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A Model of Research Article Writing Sociolinguistic Competence (RAWSC): Evidence From Qualitative Meta-Synthesis and Follow-Up Interviews

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Abstract

The knowledge of sociolinguistic factors can be a remarkable component of competence in research article writing for learners' successful handling of scholarly writing tasks in English for academic purposes (EAP) programs. This study aimed to present a model of Sociolinguistics Competence (SC) in writing EAP research articles. Give this, two stages were followed. Firstly, a meta-synthesis approach was adopted to investigate the available literature on various aspects of SC and extract the latent themes and concepts in the target model. As a result, two categories emerged from the combination of five concepts and 258 codes. Secondly, an introspective stage was followed to explore the perceptions of a sampled number of EAP Iranian researchers of features of research article writing sociolinguistic competence and their difficulties relevant to the sociolinguistic aspects of writing RAs. Data for this stage came from interviews with nine Iranian EAP researchers who have published in highly prestigious journals. Conducting thematic analysis in the introspective stage resulted in 118 codes and four subcategories. The interview findings confirmed the main categories obtained from the meta-synthesis. The combination of the findings of meta-synthesis and interviews yielded a reductionist yet inclusive account of EAP research article writing sociolinguistic competence.

Keywords

Sociolinguistic Competence, English for Academic Purposes, Research Article, Research Article Writing Competence, Meta-Synthesis, Interview

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The knowledge of sociolinguistic factors can be a remarkable component of competence in research article writing for learners' successful handling of scholarly writing tasks in English for academic purposes (EAP) programs. This study aimed to present a model of Sociolinguistics Competence (SC) in writing EAP research articles. Give this, two stages were followed. Firstly, a meta-synthesis approach was adopted to investigate the available literature on various aspects of SC and extract the latent themes and concepts in the target model. As a result, two categories emerged from the combination of five concepts and 258 codes. Secondly, an introspective stage was followed to explore the perceptions of a sampled number of EAP Iranian researchers of features of research article writing sociolinguistic competence and their difficulties relevant to the sociolinguistic aspects of writing RAs. Data for this stage came from interviews with nine Iranian EAP researchers who have published in highly prestigious journals. Conducting thematic analysis in the introspective stage resulted in 118 codes and four subcategories. The interview findings confirmed the main categories obtained from the meta-synthesis. The combination of the findings of meta-synthesis and interviews yielded a reductionist yet inclusive account of EAP research article writing sociolinguistic competence. Keywords: Sociolinguistic Competence, English for Academic Purposes, Research Article, Research Article Writing Competence, Meta-Synthesis, Interview

Introduction

Developing academic writing abilities is an important goal in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs. The value of writing and publishing a Research Article (RA) in a scholarly journal while in or after an EAP program also heightens the significance of developing EAP writing skills. Research articles are acknowledged to be the most important form of scientific discourse. The ability to write academic research papers effectively highly relies on linguistic competence and an understanding of the style, voice, generic moves, and rhetorical structures used in scientific writing as appraised by the discourse community. Hyland (2000) views a RA as an important genre for distributing knowledge to the academic community. Publishing RAs is also recognized as an enormous industry upon which knowledge is constructed and evaluated, universities are funded, and careers are built (Hyland, 2016). However, as Bartholomae (1985) puts it, the nature of academic discourse is a complex undertaking for student writers to achieve. Furthermore, the competence of writing RAs is a prerequisite for the entry into the academic discourse community if the student writers decide to pursue scholarship beyond an undergraduate education (Flowerdew, 2000). Given the importance of writing research papers, the difficulties experienced by novice academics (e.g., Flowerdew, 2001; Hyland, 2016) and the reasons for rejection of papers by the international journals (e.g., Kilduff, 2007; Linton, 2012) have been investigated in several studies.

Taking a more pragmatic view, Clark and Ivanic (1997) view writing as an activity influenced not only by the immediate social circumstances and people participating in it, but also by the social and cultural values, and beliefs. In a more sociolinguistic perspective, writers need to have knowledge of the addressed readership and of ways texts function in their community in order to be able to write effective texts (Cumming, 2001; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Paltridge and Starfield (2016) emphasize the significance of writing for a particular audience with certain expectations and prior knowledge. However, according to Day (1994), most non-native researchers starting as graduate students are deprived of acquiring the discourse conventions by means of a formal course in academic writing. It is rather a process of emulating the academic style and genre strategies of already published authors who have achieved success within their own discourse communities (Day, 1994).

A language user is required to consider all the aspects of language knowledge to have successful communication. With regard to Bachman's (1990) model of language competence, sociolinguistic knowledge as a major aspect of pragmatic competence plays a significant role in language knowledge. This type of knowledge is also essential to the learners' successful handling of scholarly writing tasks encountered in an EAP higher-education setting. However, no reductive model of Sociolinguistics Competence (SC) which can account for writing RAs in various academic fields of study has been established. Moreover, EAP researchers are often unaware of different sociolinguistic aspects of writing RAs which affect the acceptability of their RAs and thus fail to develop a publishable paper. In other words, the researchers need to consider the constituents which can potentially increase the possibility of publication of their papers. Thus, a framework including these elements is of important emphasis in the present research. Therefore, this study can be of significance to EAP researchers who study English in different academic fields of study and may find difficulty writing an acceptable research article.

Literature Review

The study of Sociolinguistic Competence, in the present research, is mainly informed by Bachman's (1990) conceptualization of language competence. In this model, language knowledge incorporates Organizational Knowledge (Grammatical Knowledge, Textual Knowledge) and Pragmatic knowledge (Functional Knowledge, Sociolinguistic Knowledge). The components in the model, influenced by Widdowson's (1978) demarcation between use and usage and Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) involves the abilities to control, produce, and identify grammatically correct sentences (Bachman, 1990), and use language appropriately.

Pragmatic competence, as a major category of language competence, is more associated with the relationships between language signs and referents on the one hand, and the language users and the context of communication, on the other (Bachman, 1990). This competence deals with the production and interpretation of meaning in contexts, and the symbolic representation of contextual performance is a mapping between form and social context, rather than between form and meaning (Bialystok, 1993). As defined by Brown (2000), pragmatic competence is the "knowledge for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts, and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular language's linguistic resources" (p. 10).

Sociolinguistic competence is a major aspect of pragmatic competence. Several studies have presented models for all the elements which characterize sociolinguistic competence. As follows, the elements in different models of sociolinguistic knowledge, as a subpart of pragmatic competence, are described in detail together with an explanation of the major components of the accumulated models.

According to Canale and Swain's (1980) review, SC is defined as the knowledge of sociocultural rules of use and rules of discourse. The concept of appropriateness is included in the category of sociocultural rules in that "certain propositions and communicative functions are appropriate within a given sociocultural context," and "appropriate attitude and register or style are conveyed by a particular grammatical form within a given sociocultural context" (p. 30). Bachman (1990) similarly defined SC as control of the conventions of language use determined by the features of the context, including sensitivity to dialect or variety, sensitivity to register, sensitivity to naturalness, and cultural references and figures of speech. The sensitivity referred to is associated with the response to which communicators need to cognate the dialect, language variety, and differences in register (Halliday, McIntosh, & Strevens, 1964). Pawley and Syder (1983), analyzing collections of fixed and variable elements of native like selection and fluency, associated the sensitivity to the conventions of language use to cultural references and figures of speech as well as the degree to which language users can appropriately and naturally generate the utterances expected in the target language in a specific language-use context. Moreover, according to Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell (1995), sociocultural competence is determined by how language users take into account social and cultural contexts, presenting their messages appropriately, including four factors of social contextual factors, stylistic appropriateness factors, cultural factors, and non-verbal communicative factors. Stylistic appropriateness factors were similar to Bachman's sensitivity to differences in register. Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) review also made clear that language users have to consider stylistic variation and degrees of formality and differences in field-specific registers.

Tarone and Swain (1995), based on a systematic research on observational and interview evidence in immersion classes, defined sociolinguistic competence as the ability of the members of a speech community to adapt their speech to the context in which language is used. "Vernacular" style is used amongst friends. Hord de Mendez (1997), reviewing the evaluation of language competence in bilinguals and monolinguals in the past studies, conceptualized SC as an awareness of appropriate language use in different contexts which includes register (variation of language use according to context), style (variation of language use according to the audience), and language specific form of language use. Brown (2000) provided a conceptualization of sociolinguistic competence similar to Bachman (1990) which included users' sensitivity to dialect or variety, choice of register, naturalness, and knowledge of cultural references and figures of speech. He defined it as "knowledge of the sociocultural rules of language and discourse" (Brown, 2000, p. 247). Moreover, Lee and Chan (2015) analyzed a corpus of conversational plays and oral presentations to identify register-style errors in students' utterances. They suggested that two types of errors make the utterance unacceptable by native speakers: discourse-context mismatch (mismatching the language use with the physical and social contexts in terms of formality), and mingling (using linguistic forms or elements with different levels of formality in the same utterance).

This section included an analysis of existing models and frameworks related to sociolinguistic competence in various written or spoken modalities. Our review reveals that despite extensive attention to SC in various models, no attempt has yet been made to conduct a meta-synthesis related to the sociolinguistic aspects of writing academic articles in order to guide the writers in a more systematic way.

Purpose of the Study

Accordingly, the present study raises research attention on categories of SC in EAP RA writing and aims to identify an aggregated framework of categories and subcategories of SC the knowledge of which can increase the publishability potential of RAs in a wide range of

EAP disciplines. In specific, the current study addresses the following research question: What are the key components (major areas, parameters, and features) of a conceptual model of academic RA Writing Sociolinguistic Competence? It is worth mentioning that this study is part of a general study to identify different elements of a model of RA writing competence, following the categorization of an acceptable model of language competence. Moreover, the major study has been conducted to fulfill the requirements of a PhD dissertation in Iran. In the present study, we strived to clearly define the domain of EAP RA writing knowledge in terms of several components and subcomponents by collating the previous studies and resolving the ambiguities existing in the plethora of studies focused on scattered aspects of writing research articles. We also made an endeavor to add to the precision of the obtained components through an elaboration of the themes and subthemes derived from the introspective stage. Accordingly, we have intended to investigate the detailed aspects of the general model, among which is the significant component of RA writing sociolinguistic competence. Regarding our contributions in the present study, the first author contributed to the choice of models, examined the meta-synthesized data, and worked on the method of meta-synthesis and interviews. The second author selected, coded, and analyzed the data, interviewed the participants, and was a major contributor in writing the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Methodology

This research is intended to build a conceptual model of EAP RA writing sociolinguistic competence that is grounded both in theory and practice. Thus, our research includes two stages: (a) developing a conceptual framework based on reviewing the theoretical literature and meta-synthesis of existing models and (b) refining the conceptual model and enriching and adding the factors that have been missed in the literature by drawing on the introspective analysis of EAP researchers' perceptions of RA development. The two stages in the study are explained as follows.

Stage 1: Meta-synthesis

The research question in this study interrogated the underpinning components of a model of EAP RA writing sociolinguistic competence. Based on the qualitative nature of this question and considering similar studies in the literature, a synthesis approach was determined to be the most appropriate method to address this question. Moreover, experts' opinions were sought to help choose an effective method to respond the question. Besides, still growing and accumulating interest in RA writing and publishing in highly ranked journals necessitates a research synthesis that systematically summarizes all the studies relevant to SC for the purpose of writing publishable research articles. This forms the rationale for the choice of a meta-synthesis approach in conceptualizing a model of RAWSC.

Accordingly, we adopted a "qualitative meta-synthesis" (Walsh & Downe, 2005) approach as the research method. The term, qualitative meta-synthesis, introduced by Stern and Harris (1985), is known to be an appropriate interpretive and inductive method designed to generate a common frame of reference based on qualitative evidence. We followed Walsh and Downe's (2005) seven-step process for qualitative meta-synthesis: (1) framing a meta-synthesis exercise, (2) identifying relevant papers, (3) deciding what to include, (4) appraising studies, (5) comparing and contrasting exercise, (6) reciprocating translation, and (7) synthesizing translation.

Framing a meta-synthesis exercise. In this stage, identifying an appropriate research interest frames the meta-synthesis exercise. According to Noblit and Hare (1988), any meta-synthesis approach should be initiated with a defined objective in the shape of a clear research

question. The question in this study addressed the underpinning themes and concepts in the framework of RA writing sociolinguistic competence. This stage included a determination of appropriateness of potential studies for meta-synthesis, mapping research evidence relevant to the framework, and prioritizing major models and studies for further investigation.

Locating relevant studies, deciding what to include, and appraising studies. This phase of meta-synthesis starts in the manner common to all literature reviews: selecting indexing tools for the literature search. This stage involved an exhaustive electronic search in order to locate topically relevant studies and collect all the possible sources in the search source indices and databases. Walsh and Downe (2006) suggested a systematic review of trials which requests researchers to locate all related studies. At this stage of screening, a "berry picking" procedure (Bates, 1989) was followed. In order to locate the available studies, this procedure involved citation analysis undertaking a search for the original models in the articles' citations. However, this stage helped to find more relevant studies through a recursive web search of citations using different databases, namely Google, Google Scholar, Taylor and Francis, Elsevier, Wiley, Sage, Oxford, Springer, Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts, Applied Social Sciences Index, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), ProQuest Education Journals, ProQuest Psychology Journals, and ProQuest Linguistics

In order to disclose non-indexed studies and to reduce the irrelevant hits associated with free-text searching, the search was limited to the *Title* and *Abstract.* A list of credible journals were also examined to identify related studies, namely *Second Language Writing, English for Academic Purposes, English for Specific Purposes, Written Communication, TESOL Quarterly, Pragmatics, Applied Linguistics, Language Awareness, Asian ESP Journal, System, Modern Language Journal, Text, Discourse Studies, Journal of Technical Writing and Communication, Reading and Writing, Functions of Language.*

All inclusion decisions were finalized under the supervision and agreement of the researchers in a period of 3 months. After identifying similar topics, we decided which papers were topically related enough to be included for the final examination. As a result of literature search, 135 abstracts were fully screened among which 87 full texts were located that initially appeared to be relevant and met the inclusion criteria. However, several studies were excluded due to the absence of direct and clear associations with the goals of the study, that is to identify the components of a model of RA writing sociolinguistic competence. Afterwards, in the appraisal step, studies were put under more scrutiny based on sample quality criteria (Atkins et al., 2008), and low quality studies were screened out to increase the rigor of meta-synthesis process. According to Atkins et al. (2008), these criteria are as follows:

- The study is qualitative;
- Research questions are clearly stated;
- Approach is appropriate for the research question;
- Qualitative approach is justified;
- Study context is described;
- Role of the researcher is described;
- Sampling method is described;
- Sampling method is appropriate to the research question;
- Data collection method is described;
- Data collection method is appropriate to the research question;
- Method of analysis is clearly described;
- Analysis is appropriate for the research question; and
- Claims are supported by sufficient evidence.

However, considering the goals of the study and in order to have a more reliable synthesis, the qualitative implications of some quantitative and mixed-method studies were also included in our meta-synthesis.

This further screening resulted in the elimination of 49 studies. In result, 38 articles were selected and accumulated for final meta-synthesis. It should be emphasized that the date range was not regarded as an important criterion for the selection of studies. However, the significant role of the studies in the literature was put into consideration.

Thus, this study applied purposive sampling to screen relevant studies in line with the research objectives and select the most appropriate studies for meta-synthesis. However, to ensure consistency in inclusion of the studies, a second coder with a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics examined the abstracts of 10% (4 full texts) of the studies that passed the initial screening based on Atkins et al.'s (2008) quality criteria. Inter-rater reliability was then assessed as Cohen's kappa and was considered to be acceptable (kappa = 0.76). Table 1 summarizes the number of screened and included materials for the study.

Table 1. *Number of Screened and Included Materials*

Materials	Number
Total abstracts screened	135
Total full texts screened	87
Total studies for final inclusion	38

Comparing and contrasting exercise. In this step, different features in the studies were compared and contrasted through an in-depth reading of the studies and exploring their key findings. The juxtaposition of studies in this way shows the homogeneity and heterogeneity of studies. Walsh and Downe (2005) suggested that using descriptive tables to represent the meta-synthesized studies is essential, since they summarize the individual studies at a glance. In this line, all the studies selected for meta-synthesis are compared and contrasted in a visual format in Table 2.

In this study, the sociolinguistic dimension of writing research articles was investigated in terms of relevant models and studies. As Atkins et al. (2008) asserted, to initiate the meta-synthesis with a manageable number of studies a balance should be found "between a broad scope review and a focus that would yield a manageable number of studies" (p. 5). Accordingly, different models proposed for the concept of sociolinguistic competence were searched in the literature and the available models also guided us to search for the relevant key terms, namely register, style, naturalness, and contextual appropriateness, yielding more relevant studies. These key words were derived from the initial search in the literature and were obtained as the recurrent components in the previous models. These components are defined in the meta-synthesis findings section.

In result, 38 studies were identified (see Table 2).

Table 2. *A Comparison of Studies in terms of Components of Sociolinguistic Competence*

N Author	Register	Style	Naturalness	Contextual appropriateness
Azuike (1992)		*		
Azuike (2006)		*		
Bachman (1990)	*	*	*	*
Ballard (2001)	*			

Brown (2000)	*	*	*	*
Canale (1983)				*
Canale & Swain (1980)	*	*		*
Carter & McCarthy (2006)	*			
Celce-Murcia et al. (1995)	*	*		*
Christie (2005)				*
Crystal (1985)	*	*		
Crystal & Davy (1980)	*			
Halliday (1978)	*			
Halliday (1994)				*
Halliday et al. (1964)	*			
Halliday & Hasan (1976)	*			
Hartley (2008)				*
Hord de Mendez (1997)	*	*		
Hudson (1980)	*	*		
Hymes (1972)				*
Lee & Chan (2015)	*	*	*	*
Lyster (1994)				*
Martin & Rose (2003)				*
Moravcsik & Murugesan (1975)		*		
Pawley & Syder (1983)			*	*
Petric (2007)		*		
Richards et al. (2002)	*			
Savignon (1983)				*
Sinclair (1983)			*	
Swales (1986)		*		
Swales (1990)		*		
Tarone & Swain (1995)	*	*		*
Thomas (1995)				*
Thompson (2001)		*		
Thompson & Tribble (2001)		*		
Wales (1989)	*	*		
White (2004)		*		
Yule (2006)	*	*		

Reciprocal translation. As Noblit and Hare (1988) suggested, in order to combine the relevant studies, a list of themes should be created, and then connections should be established among the relevant themes. Reciprocal translation implies that the obtained codes and themes are translated into the major concepts and metaphors through an interpretive process (Noblit & Hare, 1988). We thus engaged a thematic coding strategy though an iterative categorization of codes and themes.

As recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), an a priori list of categories was prepared based on theoretical background of the study. Each study was examined and classified into one of the following initially pre-specified categories. The initial categories included (a)

Register, (b) Style, (c) Naturalness, and (d) Contextual appropriateness. The studies were examined on different aspects including, date of publication, name of the journal, research questions, literature review, citations and references, methodology, analysis, and main findings. In so doing, key codes and concepts in each study were identified and synthesized following Saldana's (2015) scheme. The obtained codes were written verbatim to facilitate the coding and counting process and comparing the main themes of the studies. The codes in the aggregated studies were classified into the initial categories. Afterwards, all the interlinked categories and codes were then transformed into descriptive themes. The codes that were irrelevant to the main aspects of sociolinguistic competence were eliminated, and the codes with similar meanings were combined under one code.

To ensure consistency in coding, two raters (who were familiar with the initial categories) recoded 10 percent of the studies (4 studies) chosen at random from the whole sample. This number might seem small compared with the whole number of articles, but it was difficult to perform double coding for this large sample, and it needed much more time and effort by a second coder to code all the studies. After the completion of the recoding process, a correlation coefficient of a=0.87 indicated an acceptable inter-coder reliability.

Synthesis of translation. This last step of qualitative meta-synthesis involved synthesizing the translated, reconsolidated, and juxtaposed themes and concepts to propose a general interpretation of the phenomena. Following the phase of selective coding, the overarching theories and components were derived as grounded in the interconnected descriptive themes of the underlying model. However, unanimity was sometimes hardly achieved in determining the subcategories that shared the same themes and overarching core categories which formed the final line of argument. Thus, several meeting sessions were held to discuss the adequacy of the concepts to the general fit of the final model. However, to avoid subjectivity, all the obtained codes, subcategories, and core categories were written verbatim, and a collaborative session was held to effectively examine and judge the credibility and objectivity of decisions. The whole inductive and iterative process of thematic coding and categorizing concepts led to the synthesis of a new model of EAP research article writing sociolinguistic competence which is explained in the results section in full details.

Meta-Synthesis Findings

Through an electronic search in the literature, 38 studies relevant to different aspects of SC were located, compared, contrasted, and synthesized. In the procedure of qualitative meta-synthesis, categorizing the latent themes in the evidence and the process of repetitive analysis led to the emergence of two dimensions out of a total number of 258 codes. Table 3 illustrates the frequency of codes and concepts for the main dimensions of the synthesized model following the steps of grounded theory.

Table 3. *Frequency of Obtained Codes and Concepts for Sociolinguistic Competence*

Core category	Frequency of concepts	Frequency of codes	Percentage
Stylistic competence	2	134	51.93%
Contextual competence	3	124	48.06%
Total	5	258	100%

Stylistic Competence

Stylistic Competence is the first factor derived from the process of meta-synthesis. This factor is the result of combining 134 codes (51.93%) in the relevant studies and has to do with stylistic appropriateness or appropriateness from a stylistic point of view. This component includes two subthemes: Structure and Format and Formality.

Style, as a linguistic concept with a potential for diverse applications (Azuike, 2006), has been a subject of different ascriptions and characterizations. Wales (1989) characterized style as manner of expression, differences in expression according to differences in communication situations, distinctiveness, choice and deviation from a norm which entails a conscious selection of particular linguistic features from the available repertoire. As Azuike (1992) put it, "style is deemed to be conditioned by the sociocultural factors which influence the making of an utterance, whether written or spoken" (p. 119). Azuike (2006) also provided six broad theoretical sub-headings under the concept of style: a deviation from a norm; a manifestation of the individual, content and/or form, choice between alternative ways of expressing the same idea, product of context, and simply as good or beautiful writing.

Subtle distinctions can be found between the two concepts of register and style, despite the existing similarities (Romaine, 2000; Yule, 2006). Firstly, while register is generally and sometimes strictly evaluated in terms of vocabulary, style can be assessed at the levels of vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation. In this line, Yule (2006) identified jargon (a special technical vocabulary associated with specific area of work or interest) as one of the defining features of a register. Romaine (2000) also mentioned that stylistic differences can be reflected in vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation. Though, Crystal (1985) and Hudson (1980) recognized Halliday and Hasan's (1976) "tenor" in register as an equivalent term for style. However, the categories of register and style have different applications and a clear demarcation has been shown between the tenor and style. Meyers (1974), for example, portrayed style of language as "levels of usage" as the different ways of language use which may be informed by subject matter, the intended audience, or the occasion. Therefore, tenor as a constituent element of register is a major determinant of style but may not be known as style. Style is thus related to register. Register often determines the appropriate style that is applicable in any given event. Style, however, is a language user's manner of expressing linguistic items. With this understanding, register and style may not be used interchangeably since the former can determine the latter. In result, register sensitivity is considered a key variable in contextual competence.

Structure and format. The first component that related to RA stylistic competence includes the knowledge of academic structure and format. Academic structure and format in scholarly manuscripts can refer to various aspects of the writing technique. Authors preparing a manuscript for submission should attend closely to APA writing style (American Psychological Association, 2006). APA Style includes guidance on conventions of mechanics, citation and referencing, and length. The guidelines of APA Style are recommended for most high rank journals. An article that considers APA Style guidelines is not more likely to distract the reviewer's attention from the content of the paper.

An academic format and structure are also characterized by appropriate citation and referencing. Different typologies of citations can be attributed to their different aspects, the purpose of making citations, and disciplinary and generic features of the analyzed corpora (White, 2004). Moravcsik and Murugesan (1975), utilizing a content-based typology, made a classification of citations along four dimensions: conceptual or operational, organic or perfunctory, evolutionary or juxtaposition, and confirmative or negational. Swales (1986) preferring formal typologies, focused on the linguistic realization of and surface forms of citations rather than their meaning. The most frequently used was the distinction introduced by

Swales (1990) between integral and non-integral citations, on the one hand, and reporting and non-reporting, on the other hand. In a non-integral reference, the author's name is used outside the sentence structure and has no syntactic role. An integral reference on the other hand, includes the author's name in the text structure whereas the year is used in the parentheses. Following Swales' classification, Thompson and Tribble (2001) divided non-integral citations into four subtypes, including source which may be a statement as a report regarding some facts or the attribution of an idea to another to indicate where the idea or information is taken from; identification which identifies an agent and actor within the sentence it refers to; reference which is usually signaled by the inclusion of the directive "see," referring to work containing further information; and origin which signals the originator of product, method, or concept is cited. Thompson and Tribble (2001) split integral citations into three categories: verb controlling which controls a verb in terms of active or passive voice, naming in which citation is included in noun phrase, and non-citation in which the reference is cited without the year when the reference has been given in the text earlier and there is no need to repeat.

Thompson (2001) further made a classification of nine citation types: (a) Attribution is related to Thompson and Tribble's (2001) source citation; (b) Exemplification includes such terms as "for example, or 'e.g.'; (c) Further reference is used in parentheses or a footnote and is preceded by the word 'see'; (d) Statement of use is applied to make connections between the cited and the writer's work in order to "use the arguments, concepts, terminology, or procedures from the cited work for the writer's own purposes" (Petric, 2007, p. 244); (f) Evaluation is used to evaluate the works of other authors and using evaluative language; (g) Establishing links between sources is used to make comparison and contrast between or among different sources; (h) Comparison is used to compare the writers' findings or interpretation with other sources; and (i) Other category is used when the link between the citing and cited document is not clear.

Different journals require different formats for citing a paper in the text and for listing references. The most commonly used referencing system preferred by the academic journals is APA referencing and citation style. Regardless of the citation style, there are two basic rules for listing the references: (a) every cited source must be listed and (b) every listed source must be cited. According to Hartley (2008), four main styles of referencing are currently used for academic articles: The APA style, The Modern Languages Association (MLA), The Institute of Electronic and Electrical Engineers (IEEE) style, and The Vancouver style.

Formality. A key finding from the current synthesis was the importance of formality in an academic style. Academic style incorporates academic diction which refers to the authors' choice of proper academic language. Romaine (2000) observed that style "can range from formal to informal depending on social context, relationship of the participants, social class, sex, age, physical environment, and topic" (p. 22). Register influences the manner of expression in that a writer should switch between formal and informal forms to adapt to different linguistic contexts for the purpose of appropriateness. Yule (2006) providing a further insight into this linguistic flexibility, maintained that formal style (also referred to as careful style) involves more careful attention to the way one is using the language and informal style (also referred to as casual style) involves less attention. Yule recognized this change from one style to the other as style-shifting. A distinctive feature of academic writing style is the choice of the more formal alternative when selecting a verb, noun, or other word (APA, 2006). Shifting from a less formal word to a more formal word is a concrete way to maintain an academic tone in the text. To project a written academic style, writers should try to use a single verb wherever possible. Other style shifts occur in terms of voice, tense, length of sentences, avoidance of contractions and abbreviations.

Contextual competence. Contextual Competence as another main component of RAWSC was derived out of a total number of 124 codes (48.02%) and three subthemes: register sensitivity, naturalness, and contextualization. This is a key element which is highly

linked with other categories of sociolinguistic competence. Regarding the aspect of context and socio-contextual appropriatness, sociolinguistic competence is the ability to understand the social meaning of a linguistic item and use it for appropriate communicative purposes. Canale (1983) stated that the appropriate production and understanding of utterances in different sociolinguistic contexts depend on several contextual factors, including status of participants, purposes of the interaction, and norms of interaction. Hymes (1972) put forward the concept of communicative competence adding a social-cultural dimension to the concept of language competence. Hymes defined this competence as one's awareness of knowing when, where and how to say what with whom on the basis of four parameters of possible, feasible, appropriate, and done. As Savignon (1983) mentioned, "Sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of socio-cultural rules of discourse and language. It requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used: the roles of participants, the information they share, and the function of interacting" (p. 37). However, Savignon stated that the sociolinguistic competence exceeds the ability to use language appropriately in a social context. This competence also assists language users to interpret and act in different situations by using different contextual clues. The knowledge of culture and interaction as crucial elements of verbal and non-verbal communication is also included in this kind of competence. Similarly, Lyster (1994), claiming for the importance of contextual factors, defined the concept of sociolinguistic competence as the "capacity to recognize and produce socially appropriate speech in context" (p. 263).

Naturalness. Naturalness as a significant element in several models of sociolinguistic competence (e.g., Bachman, 1990; Brown, 2000) is the first subtheme of Contextual Competence. Sinclair (1983) proposing the idea of naturalness in language, held that there exist a very large number of well-formed sentences which do not seem natural to a sensitive native speaker. These sentences violate some restrictions which do not follow the criteria for well-formedness. Sinclair believed that three parameters designate the form of naturalness of statements: neutrality (degree of apparent naturalness), isolation (degree of dependence on the surrounding text), and idiomaticity (degree of use of co-occurring words). Thus, a balance of the three parameters must be kept to enhance naturalness in communication.

Register sensitivity. Register as one of the components of contextual competence has been the focus of a number of conceptualizations. According to Halliday et al. (1964), the sensitivity to sociolinguistic conventions is associated with the response to which communicators are able to cognate the dialect, language variety, and differences in register. It is linked with a configuration of situational features and accounts for "appropriateness" in the use of language in a given situation (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Yule, 2006). Register is thus determined by the topic of discourse and the subject matter or the event in which the text is functioning (field), channel and medium of communication (mode), and the roles of the users, interaction type, and the relationship among participants (tenor) (Ballard, 2001; Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Yule, 2006). Yule (2006) asserted that register can be situational (e.g., in church), topical (e.g., talking about language), or occupational (e.g., among lawyers). Register can be considered a semantic phenomenon since it clusters semantic features according to the specific situation (Halliday, 1978). In other words, from a sociolinguistic and stylistic point of view, it is a variety of language which is used for a situational purpose and setting (Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Richards et al., 2002; Wales, 1989). Register is thus a major constituent of sociolinguistic context and its appropriate use contributes to the consideration of subject matter, the audience, and manner and means of expression.

Contextualization. Sociolinguistic competence also contributes to contextual appropriateness considering social and contextual factors which affect the use of language. Context is to a great extent associated with language variation in sociolinguistics and meaning in pragmatics. This concept is thus related to register. In fact, register is a functional or situational variety of language which is related to a speech event or a sociolinguistic context

(Crystal & Davy, 1980). In Ballard's (2001) characterization, register incorporates several factors which work together to influence the choices language users make when constructing discourse, including a text's subject matter, its purpose, its mode (spoken or written), its genre (its type), and the relationship that exists between its participants (e.g., the writer and the audience).

Halliday (1994) provided the concept of context of situation and cultural context, analyzing them in terms of field, tenor, and mode. These three components signify any socio-linguistic occurrence. Thomas (1995) classified "context" into three types: physical context (date, time, location, theme); social context (the social status of the speaker and the addressee); and linguistic context (the language which is being used and why it is used). Halliday (1994), Martin & Rose (2003), and Christie (2005) believed that any text is a result of conceptual and situational contexts which include topic contextualization at the conceptual level and in terms of time and place respectively. They explained that the situational context refers to the writer's abilities to abide by setting (place and time) of the concepts they are going to write about and conceptual contextualization refers to writers' abilities to eliminate any irrelevant information in their writings. Christie (2005) emphasized that a context is not separated from its text, because the text gives it life and the context makes the text relevant.

The next section deals with the second stage of the study which aimed to explore how the meta-synthesis findings go with the ideas and practical experiences of researchers.

Stage 2: Interview

The interviews were conducted to gain a detailed understanding of the researchers' perceptions of RA writing sociolinguistic competence and confirm the conceptual model of RAWSC as suggested in the meta-synthesis stage. Twenty participants were purposively recruited to take part in the study. Based on the collected information and participants' willingness to cooperate in the study, 9 participants were selected for interviews with each publishing at least five articles in prestigious journals in such disciplines as Management, Economics, Applied Linguistics, Chemistry, medicine, Environmental science, Psychology, Geography, and Philosophy. Accordingly, all the selected researchers had experienced conducting academic research, writing research articles, publishing research articles, and receiving rejections from the editors. In this group, 5 were males (55.5%) and 4 were females (44.5%), chosen from among the faculty members from different universities with different academic ranks, namely assistant professors, associate professors, and professors. Table 4 demonstrates the demographic characteristics of the participants. To remain anonymous each participant was given a pseudonym.

Table 4. *Background of Interview Participants*

Participant	Sex	Number of articles published	Discipline
Ali	Male	8	Management
Zahra	Female	6	Economics
Fatemeh	Female	11	Applied Linguistics
Hadi	Male	6	Chemistry
Vahid	Male	9	Medicine
Javad	Male	10	Environmental science
Amir	Male	11	Psychology

Neda	Female	7	Geography
Shabnam	Female	7	Philosophy

The interview included five in-depth questions (see Appendix) aimed to uncover how the respondents perceive RA writing SC inviting them to reflect on their perceived difficulties of sociolinguistic aspects of writing RAs, including register and style, and contextual appropriateness. For the purpose of developing effective and goal-oriented questions, a significant time was dedicated to the development of interview questions. The questions addressed the main components of sociolinguistic competence which affected the publishability of their research articles.

Introspective interviews were conducted by the second author in a face-to-face, semi-structured interview, using interview schedules. The interview was conducted in Persian, audiotaped, and transcribed. Then, it was translated into English by the same researcher. Finally, recurrent themes were obtained by the process of thematic analysis of the interviews. After transcribing the recorded files of interviews, the steps of coding scheme (see Saldana, 2015) were followed as explained in the previous sections. This scheme included the steps of *from codes to categories*, *recoding and recategorizing*, *and from codes and categories to theory*. As an instance, the category of *register sensitivity* resulted from the combination of 10 codes in the present study. Further, as explained in the following, a synthesis of derived categories led us to develop the concept of RA sociolinguistic features.

Interview Findings

Three sociolinguistic features emerged during the thematic combination of four subcategories and 128 codes. Firstly, the interviewees recognized *following an academic format and style* as a significant element of high quality research articles. This involves paying attention to the face validity and academic structure of different sections of any paper in order to meet the English readership standards. The research informants claimed the importance of avoiding run-on sentences, appropriate length, font, and spacing, and correct presentation of tables, figures, captions, footnotes, and headings. They also suggested that the authors consider consistency and homogeneity in writing style of headings and subheadings, tables, figures, footnotes, graphs, and references and citation. However, as was found in the interviews, minor problems were tolerated by the reviewers and even major problems rarely affected reviewers' decision. "Only major problems in this area matter. Minor problems are usually tolerated by the reviewers or editors especially if the paper has merits in other areas (e.g., its contribution to the literature)" (Zahra, January 4, 2018).

Secondly, the respondents emphasized the importance of *formality* and using formal structures in writing a successful research article. As some techniques to increase formality of writing, they referred to the avoidance of slang, casual language, and clichés, and choosing more formal alternatives when selecting a word or a phrase. "I think ideas need their own proper words which are formal and academic which appropriately carry the message" (Vahid, January 20, 2018).

As the third category, the concept of *register sensitivity* was derived from a synthesis of 10 codes. The respondents highlighted the knowledge of discipline-specific lexico-grammatical knowledge in writing academic RAs. As one of them said, "I think we need to be aware of discipline-specific lexico-grammatical knowledge since it helps us to produce a more appropriate manuscript in a specific field" (Javad, January 11, 2018).

Fourthly, according to the concept of *writing to the journal*, the RA authors should consider the correspondence between the format of the journal and that of the paper and follow

the standards of each journal in writing different RA sections. They need to follow the specific journal's author instructions carefully in terms of format, word count, number of figures and tables, and referencing style. Related to this concept, the role of considering the journal's audience was emphasized. Furthermore, the importance of following models of previous articles in a specific journal to which they submit was highlighted. "In order to receive an acceptance letter, preparing the manuscript the way previous articles have been prepared is very helpful" (Neda, January 22, 2018).

Table 5 shows the sociolinguistics features together with the frequency of codes for the subcategories.

Table 5. *RA Sociolinguistic Features and Frequency of Codes*

	RA sociolinguistic features	**Frequency of codes**	**Percentage**
1	Following an academic format and style	71	60.16%
2	Formality	21	17.79 %
3	Register sensitivity	10	8.47%
4	Writing to the journal	16	13.55%
	Total	118	100 %

As follows, a model of sociolinguistic competence is presented based on the two stages of meta-synthesis and interviews.

A Model of Sociolinguistic Competence in Writing EAP Ras

This study aimed at providing a reductive model of sociolinguistic competence in writing academic RAs. To this end, a meta-synthesis approach was adopted as the basis for construct definition of the model. After the recursive search in the literature, 38 studies relevant to different aspects of SC were qualitatively meta-synthesized. Interviews were also conducted to examine the EAP researchers' perceptions of different aspects of SC and yield a more reliable model. The underpinning elements contributing to EAP RAWSC were identified, including Stylistic Competence and Contextual Competence. Table 6 demonstrates the dimensions and concepts of SC together with a description of the constituting factors. The frequency columns provide a raw count of relevant codes in the meta-synthesis and interviews. The percentage for each subcategory is also provided.

Table 6. *A Model of Sociolinguistic Competence in Writing EAP RAs*

Dimensions	Concepts	Description	Codes (meta-synthesis)	Codes (interview)	Percentage
Stylistic competence (Total= 226 codes, 60.10%)	Structure and format (Total=148 codes)	The knowledge of writing a RA according to the norms considered for each research article section; familiarity with the appropriate RA academic structure and English readership standards	77	71	65.48%

	Formality (Total=78 codes)	An awareness of formal words and structures, and strategies that enhance the formality of RAs	57	21	34.51%
Contextual competence (Total= 150 codes, 39.89%)	Register sensitivity (Total=52 codes)	Awareness of discipline-specific lexico-grammatical features; knowledge of choosing an appropriate register for RA writing	42	10	34.66%
	Naturalness (Total=31 codes)	The knowledge of generating sentences which are natural and acceptable for the native speakers	31	0	20.66%
	Contextualization(Total=67 codes)	The knowledge of conceptual and situational contextualization, considering the specific journal's writing conventions, and writing to the journal community	51	16	44.66%
Total= 376			258	118	100%

Discussion and Conclusions

Writing an acceptable RA requires mastery of four areas of language competence: grammatical, textual, sociolinguistic, and functional. Nevertheless, no attempt has yet been made to establish a well-defined conceptualization of these four facets in writing RAs. Moreover, the available frameworks on the multifaceted nature of language competence (e.g., Bachman, 1990; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980) have failed to unanimously demonstrate a comprehensive account of language knowledge in different genres of language use. Also, due to the variety of proposed models, this study attempted to collate the existing models to extract a synthesized account of the sociolinguistic aspect of language competence. Besides, this study incorporated a further investigation of EAP researchers' perceptions of RAWSC to develop a model which can account for the knowledge of RA writing in different EAP fields. The findings of this study lend support to previous studies in the literature (Jalongo, 2013; Jalango & Saracho, 2016; Swales & Feak, 1994) which emphasized several sociolinguistic factors which characterize publishable RAs: diverse readership, consideration of the specific outlet, format and structure, audience appropriateness, and formality.

This study thus aimed to develop a conceptual model of sociolinguistic competence in writing academic RAs. The result of the study yielded a reductionist account of RA writing sociolinguistic competence including a two-tier construct framework with Stylistic and Contextual competences as the main themes and five subthemes. Bearing in mind the growing significance of a RA as an important genre for distributing knowledge to the discourse community (Hyland, 2000; 2016), the synthesized model helps the students in higher education who today experience increasing difficulties in publishing scholarly RAs. Awareness of

diverse models for SC and their constituents can considerably assist students on courses of English for academic purposes if they are to continue education beyond their undergraduate studies (Flowerdew, 2000) and succeed in their academic endeavors. Furthermore, this can highly yield an implication for novice native or non-native academic researchers to understand whether they have the knowledge of various components of sociolinguistic competence. This model of SC can, also, guide the EAP curriculum developers to plan textbooks, lessons, or any other instructional materials dedicated to sociolinguistic competence in writing academic RAs. Moreover, such a model, offering the compartments of the SC competence of writing academic RAs can have a constructive role in EAP instruction. This suggests the significance of socio-cultural factors in academic writing and the need of teaching these variables in EAP writing classes. However, the authors are not aware of various sociolinguistic aspects of RA writing, and these factors are less focused than grammatical and lexical aspects of RA writing. This results in a RA unacceptable for the journal academic community. Accordingly, university instructors can highly benefit from incorporating the stylistic and contextual components of the model in their syllabi to help the EAP students throughout different research writing courses.

The limitations of the study are attributed to different stages of the study. Firstly, in the stage of meta-synthesis, one potential limitation is associated with the sample size of meta-synthesized studies (38 studies). Screening and selecting a larger number of studies for meta-synthesis could provide more reliable and generalizable findings. As another caveat to the current study, it should be asserted here that the synthesized model may not be a substitute for the prior models which have been proposed for different compartments of the new model but rather it has an accumulative nature in the sense that it embodies the key elements in the previous frameworks. Moreover, in the introspective stage, a random selection of a larger number of participants could result in more reliable findings. Besides, the interviewees were selected from among Iranian EAP researchers from different fields of study. This should also be taken into consideration when generalizing the introspective findings.

The present study raises some topics reserved for further work. Future studies that emphasize the manifestation of different aspects of sociolinguistic competence are recommended which are specific to distinct academic fields. Besides, a cross-linguistic comparison of different categories and subcategories of SC in academic writing may underline some discrepancies, which can guide native and non-native writers of English to produce a more acceptable research paper. Finally, the present study can be replicated with EAP learners and teachers to identify their perceptions of various facets of RA writing competence across different academic genres and contexts.

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Appendix

1. Have you ever experienced submitting and resubmitting your academic papers to a variety of journals and finally being rejected by the journal editors? Do the editors and reviewers make any comments regarding formality and style of writing? Are there any related reasons which lead to the rejection of articles? Please explain.

2. What do you think are the main factors that the authors should consider in order to write effectively and publish their articles successfully?

3. How can you describe the stylistic and register-specific features of a research article deserving to be published in a highly ranked journal?

4. Are there any issues related to style, register, citation and referencing, journal appropriateness, etc. that the authors need to consider in writing different sections of a research paper?

5. What do you think are the important difficulties that arise from the authors' lack of stylistic and contextual knowledge in writing different parts of a research article?

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