As it is evident, three prepositional phrases, "because of", "as a result of", and "as a consequence of" (Examples 15-17), were used. It's worth saying that the attention dedicated to these prepositional phrases was

not same across the two corpora. Iranian writers mostly preferred using "because of" and international writers prefer using "as a result of" and "as a consequence of" more than other prepositional phrases. It seems that Iranian writers of ELT RAs are not aware of the prepositional phrases that are commonly used by international writers or they are now aware of the preferred ones by international writers. Thus, writing RAs' courses should increase Iranian writers' awareness concerning this issue and provide them with the preferred prepositional phrases for presenting causality.

> Example 11: however, ***because of the adoption of facilitator talk***, he was successful in establishing more symmetrical social relationships with his students, resulting in more participation opportunities, which then helped reduce reticence in the classroom. (International Writers)

> Example 12: So, ***as a result of*** elaborating on a topic, the teacher sometimes deprives student contributors of an opportunity to participate in extended dialogue, to develop a topic, and to make explicit their thinking. (International Writers)

> Example 13: ***As a consequence***, RAs published in these journals can appropriately represent the status quo of English and Persian ones in these disciplines. (Iranian Writers)

Table 6

Frequencies analysis of sentence connectors indicating causality in ELT RAs

Sentence connectors	Iranian ELT RAs		International ELT RAs	
	Fre.	Percentage	Fre.	Percentage
Therefore	214	78%	93	89%
Consequently	56	20%	11	11%
Because of this	2	2%	0	%
Total	272	100%	104	100%

The results in Table 6 suggest that four sentence connectors were used from the suggested sentence connectors by Manchester phrase bank by two group of writers. The connectors are "therefore", "consequently", "as a result of this" and "because of this" (Examples 14-17). The results in Table 6 indicate that "therefore" in both corpora received the greatest attention

suggesting that both group of writers used this as it is considered as clear indicators of causality comparing to other options suggested by Manchester academic phrase bank. So, in teaching curriculum for RA writing, writers should understand that international writers prefer this connector over other options.

> Example 14: More specifically, the new objective or goal was to develop the students' communicative competence based on the principles of communicative language teaching. ***Therefore***, all secondary contradictions can be viewed as tertiary contradictions because the new English curriculum was imposed by the Iranian Ministry of Education which is culturally more advanced than the instructional activity system in which language teacher's work. (Iranian Writers)

> Example 15: The findings of Newman and Pintrich are in agreement that students with low self-efficacy are more likely to believe that asking for help will indicate to their peers that they are of low ability. ***Consequently***, they will ask for help much less frequently than their high self-efficacy counterparts who do not believe HS is a reflection on their ability. (International Writers)

Table 7

Frequencies analysis of adverbial phrases indicating causality in ELT RAs

Adverbial phrase	Iranian ELT RAs		International ELT RAs	
	Fre.	Percentage	Fre.	Percentage
Thus	140	88%	89	85%
Thereby	18	12%	16	15%
Total	158	100%	105	100%

Table 7 reports that both groups of writers prefer using "thus" as the head of adverbial phrase (Example 16). This could be discussed based on the fact that both groups of writers prefer this item to indicate causality as it is clear indicator of causality.

> Example 16: DW merely describes the sequences of actions without reference to the details; thus, absolutely, it is not reflective. (Iranian Writers)

If we consider the RAs published in international journals as a control corpus, the findings of this study could help Iranian writers of ELT RAs. The highlighted differences concerning some

items for presenting causality need to be stressed while writing or teaching RA writings in Iranian context. It worth mentioning that academic phrasebanks such one developed by the University of Manchester is developed to answer the need of different disciplines, thus writers need to use those phrases from the list that are stressed by disciplinary studies in their disciplines.

4. Conclusion

This study intended to shed the light on how ELT writers of RAs published in Iranian local and international journals present causality with respect to academic phrasebank developed by Manchester University. Results help to conclude that in both sets of RAs, causality was preferred to be presented using "sentence connectors". If we consider ELT RAs published in International journals of high standard compared to those published in Iranian journals, thus we can conclude that Iranian writers overuse "nouns" and "prepositional phrases "and underuse "adverbial phrases" in presenting causality. Thus, it could be concluded that Iranian writers of ELT RAs need to be aware of these findings to be able to get to the possible standards practiced by writers in presenting causality in RAs published in international journals.

It is deemed necessary to present limitations and suggestions for further studies. First, this study is limit in the corpus size and focus on discipline. Only 100 RAs from two ELT journals were studied which might not be enough to generalize the findings. Thus, further studies on a large corpus from different disciplines could better representative and findings would be generalizable. Second, this study focused on only one kind of academic phrases. Thus, further studies focus on the realizations of other phrases could help to have a better decision on how to include such phrasebank in teaching RA writings.

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