An Analysis of Citations in Chinese English-major Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

1. Introduction

Citations are important rhetorical devices in research writing (Petrić, 2007). Over the past two decades, various studies have investigated L1 and L2 learners' use of citations and have demonstrated that it is a more challenging task for L2 learners to use citations appropriately and effectively since cultural, psychological and educational factors play important roles (Bloch & Chi, 1995; Cumming et al., 2005; Liu, Lin, Kou, & Wang, 2016; Zhang, 2015).

Previous scholars have analyzed the research writing of L2 learners to study and compared the citation competence of different writers and the citation features in different sections of research articles, master's theses and doctoral dissertations (Samraj, 2013; Thompson, 2005a, 2005b). They have tended to focus on the analysis of only one citation feature (Akiko, 2008; Petrić & Harwood, 2013; Planks & Gebril, 2012; Sun, 2016) or more than one citation feature, such as the form and function, without establishing connections between them. These two kinds of analysis cannot fully investigate a writer's citation competence since citation competence is a multi-dimensional construct (Xu, 2016).

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Hu and Wang (2014) and White (2004) have also demonstrated the need to establish a framework to evaluate citation competence. Based on metafunctions in systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994), Xu (2016) argued that the construct of citation competence includes three dimensions − ideational, interpersonal and textual. These three dimensions are closely related, and each citation can reveal writers' citation competence in these three dimensions simultaneously. According to Xu, the analysis of citation competence from a three dimensional perspective can indicate how writers construct their academic identity. It can also reveal some non-discursive features like writers' disciplinary knowledge and professional experience. Therefore, Xu established a framework based on the three dimensions to help researchers and teachers study and improve writers' citation competence from different perspectives. The present study is based on and further expands Xu's framework to analyze the citation features of Chinese English-major master's theses and doctoral dissertations.

Compared with journal articles, master's theses and doctoral dissertations are less explored (Akiko, 2008; Hendley, 2012; Hewings, Lillis, & Vladimirou, 2010; Keck, 2006; Ma & Qin, 2014a; Yu, 2007). Scholars such as Thompson (2005a) and Wette (2017) have argued that doctoral students are experienced writers who are starting to establish their own authoritative voice, while master's students are still inexperienced writers. It is reasonable to assume that doctoral students have higher citation competence than master's students since the expectations and requirements for them are different. Doctoral students in China generally take two years to write their dissertations, while master's students generally take only one year; doctoral students are expected to provide innovative ideas with academic and social value while master's students are required to conduct research independently and propose some new ideas. However, although differences in citation competence may exist, it would be wrong to believe that doctoral students' citation competence in the ideational, interpersonal and textual dimensions is always higher than master's students' competence. Investigating the practices of doctoral and master's students can provide some useful insights to help teachers and supervisors improve the teaching of citation skills.

When writing a thesis or dissertation, master's and doctoral students need to distinguish the functions of each section. Compared with methods and results, literature reviews and discussions are dense with citations to build the present state of knowledge and demonstrate the rationale or significance of a study (Thompson & Tribble, 2001). Literature reviews may have the highest citation density; the functions of literature reviews include establishing a network of previous research to position the writer's own study, pointing out the niche, presenting a theoretical background and building theoretical frameworks (Kwan, Chan, & Lam, 2012; Mansourizadeh & Ahmad, 2011; Tseng, 2018). Discussions may be mainly used to interpret results, compare results against other scholars' claims and present contributions and further actions (Kwan & Chan, 2014; Mansourizadeh & Ahmad, 2011; Samraj, 2013). Although these two sections both have higher citation densities than other sections, citation features might be distributed differently because of the difference in their functions. More data are needed to demonstrate whether and how these different functions influence writers' use of citations.

Through an analysis of the combined and separate corpora of 30 master's theses and 30 doctoral dissertations, this study intends to compare the citation competence of Chinese English-major master's and doctoral students and further explore differences in citation features in the literature review and discussion sections. Based on the expanded framework (Xu, 2016), each citation will be analyzed from the ideational dimension (content), interpersonal dimension (function and writer's stance) and textual dimension (integral and non-integral types) (see Appendix A). The analysis of these four citation features reveals what aspects of research are cited, indicates how writers establish their academic identity, build relationships and interact with the cited scholar and shows whether the cited scholar or the cited information is emphasized (Xu, 2016).

2. Literature review

This section presents definitions and evaluations of citation competence and further reviews previous studies about the citation features in different dissertation sections.

2.1. Definitions and evaluations of citation competence

Citation competence refers to the ability to read, understand and finally integrate the content of the source text into a writer's own research writing (Davis, 2013). It is an important rhetorical ability to position a writer's research in relation to the previous research and build connections between them (Ma & Qin, 2015a; Wang, Yang, & Sun, 2017; Yu, 2007), which is positively related to the quality of the research writing (Ma & Qin, 2014a; Petrić, 2012). High citation competence can not only enable a writer to integrate others' words or findings but also help the writer present the purposes or significance of the research more convincingly, show the findings more persuasively and finally align with a specific research community (Hyland, 1999; Mansourizadeh & Ahmad, 2011).

Citation competence can be evaluated from the analysis of the citation features in the research writing. When previous scholars analyzed citations features, they tended to focus on one kind of citation feature, for example, the citation function, or type, or strategy (Akiko, 2008; Petrić & Harwood, 2013; Plakans & Gebril, 2012; Sun, 2016). Studies such as those of Wette (2017) and Xu (2012) have analyzed more than one citation feature, for example function and type, or strategy and type. Analyses of this kind, however, cannot fully reveal a writer's citation competence because even if they evaluate citations from more than one perspective their framework is too narrow to reveal the connections between citation features. White (2004) also proposed that a larger framework of citation competence should be established in the field of discourse analysis.

With reference to appraisal theory within systemic functional linguistics (Martin & White, 2005), Coffin (2009) focused on the interpersonal dimension of citations and established a framework to evaluate citation competence. This framework aims

at emphasizing how a writer uses citations to build connections and negotiate different voices and views. Coffin further proposed three sub-dimensions to assess citation competence. These three sub-dimensions are "writer's stance, textual integration of source and the nature of the source" (Coffin, 2009, p. 170). Writer's stance refers to the attitude or position of a writer towards the cited text; textual integration of source is related to how the cited text is integrated into the research writing, for example through direct quotation and insertion; the nature of the source is defined as the source of a cited proposition which can be human (e.g., Swales), non-human (e.g., theory) or abstract human (e.g., Swales' theory) (Coffin, 2009). According to Coffin, this framework can evaluate different perspectives of citation competence, and she used this framework to analyze the citations of a doctoral student's dissertation on film studies. Hu and Wang (2014) applied Coffin's framework and revised it to analyze citation competence across disciplines. It should be noted that the original and the revised frameworks were both based on the interpersonal metafunction in systemic functional linguistics.

Xu (2012, 2016) established a framework of citation competence from the ideational, interpersonal and textual meta-functions in systemic functional linguistics. In Xu's framework, the ideational dimension of citation competence is about citing "what"; Xu argued that the content of citations belonged to this dimension. The interpersonal dimension refers to the purposes of employing citations or attitudes towards the cited text, and the function of citations was placed in this dimension. Citation competence in this dimension can demonstrate how writers interact and establish relationships with previous researchers, and further indicate how they construct their academic identity. This competence is crucial, especially in the writing of literature reviews and discussions, since one of the functions of these two sections is to interact with previous scholars, by positioning the study in the academic field and comparing results from the study with previous researchers' claims. The textual dimension relates to the way the information is cited or how sources are placed in the citing sentence.

The frameworks devised by Coffin and Xu both make connections between different citation features and provide a coherent approach to the evaluation of citation competence (Ma & Qin, 2015b). Compared with Coffin's framework, Xu's framework not only focuses on the interpersonal perspective of citations but also the ideational and textual perspectives to present a more comprehensive evaluation of citation competence. It has yielded useful findings when applied to the analysis of applied linguistics theses (Xu, 2016). The present study is based on and further extends Xu's framework, analyzing master's theses and doctoral dissertations in applied linguistics.

2.2. Expansion of the analytical framework

In Xu's (2016) framework, the ideational dimension of citation competence is concerned with the content of citations. Writers are expected cite different types of content in different sections of the research text based on the functions of each section (Kwan & Chan, 2014). The interpersonal dimension is concerned with "citing whom" (Xu, 2016, p. 74). In this dimension, writers need to establish interactive relationships with previous researchers to place their study in a research field. Xu proposed that the function of citations belonged to this dimension since it is concerned with how writers interact with the cited researchers. Finally, the textual dimension is about "how to cite" (p. 74). Writers need to organize the information naturally and reasonably. This dimension is concerned with citation type and placement within citing sentences, because this is related to the way that the cited texts are organized (Xu, 2016). This study further expanded Xu's framework by adding writer's stance into the interpersonal dimension since this citation feature shows the writers' attitudes towards the cited texts, which is closely related to their relationship with the cited researchers.

The analysis of citation competence from three dimensions can indicate writers' disciplinary knowledge, social identity built through socially shared norms and traditions in the academic field and professional experience (Matsuda, 2015; Xu, 2016). The four features in the three dimensions are included because they are important citation features which are frequently analyzed (Akiko, 2008; Hewings et al., 2010). Moreover, after the expansion of the framework, the analysis of the writers' identity, relationships and interactions with the cited researchers is not only supported by the function of citations but also the writer's stance.

2.3. Citations in literature reviews and discussions

The citation features in different sections of research writing may be different, so scholars have compared the cross-sectional citation features in the master's theses, doctoral dissertations and journal articles (Ma & Qin, 2014b; Thompson & Tribble, 2001). Among them, Flowerdew and Li (2007) and Petrić (2007) explored citation features in master's theses and journal articles, specifically in the introduction (including literature review), methodology, results and discussion (IMRD). They argued that the distribution of the citation features was different in these four sections mainly due to the various functions of these sections. Citations in literature reviews serve various functions, which include reviewing and building a network of previous research to position the writer's own study (Mansourizadeh & Ahmad, 2011), pointing out the niche to justify the study (Kwan, Chan, & Lam, 2012), presenting a theoretical background and theoretical frameworks (Tseng, 2018).

These functions are notably different from those of citations located in discussions. In discussions, writers may employ citations to establish connections with previous researchers and interpret their findings (Flowerdew & Li, 2007), compare their findings against previous researchers' claims (Samraj, 2008) and present the extension of the existing research scope (Kwan & Chan, 2014). It may be difficult for L2 postgraduate writers to fully understand the functions of the discussion section and make connections between their findings and previous researchers' findings (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006).

Using citations appropriately in literature reviews and discussions is a challenging and important task for writers (Samraj, 2013). Due to the different functions of these two sections, the distribution features of citations may differ. Although scholars have investigated the citation features in the two sections separately (Petrić, 2007; Thompson & Tribble, 2001), they need to make a detailed comparison between the two sections to examine whether and how the functions of the two sections may influence the use of citations.

Compared with journal articles, master's theses and doctoral dissertations are less explored (Akiko, 2008; Hendley, 2012; Keck, 2006; Ma & Qin, 2014a; Yu, 2007). The differences in citation competence between master's and doctoral students are mostly assumed by scholars without much empirical evidence. Although some studies have shed light on the analysis of master's theses and doctoral dissertations (Kushkowski, Parsons, & Wiese, 2003; Pecorari, 2006), less is known about whether and in what perspectives the citations in them are different. This study aims at comparing the citation competence of Chinese English-major master's and doctoral students, especially their competence in using citations in the literature reviews and discussions. The specific questions are as follows:

(1) To what extent do the citation features in the master's theses differ from those in the doctoral dissertations?
(2) To what extent do the citation features in the literature reviews differ from those in the discussions?

3. The analytical framework of citation features

The following section presents the definitions of content, function, writer's stance and types of citations. Some examples are presented to illustrate the four features.

3.1. Illustration of citation features in the ideational dimension

In the ideational dimension, the content of citations will be analyzed. It requires writers to decide what aspects of the research should be cited. Previous studies have categorized citation content in different ways (Kwan & Chan, 2014; Xu, 2012). This study follows Xu's (2012) division of citation content into six categories, which are research topics, concepts, definitions or terms, theories or models, methodology, results or findings, viewpoints or explanations. A detailed description of each category can be found in Appendix A.

3.2. Illustration of citation features in the interpersonal dimension

The interpersonal dimension of citation features is about showing the authorial identity, building relationships and interacting with previous scholars. Ma and Qin (2015a) pointed out that writers use citations to build their identity and interact with others. Citations also indicate writers' attitudes towards the cited texts. Therefore, the two citation features — function and writer's stance are included in this dimension.

Different scholars have put forward various functions that are suitable for the analysis of their data (e.g., Harwood, 2009; Mansourizadeh & Ahmad, 2011; Petrić, 2007; Samraj, 2013). The current study will analyze the function based on the sub-categories proposed by Cumming et al. (2018) who also analyzed the citations in Chinese English-major students' research writing. The six functions are identified as supporting, defining, application, topic-relevance, disagreement and agreement (see Appendix A). Application is realized when writers apply other scholars' concepts, theories or models in their own studies. For example, in "this study used Swales' (1990) framework to analyze citations", the writers fulfill the application function since they apply Swales' framework in their studies. Topic-relevance is employed to make comparisons between various related studies. It enables writers to establish connections between different studies. For example, in this citation, "similar to Xu (2012), Ma and Qin (2014a) also established a framework of citations", topic-relevance is used to make connections between these two studies.

This research applies Hyland's (1999) widely acknowledged classification of writer's stance. Six categories — acceptance, disagreement, positive, neutral, tentative and critical — are identified (see Appendix A).

3.3. Illustration of citation features in the textual dimension

In the textual dimension, the types of citations are examined since they are related to the way in which the citations are presented, more specifically the source placement in a citing sentence. Swales (1990) first distinguished two types of citations, integral and non-integral citations. Non-integral type refers to the citations including the cited scholar's name and year that are often placed within brackets outside the sentence and play no explicit grammatical role, while integral citations play an explicit grammatical role in the sentence (Thompson & Tribble, 2001). For example, "Swales (1990) first distinguished …"

is an integral citation, because the cited researcher "Swales" is integrated into the sentence. "The division is conducted (Swales, 1990) …" is a non-integral citation since the cited author and the year are not integrated into the sentence. Thompson and Tribble (2001) expanded this distinction by dividing the integral category into verb-controlling and naming and the non-integral category into source, identification, reference, and origin. More examples of each category are listed in Appendix A. The extended framework includes four citation features − content, function, writer's stance and types of citations, which are placed under three dimensions (see Fig. 1).

4. Research methods

4.1. Corpus description

The corpus in this study consists of the literature reviews and discussions in 30 master's theses and 30 doctoral dissertations about second language learning. These theses and dissertations were written by the students from 31 randomly selected universities in China. The majors of these master's and doctoral students all belong to a sub-field of English applied linguistics, which is second language learning. Their graduation years are from 2010 to 2018. As one of the requirements to obtain a research-based degree, these master's and doctoral students need to complete a thesis or dissertation which will be
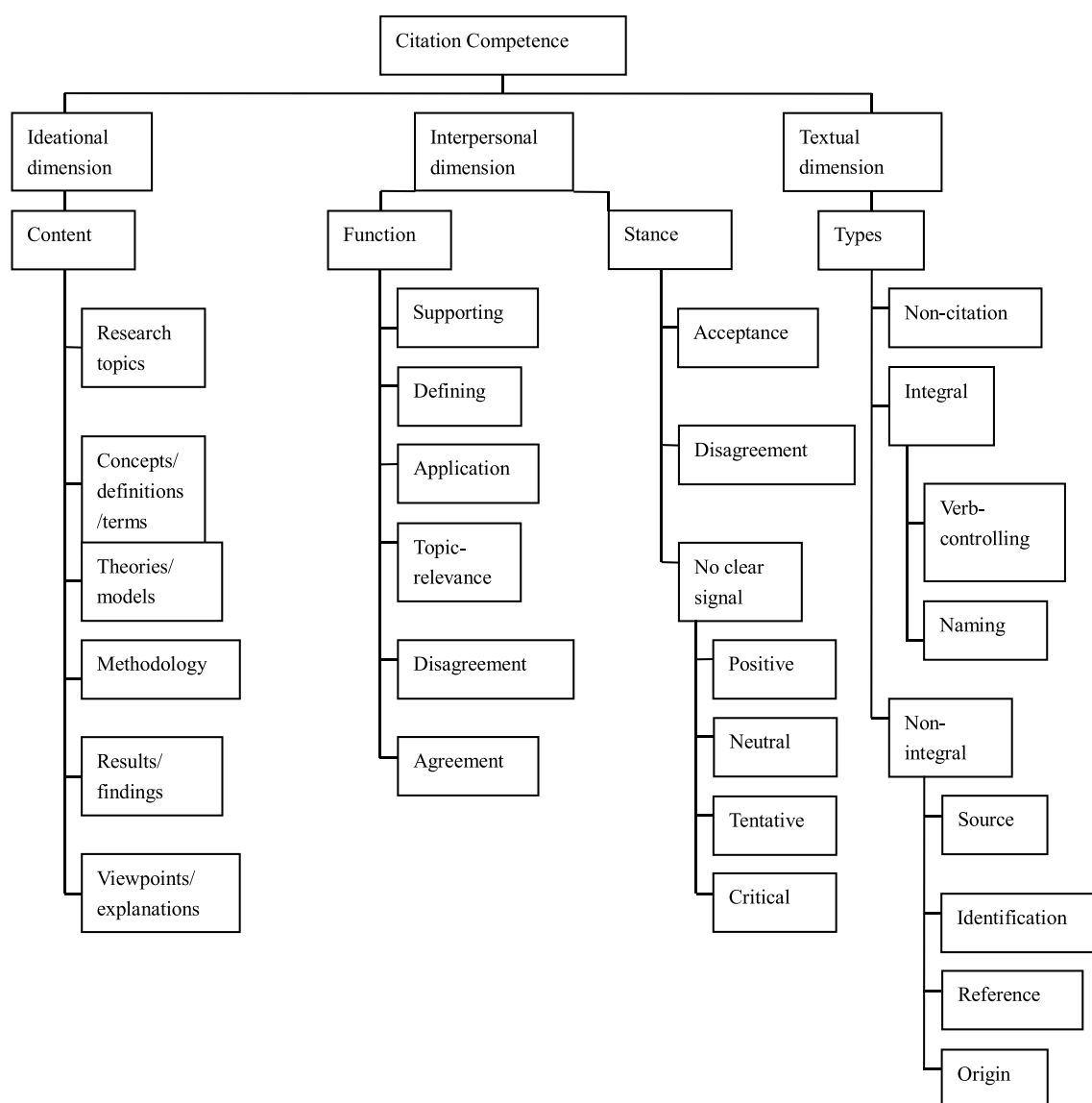

Fig. 1. The framework of citation competence.

evaluated by their supervisor and at least two peer reviewers. Some universities also require graduate students, especially doctoral students, to publish academic papers in peer-reviewed journals as a prerequisite of obtaining a degree. These students generally have more than ten years' English learning experience prior to submitting their theses or dissertations and have taken academic courses related to their research field.

The following table shows the number of words in the main corpus and sub-corpora (see Table 1).

4.2. Corpus development

All the master's theses and doctoral dissertations were randomly collected from CNKI, the largest academic resource provider in China. A simple search was conducted for the theses and dissertations in linguistics, followed by the standard search for the theses and dissertations in applied linguistics. The key words that were used in the simple search were "language acquisition", "second language acquisition", "foreign language acquisition", "language learning", "second language learning" and "foreign language learning". The key words that were employed in the standard search were "styles", "strategies", "motivation" and "anxiety" of second or foreign language learners, "second or foreign language listening/speaking/ reading/writing", and "language assessment". These topics did not include all fields in applied linguistics but were related to its sub-field − second language learning. After the simple search and standard search, the duplicate documents were eliminated. If the theses or dissertations did not have separate literature review or discussion chapters, they would be excluded. Then, the selection process of the 30 master's theses and 30 doctoral dissertations was completed.

These 30 master's theses and 30 doctoral dissertations were used to create the corpus for analysis. All the papers were manually cleaned: titles, chapter headers, tables, figures and footers were removed. Then, the chapters of literature reviews and discussions were extracted from the theses and dissertations. The following table shows the main corpus and its sub-corpora (see Table 2).

4.3. The analytical tools

This study mainly used corpus methods and the textual analysis to explore the citation features of Chinese English-major master's theses and doctoral dissertations. UAM Corpus Tool 3 (O'Donnell, 2013) was used to annotate the data in the main corpus and sub-corpora. This tool can help users annotate the citations in the master's theses and doctoral dissertations, calculate the number of each category in the annotation scheme and retrieve the results of the annotations. The annotation scheme was established based on the analytical framework of this study. To investigate master's and doctoral students' citation practices, each citation was annotated for content, function, writer's stance and citation type.

Two other statistical software programs, Excel and SPSS, were used to conduct statistical analysis. Excel was mainly used to calculate the density of citations per 1000 words. SPSS was employed to examine whether there were significant differences between citation features in the master's theses and the doctoral dissertations.

4.4. The analytical procedures

A pilot study was conducted to examine the applicability of the annotation scheme. The researcher and another scholar who has received some training participated in the pilot study. Three master's theses and three doctoral dissertations were chosen and annotated. The inter-coder agreement is 91.7%, which is acceptable (Hu & Wang, 2014). The results showed that the annotation scheme was applicable for analyzing citations in the master's theses and doctoral dissertations. All the sub-categories of citation features were used to annotate the three master's theses and doctoral dissertations. Although one category of citation content − methodology − yielded low frequencies, it was not deleted since it may help researchers examine the differences in citation practices between the master's students and the doctoral students. Then, the researcher annotated all the data and checked again after three weeks without referring to the results of the first coding. The intra-coder agreement is 96.8%; the major reason for the disagreement between the first and the second coding was that some citations did not get annotated in the first coding process. The researcher annotated all the missed citations.

In order to analyze and compare the citation competence of master's and doctoral students, every citation in the sub-corpora of the master's theses and doctoral dissertations was analyzed from the content, function, writer's stance and

Table 1
Number of words in the main corpus and sub-corpora.

Corpora	Total number of words
Main corpus	832,287
Sub-corpus of literature reviews and discussions in master's theses	266,936
Sub-corpus of literature reviews in master's theses	157,993
Sub-corpus of discussions in master's theses	108,843
Sub-corpus of literature reviews and discussions in doctoral dissertations	565,451
Sub-corpus of literature reviews in doctoral dissertations	372,864
Sub-corpus of discussions in doctoral dissertations	192,587

Table 2
Main corpus and sub-corpora.

Main corpus	Sub-corpus of literature reviews and discussions in master's theses	Sub-corpus of literature reviews in master's theses
		Sub-corpus of discussions in master's theses
	Sub-corpus of literature reviews and discussions in doctoral dissertations	Sub-corpus of literature reviews in doctoral dissertations
		Sub-corpus of discussions in doctoral dissertations

types of citations. Independent Samples *t*-test was conducted to examine whether the differences between the theses and dissertations were significant or not.

5. Results

5.1. Results corresponding to research question 1

The first research question concerned the extent to which citation features in master's theses differ from those in doctoral dissertations. Their overall densities are first compared. The density of citations in doctoral dissertations is 9.78/1000 words (9.78 words per thousand words) and that in master's theses is 8.72/1000 words. The Independent Samples *t*-test shows that this difference is not significant (*t [58] = -0.49, p [2-tailed] = 0.63, CI or MD = -2.39, 1.45*). The detailed analysis spanned the three dimensions of citation features: ideational, interpersonal and textual.

Table 3 shows the statistics from the ideational dimension and reveals that the citation densities of theories or models in the master's theses and doctoral dissertations show a significant difference. The citation density of theories or models in the doctoral dissertations is significantly more than that in the master's theses. The other five categories, however, do not show significant differences.

In the interpersonal dimension, the analysis shows that two functions, application and agreement, are significantly different between master's theses and doctoral dissertations (see Table 4). The use of the application function in the doctoral dissertations is significantly more than that in the master's theses. The agreement function also shows a significant difference. The density of agreement in the doctoral dissertations is significantly higher than that in the master's theses.

Table 5 shows the results of a *t*-test for writer's stance. The findings indicate that there is no significant difference in all the sub-categories of stance identified in this research although the densities in the two groups vary.

Table 6 presents statistics from the textual dimension. The results show that the densities of reference, defined as introducing readers to other texts, and origin, defined as identifying the originators of the theories or models, are significantly different in the two groups. They are significantly higher in the doctoral dissertations than in the master's theses.

5.2. Results corresponding to research question 2

This study further explored the differences in citation features in literature reviews and discussions in the master's theses and doctoral dissertations. In the master's theses, the citation density of literature reviews is 12.55/1000 words, and that of discussions is 3.29/1000 words. The Independent Samples *t*-test shows that this difference is significant (*t [58] = 10.42, p [2-tailed] = 0.00, CI or MD = 7.48, 11.03*). Similarly, in the doctoral dissertations, the density of literature reviews (11.97/1000 words) is significantly higher (*t [58] = 8.68, p [2-tailed] = 0.00, CI or MD = 5.50, 8.79*) than that of discussions (4.82/1000 words).

There are significant differences in the densities in literature reviews and discussions. It is reasonable to assume that the densities of sub-categories may also be significantly different. Based on Mansourizadeh and Ahmad's (2011) and Xu's (2016) method, the following analysis only focuses on the percentage of each sub-category rather than the density. According to

Table 3
T-test for content.

Content	Thesis type	M	SD	CI (MD)	t (df)	P (2-tailed)
Research topics	M	1.76	2.15	-.36, 1.11	1.01 (58)	.31
	D	1.38	1.94			
Concepts/definitions/terms	M	.84	1.00	-.29, .34	.17 (58)	.86
	D	.81	.76			
Theories/models	M	.68	.76	-.66, -.09	.26 (58)	.01
	D	1.06	.82			
Methodology	M	.14	.35	-.05, .14	.90 (58)	.37
	D	.09	.16			
Results/findings	M	1.32	1.38	-.84, .11	-1.63 (58)	.13
	D	1.69	1.25			
Viewpoints/explanations	M	3.13	2.57	-1.09, .63	-.53 (58)	.60
	D	3.36	2.22			

Note: M = Master's Theses; D = Doctoral Dissertations.

Table 4
T-test for function.

Function	Thesis type	M	SD	CI (MD)	t (df)	P (2-tailed)
Supporting	M	6.47	5.15	−1.60, 1.80	0.10 (58)	.92
	D	6.38	4.12			
Defining	M	.40	.56	−2.10, .16	-.26 (58)	.79
	D	.43	.45			
Application	M	.16	.28	-.35, −.12	−3.92 (58)	.000
	D	.40	.37			
Topic-relevance	M	.61	.89	-.39, .18	-.73 (58)	.47
	D	.72	.66			
Agreement	M	.23	.38	-.36, −.09	−3.26 (58)	.001
	D	.46	.37			
Disagreement	M	.01	.06	-.03, .01	-.68 (58)	.50
	D	.02	.05			

Table 5
T-test for writer's stance.

Stance		Thesis type	M	SD	CI (MD)	t (df)	P (2-tailed)
Acceptance		M	.68	.81	-.27, .29	.08 (58)	.94
		D	.67	.72			
Disagreement		M	.01	.06	-.03, .01	-.68 (58)	.50
		D	.02	.05			
No-clear signal	Positive	M	4.89	3.84	−1.08, 1.37	.23 (58)	.82
		D	4.73	2.87			
	Neutral	M	1.88	1.81	-.99, .36	-.92 (58)	.36
		D	2.19	1.92			
	Tentative	M	.09	.22	-.13, .01	−1.68 (58)	.09
		D	.15	.17			
	Critical	M	.36	.47	-.30, .03	−1.60 (58)	.11
		D	.49	.45			

Table 6
T-test for types.

Types		Thesis type	M	SD	CI (MD)	t (df)	P (2-tailed)
Non-citation		M	.09	.22	-.01, .11	1.76 (58)	.08
		D	.03	.09			
Non-integral	Source	M	2.52	2.80	−1.35, .40	−1.08 (58)	.28
		D	3.00	1.98			
	Identification	M	.05	.18	-.09, .02	−1.13 (58)	.26
		D	.08	.12			
	Reference	M	.11	.35	-.34, −.05	−2.63 (58)	.01
		D	.30	.45			
	Origin	M	.06	.13	-.16, −.01	−2.36 (58)	.02
		D	.15	.24			
Integral	Verb-controlling	M	4.09	3.77	-.63, 1.81	.96 (58)	.34
		D	3.50	2.91			
	Naming	M	1.07	1.05	-.50, .24	-.71 (58)	.48
		D	1.20	1.01			

Table 7
Content of citations in the literature reviews and discussions.

Content	M		D	
	Literature reviews (%)	Discussions (%)	Literature reviews (%)	Discussions (%)
Research topics	26.47	6.58	21	4.41
Concepts/definitions/terms	13.67	4.39	10.47	7.21
Theories/models	9.43	5.02	12.65	11.42
Methodology	2.37	1.88	1.04	0.9
Results/findings	11.35	40.75	15.36	30.86
Viewpoints/explanations	38.5	41.38	39.48	45.19

Note: M = Master's Theses; D = Doctoral Dissertations.

Table 7, research topics, concepts, definitions or terms are cited more frequently in the literature reviews than in the discussions in the master's theses and doctoral dissertations. Results or findings, however, are cited more often in the discussions than in the literature reviews.

In the interpersonal dimension, the writer's stance and the function of citations are examined and reported (see Table 8). The percentages of topic-relevance are lower in the literature reviews than in the discussions in the master's theses and doctoral dissertations. In Table 9, covertly shown stance − no clear signal − accounts for the largest percentage in the literature reviews and discussions of master's theses and doctoral dissertations. The neutral stance takes up higher percentages in the literature reviews than in the discussions.

As is shown in Table 10, verb-controlling citations, where the cited author acts as the subject which controls the verb has higher percentages in the literature reviews than in the discussions. The percentages of integral citations (verb-controlling and naming together) are higher in the literature reviews than in the discussion chapters in master's theses and doctoral dissertations. Source, referring to the attribution of the proposition to the cited researcher (Thompson & Tribble, 2001), accounts for higher percentages in the discussions than in the literature reviews.

6. Discussion

This section aims to discuss possible reasons for the results, and possible implications.

6.1. Comparison of citation features between master's theses and doctoral dissertations

In the ideational dimension, the findings reveal that the doctoral students use significantly more citations of theories or models than the master's students. With regard to the function of citations in the interpersonal dimension, the doctoral students use two functions, application and agreement, significantly more often than the master's students. This finding is similar to Planks and Gebril's (2012) research findings. Doctoral students need to cite concepts, models or theories and then apply these in their own research. This may be the difference between the inexperienced master's writers and experienced doctoral writers. Doctoral students are normally expected to have higher academic abilities than master's students. As potential scholars who spend much time on their studies, they are able to establish a strong theoretical foundation by reviewing previous theories and models, revising and applying the robust theoretical frameworks to answer their research questions. Master's students may even struggle to find theories and models that are related to their research topics, not to mention further applying these theories and models. This study further confirms Wette's (2017) idea that doctoral students can apply and integrate various citations to propose the definitions used in their studies. The doctoral students also employ the agreement function more often. Compared with the master's students, the doctoral students have more self-confidence to present their direct support for previous studies. They can only give this direct support if they have enough academic knowledge of the topic.

With regard to the writer's stance in this dimension, although the master's students and the doctoral students do not show their stance significantly differently, the doctoral students present more critical stance. Compared with the master's students, the doctoral students tend to think more critically and show their own voice. This finding is different from previous research that indicates the lack of negative evaluations among Asian students (Hyland, 2002; Lou, 2011). This result suggests that L2 learners at higher levels of language proficiency are able to demonstrate greater critical thinking ability. With the development of their language proficiency and research ability, those L2 learners are better able and more willing to present their critical stance.

Finally, in the textual dimension, previous findings demonstrate that students of high language proficiency tend to use more non-integral citations and less integral citations (Ma & Qin, 2014b; Thompson, 2005b), and try to establish their academic identity (Ivanic, 1998). Similarly, the present research also reveals that the doctoral students use two types of non-integral citations, reference and origin, significantly more often than the master's students. Using non-integral citations shows their intention to emphasize the cited text and their voice rather than the cited researchers' authority. The doctoral students can introduce more studies and transmit more information to readers by introducing more related studies with the use of the reference type. They also connect with the originators of theories and models to provide the rationale for their own

Table 8
Function of citations in the literature reviews and discussions.

Function	M		D	
	Literature reviews (%)	Discussions (%)	Literature reviews (%)	Discussions (%)
Supporting	85.19	63.95	79.62	66.43
Defining	6.7	2.19	5.56	3.59
Application	2	3.13	4.28	6.57
Topic-relevance	3.95	23.51	6.18	13.75
Agreement	1.9	7.21	4.17	9.26
Disagreement	0.25	0	0.2	0.4

Table 9

Writer's stance in citations in the literature reviews and discussions.

Stance		M		D	
		Literature reviews (%)	Discussions (%)	Literature reviews (%)	Discussions (%)
Acceptance		6.81	10.97	7.5	13.86
Disagreement		0.15	0	0.15	0.33
No clear signal	Positive	61.11	71.16	55.07	60.4
	Neutral	26.28	13.17	29.64	16.5
	Tentative	1.1	0.31	2.05	2.31
	Critical	4.55	4.39	5.58	6.6

Table 10

Types of citations in the literature reviews and discussions.

Types		M		D	
		Literature reviews (%)	Discussions (%)	Literature reviews (%)	Discussions (%)
Non-citation		1.38	0.62	0.55	0.22
Non-integral	Source	30.9	38.08	34.21	42.21
	Identification	0.59	0	1.51	0.33
	Reference	1.04	4.02	3.41	4.17
	Origin	0.69	1.24	1.76	2.3
Integral	Verb-controlling	54.79	27.86	45.88	30.48
	Naming	10.61	28.17	12.67	20.29

working definitions or frameworks. The findings in the three dimensions demonstrate that the doctoral students use citations to review previous theories or models, connect with the originators of these theories or models and apply these to make theoretical contributions to the academic field and establish their own academic identity. These findings support Thompson's (2005a) argument that unlike master's students, although doctoral students are also the examinees, they start to have their authoritative voice and build their own identity.

6.2. Comparison of citation features between the literature reviews and discussions

In the ideational dimension, research topics, concepts, definitions or terms are cited more often in the literature reviews than in the discussions. Results or findings, however, are cited more frequently in the discussions than in the literature reviews. This finding indicates that the functions of the literature reviews and discussions influence the distribution of citation features. The major functions of the literature reviews include positioning the current study in an academic context and summarizing previous research and theories. The master's students and doctoral students may be aware of these functions, and they cite research topics to present the general situation of the field and cite the related concepts and definitions to summarize theories and position their research in a suitable context.

In the interpersonal dimension, topic-relevance takes up a higher percentage in the discussions than in the literature reviews. This finding is again related to the major function of the discussions — to compare results against other researchers' claims. Topic-relevance enables master's and doctoral students to clarify and interpret their own findings by comparing them with previous research findings. This finding is in line with the findings in some previous studies (Kwan & Chan, 2014; Samraj, 2013). By making comparisons, the master's students and the doctoral students can also extend the existing research scope by citing the related studies and presenting what their studies can contribute to the field. Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006), however, argued that graduate students had a limited understanding of making comparisons between their studies and previous studies. The possible explanation for the difference is that Bitchener and Basturkmen only interviewed four graduate students and four supervisors and drew this conclusion. The number of participants might influence the findings.

The analysis of the writer's stance reveals that in the literature reviews and discussions the master's students and the doctoral students prefer to use covert evaluations and show their stance indirectly by ascribing their attitudes to other scholars. This finding is in line with previous research findings (Hu & Wang, 2014; Ivanic, 1998; Zhang, 2015). These student writers still have a sense of inferiority or powerlessness and regard themselves as writers without authority, possibly because their writing will be judged by their supervisors and other scholars. But compared with the master's students, the doctoral students have more self-confidence and start to have their own voice. As for the neutral stance, both master's and doctoral students tend to show it more frequently in the literature reviews than discussions. This finding is similar to Petrić's (2007) findings. The different functions of these two sections also shape the master's and doctoral students' stance to the citations. In the literature reviews, students mainly display their knowledge without much clarification and comments to place their study in an academic context. In the discussions, however, students may show their positive or negative stance to compare their results against other researchers' claims.

In the textual dimension, the integral type of citations is used more frequently in the literature reviews than in the discussions. Source, a non-integral type of citations, has a higher percentage in the discussions than in the literature reviews. This finding demonstrates that in the literature reviews the master's students and doctoral students prefer to put the cited researchers in the prominent position to emphasize the cited researchers' voice, but in the discussions students tend to use the non-integral type of citations to indicate the sources of cited texts and focus on the cited information. Emphasizing the cited researchers or the cited information may be partly due to the functions of these two sections and characteristics of theses and dissertations. In the literature review, by using the integral type of citations, the master's students and the doctoral students emphasize the cited researchers and use the researchers' authority to position their studies in the required academic context and present previous research, theories and frameworks on which their studies are based. They use the cited researchers' authority to convince their supervisors that their studies are theoretically supported. In the discussions, the master's students and the doctoral students focus on the cited information and show their voice possibly because of the major functions of this section − comparing and interpreting results. They use citations to help interpret the results, so the cited information is more important than cited researchers' authority.

7. Conclusion

Based on the expanded theoretical framework, this study compared the citation features of Chinese English-major master's theses and doctoral dissertations and further explored citations features in literature reviews and discussion chapters. In terms of the comparison between master's theses and doctoral dissertations, the findings in the ideational dimension demonstrate that doctoral students cite significantly more theories or models than master's students. Corresponding to this finding, doctoral students use one function of citation − application − significantly more often. These two findings indicate that doctoral students are better able to apply theories and models to their own research to contribute to a cumulative development of knowledge.

The comparison between the literature reviews and discussions shows that their functions influence the distribution of citation features in the three dimensions. In the interpersonal dimension, topic-relevance, a citation function, is employed more in the discussions to achieve a major function of discussions − interpreting the findings and comparing them with previous findings. In the textual dimension, the integral type of citations is used more in the literature reviews and a non-integral type − source − is employed more in the discussions. The students intend to emphasize the cited researchers in the literature reviews to establish the context of studies with authority, but emphasize the cited information in the discussions to compare and interpret their own findings.

This study has some noteworthy limitations. It is cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. The research did not trace the improvements in citation competence in a certain group of students. The subjectivity of the annotation cannot be avoided although the intra-coder agreement is acceptable. Finally, this study only analyzed the theses and dissertations written by English-major students in China, so the claims are not necessarily transferable to other contexts.

This study offers some pedagogical implications on teaching citations to master's and doctoral students. The teaching of citations should be included in the EAP courses, as a section to provide a systematic training for both master's and doctoral students. Teachers can use the framework of this study to provide an explicit instruction about the different dimensions of citation competence. They can further use various examples of citations to first enable students to identify different types of content, function, stance and types of citations and then compare these citations to explore the deep meanings behind each citation feature.

For more specific suggestions, teachers should also inform and teach students the different uses of citations in the literature reviews and discussions. For example, a major function of discussions is to interpret the research findings. In order to interpret findings convincingly, students are encouraged to cite theories or models and nudge readers to see findings from a particular theoretical angle, which is often noticed in qualitative research writing. Students may be only aware that theories or models are cited in the literature reviews but ignore their roles in the discussions.

The requirements for a master's and a doctoral degree are different, and it is unrealistic to expect master's students and doctoral students to have the same level of citation competence. The focus of instruction on these two groups should also be different. For master's students, teachers can use various examples of citations to help students understand different citation features and their characteristics. These examples can be collected from students' essays and scholars' publications to show the different citation practices between student writers and mature writers. Some citations that can cause confusion should also be included to help students avoid this kind of citation practice; for example, the misuse of non-integral citations may obscure the role of the cited scholars. For doctoral students, in addition to the above suggestions, teachers can further provide some lexico-grammatical resources like different reporting verbs to enable students to present their stance. For example, the reporting verbs "argue" and "hold" show writers' positive attitudes towards citations, and the reporting verbs "suggest" and "believe" show writers' tentative attitudes. These lexico-grammatical resources are helpful for doctoral students when they want to show their stance and present their academic identity.

There are some suggestions for future research. More studies are suggested to examine the writers' use of citations longitudinally by collecting the research writing from the same group of writers. Researchers may examine the citation practices of student writers from various majors in different contexts.

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Appendix A

Definitions of Citation Content (Ideational Dimension).

Content	Definitions	Examples
Research topics	Citing previous research topics or concrete details (Xu, 2012).	*Laufer (1991, 1998) did a series of research about the process of L2 vocabulary acquisition.* *(from a doctoral dissertation)*
Concepts/ definitions/ terms	Citing specific concepts, definitions or terms that are used in previous studies.	*Storch and Tapper (2009) operationalized lexical complexity as the percentage of words which appeared in Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List. (from a master's thesis)*
Theories/ models	Citing certain theories, models, frameworks or constructs.	*Zhang Wenzhong, Wu Xudong (2003) built the cognitive mental model about the development of vocabulary ability in the classroom setting. (from a doctoral dissertation)*
Methodology	Citing research designs, instruments or research procedures.	*The participants in the previous studies were assigned as high proficiency and low proficiency learners (Lin, 2009). (from a doctoral dissertation)*
Results/ findings	Citing results or findings of previous studies.	*Empirical facts show a close relationship between writing ability and language ability (Yang & Weir, 1998). (from a doctoral dissertation)*
Viewpoints/ explanations	Citing attitudes and evaluations shown by previous authors or explanations of the concepts.	*Because of this, writing has come to be seen as a social practice rather than a skill (Lillis, 2001). (from a master's thesis)*

Definitions of Citation Function (Interpersonal Dimension).

Function	Definitions	Examples
Supporting	To present the cited authors' standpoints or research findings; to indicate or support the writer's own claims or ideas; to acknowledge the cited authors' ideas or terms (Petrić & Harwood, 2013).	*Levis (2006) outlined a distinction between broad and narrow views of intelligibility. (from a master's thesis)*
Defining	To define or explain a construct, model, concept, theory or approach.	*"Implicit learning" must be defined as "learning without awareness by the learner" (Rieder, 2003, p. 26). (from a master's thesis)*
Application	To apply a construct, model, concept, theory or approach into one's own analysis.	*Participants' anxiety state was obtained with the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory complied by Spielberger et al. (1970). (from a doctoral dissertation)*
Topic -relevance	To support the topic of the research by making comparisons with previous studies.	*These findings are in line with the evidence from research on pragmatic markers in general, which showed differences in the range as well as function of PMs used by L1 and L2 speakers (e.g., Hasselgren, 2002; Müller, 2005). (from a master's thesis)*
Disagreement	To disagree with an idea.	*Hymes (1972) presented the term communicative competence in order to take into account the sociocultural features of language which Chomsky (1965) had overlooked. (from a doctoral dissertation)*
Agreement	To agree with an idea.	*As Swennen, Lunenberg and Korthagen (2008, p. 18) point out, modeling approach is important but "not sufficient to achieve desired in educational training". (from a doctoral dissertation)*

Definitions of Citation Stance (Interpersonal Dimension).

Stance	Definitions	Examples
Acceptance	Accepting the views of the cited authors; presenting the cited information as true (Hyland, 1999).	*McLain (1993) made a clear difference between tolerance and intolerance, which enriches the study of tolerance of ambiguity. (from a doctoral dissertation)*
Disagreement	Disagreeing with the views of the cited authors; presenting the cited information as false.	*There are, however, other investigations that have failed to document correlations between attitudes towards L1 retention and actual L1 proficiency (Hulsen, 2000). (from a master's thesis)*

(continued)

Stance	Definitions	Examples
Positive (no clear signal)	Showing positive attitudes or stance indirectly by making the cited authors responsible for the attitudes.	*Oxford (1993) argued that learning strategies were specific actions taken by learners. (from a master's thesis)*
Neutral (no clear signal)	Showing the neutral attitudes or stance indirectly by making the cited authors responsible for the attitudes.	*The concept of amotivation was introduced by Deci and Ryan (1985). (from a doctoral dissertation)*
Tentative (no clear signal)	Showing the tentative/uncertain attitudes or stance indirectly by making the cited authors responsible for the attitudes.	*Gass (1997) suggested to replace comprehensible input which implies the speaker control on learning with the concept of comprehended input which emphasizes learner comprehension as crucial to learning. (from a master's thesis)*
Critical (no clear signal)	Showing critical attitudes or stance indirectly by making the cited authors responsible for the attitudes.	*Richard and Lockhart claim that beliefs include subjective and objective dimensions (1994). (from a doctoral dissertation)*

Definitions of Citation Types (Textual Dimension).

Types		Definitions	Examples
Integral	Verb-controlling	The cited author "acting as the agent that controls a verb in active or passive voice" (Thompson & Tribble, 2001, p. 95).	*Coterall (2000) pointed out five principles for designing language course — promoting learner autonomy through the design of syllabus and curriculum. (from a doctoral dissertation)*
	Naming	The cited author acting as "a noun phrase or a part of a noun phrase" (Thompson & Tribble, 2001, p. 95).	*In Selinker's (1972) interlanguage model, several core processes were involved; the use of learning strategies is one of them. (from a doctoral dissertation)*
Non-	integral	Source	The attribution of the proposition to the cited authors, indicating the source of this idea.
	Sometimes there are	*misunderstandings of the genuine Confucius' image as a teacher (Sun & Wang, 2012). (from a doctoral dissertation)*	
	Identification	The identification and clarification of an agent within the sentence it refers to.	*Some researchers claimed that Bongaerts et al.'s findings showed that nonnative speakers can "speak the L2 without a detectable foreign accent" (Flege & Liu, 2001, p. 550). (from a master's thesis)*
	Reference	The introduction of other texts to the reader.	*Some scholars regarded learner uptake as one type of the evidence for the receptive effects of recasts (e.g., Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002; Sheen, 2004).* *(from a doctoral dissertation)*
Origin		"Indicating the originator of a concept or a product" (Thompson & Tribble, 2001, p. 95).	*This argument is also consistent with Ferris' division of error into treatable and untreatable errors (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ferris, 2002, 2010). (from a master's thesis)*
Non-citation		Showing the name of the cited authors but with no reference of the year.	*Norton pointed out the influence of intolerance of ambiguity. (from a master's thesis)*

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