

“Citation Rhetoric Examined” / “Une évaluation de la rhétorique des citations scientifiques”

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In his influential monograph *The Rhetoric of Citation Systems*, Connors (1999) elaborates on the principle that scholars working with different forms of citation find themselves thinking differently, since the citation format has natural consequences in the way it interacts with the

material in the practice of the writer. For example, the popular MLA and APA formats differ radically in the way they handle footnotes. MLA allows writers to include both substantive and citation footnotes, and gives them the choice to include citations at the foot of the page, at the back of the book, or inline. Many journals employing APA, on the other hand, discourage use of substantive footnotes and require that citations be inline. The content of in-text parenthetical citations is also different: MLA requires writers to include a page number for citations, while APA allows writers to refer broadly to a source by author name and year. Connor argues that the APA's emphasis on the year encourages both the writer and the reader to be conscious of how recent the source material is, and that a prejudice tends to emerge against older publications, which helps to strengthen the supercessionist form of thinking across the disciplines where the APA format is popular. In addition, the lack of substantive footnoting in the APA tends to discourage digressions into related but essential content by both writers and readers.

In this project, we examine how citation style may modify the reading experience through a preliminary study with graduate students in the humanities and social sciences. We have prepared two versions of a short online article, one adhering to APA and the other to MLA standards. The latter includes substantive footnotes. We have situated these articles in a scholarly reading environment that allows users access to referenced material. Post-reading, participants complete a set of recall and user-perspective questions designed to ascertain whether and how citation style modifies comprehension and reader disposition toward the text. A subset of the participant pool subsequently carries out the task of reformatting the short MLA-style paper into an APA-style paper; a second subset carries out the opposite task. The details of this process are recorded using Morae usability software and participants are interviewed post-task about their process. Although we are not at a stage in the research to report results here, we anticipate this work will shed light on the complexity of the devices of publication in relation to how citation systems modify academic reading and writing processes.

This project is an initiative of a major collaborative research initiative in the digital humanities, Implementing New Knowledge Environments (INKE), that aims to foster understanding of the significance of digital and analog books and their role in humanities scholarship. It is also part of a larger study of citation rhetoric as exemplified in *Synergies: Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Infrastructure*, a not-for-profit platform for the publication and dissemination of research results in the social sciences and humanities published in Canada. Results of this citation rhetoric research project will benefit analysis of citation statistics in large-scale web search interfaces such as *Synergies*. It will also contribute to further research on automated semantic searches in bibliographies and works cited.

References

Connors, Robert J. *The Rhetoric of Citation Systems*. NY: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (Taylor & Francis Group), 1999.