An analysis of stance and voice in Applied Linguistics research articles across Mainland Chinese and British cultures

Xiaoyu Xu and Hilary Nesi (Coventry University, UK)

Scholars from Mainland China are increasingly publishing in the medium of English in order to gain visibility and credibility worldwide. However, while Chinese scholars in the hard sciences now feature extensively in international databases such as the Science Citation Index, the visibility of Chinese scholars in the Social Sciences Citation Index is strikingly low. Due to the holistic, interpretative, reiterative nature of knowledge in the soft sciences, writers have to work harder to establish personal credibility through their claim-making negotiations, sharing sympathetic understanding and promoting tolerance in their readers (Becher, 1994; Becher & Trowler, 2001; Hyland, 2000). The Chinese language has developed in a strict political environment within the particular cultures of Confucianism and collectivism where high importance is given to context and greater energy is devoted to saving 'face'. It is probably for this reason that the tradition of argument in China is considered to be more implicit, more modest, more positive, less engaging and less evaluative than in the Anglo-American argumentative traditions (Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Lustig & Koester, 2008; Hofstede & Minkov, 2010; Hall, 1976). However factors other than national culture such as disciplinary culture, genre, topic, audience size and the writers' own language proficiency and academic experience may also impact on argumentative style in research writing. These considerations have been neglected in most of the prior research into the typically Chinese features of academic writing.

This paper uses corpus methods alongside discourse analysis to test whether and how all these factors might affect research writing in the soft sciences. To this end, 15 Applied Linguistics research articles written in English by Mainland Chinese scholars were selected for a Chinese corpus, and 15 research articles by British scholars matching the variables in the Chinese corpus were selected for a reference corpus. Only the Introduction and Conclusion sections were included as they are the most argumentative parts of research articles. Stance and voice, two crucial aspects of argument, were chosen to be examined using Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) which maps the expressions of feelings, the interaction between reader and writer, and the up-scaling and down-scaling of evaluations. Appraisal markers were differentiated according to their level of relevance to the writers' argumentative intention, using the theory of context (Xu & Nesi, 2017). This helped to focus on Appraisal markers relevant to argument. Moves were also taken into account, drawing on Genre Analysis (Swales, 1990, 2004) to understand the purposes of particular co-articulations of Appraisal markers. The two corpora were marked up manually using the UAM CorpusTool (O'Donnell, 2008) and compared statistically using the t-test provided by UAM CorpusTool.

The findings indicate that generally the Chinese authors tried to maintain writer-reader relationships by avoiding explicit attitudinal evaluation of the work of others, while the British authors tried to maintain writer-reader relationships by toning down or only evoking stance. The Chinese authors argued for their own positions by reinforcing their explicit attitudes, adding multiple references, sharpening the completion of tasks and construing claims as unquestioned, whereas the British authors argued for their own positions by explicitly evaluating people and phenomena (see Table 1).

	Maintenance of writer-reader relationship	Argument for own positions	
Chinese	Avoidance of expression of Attitude ++	Up-grading of Inscribed Attitude +++ Multiple references +++ Sharpening +++ Monoglossic claims +++	
British	Heteroglossic claims + Evoked Graduation ++	Expression of Attitude	Inclination +++
			Reaction ++
			Social valuation +++

Table 1. Chinese and British authors' characteristic preferences for Appraisal categories
(+ = weak significance 90%; ++ = medium significance 95%; +++ = high significance 98%)

For example, while trying to avoid expressions of explicit Attitude to downtone stance and voice, the Chinese writers in this corpus consistently preferred to make **Monoglossic** claims (e.g., *Compared with the previous quantitative methods in typology, our method has these advantages and novelties*). These claims are presented as "taken for granted" and are "intersubjectively neutral, objective or even 'factual'" (Martin & White, 2005: 99). The Chinese writers were more inclined to establish territory in their introductions through **Multiple references** (e.g., *The same controversy exits in the EFL field among the relatively sparse studies on PA training and its long term effect assessment (Lundberg et al., 1988; Bradley & Bryant, 1985; Lie, 1991; Kozminsky & Kozminsky's, 1995; Castles & Coltheart, 2004)*) and through **Sharpening the reality process** (e.g., *research has shown that…, studies have found…*), referring to the prior research to evoke the importance of the topic and an authoritative stance. They also strengthened their stance by **up-grading Inscribed Attitude** (e.g., *early childhood literacy is the best investment*) to emphasize potential improvements that could be made to the real world. In the concluding section they contextualised their studies by **Sharpening the Focus** (e.g., *…as demonstrated in this study…, this study has shown*), signalling that their aims had been realised. When they consolidated their results, they **up-graded Inscribed Attitude** (e.g., a *key strategy in this would be for tutors to…*) to emphasize the positive implications of their research for the real world.

In contrast, the British consistently preferred **Heteroglossic** claims to generally downtone their stance and voice, making reference to other voices by a variety of means such as projection (e.g. *these findings suggest that…*), modality (e.g. *the criticism of PPP seems well-founded*) or concession (e.g. *Although generally unstated in descriptions of methodology, this belief …*). However the British writers established territory by using more **explicit Attitude** (e.g., *the latter two points are particularly concerning*) to evaluate important problems mentioned in the literature, evaluate the advantages of prior approaches, and reluctantly agree with opponents' opinions. When they moved to establishing a niche, they preferred **Inclination** (e.g., I am *interested, we hope, we are curious*) to directly reveal authorial presence and their desire to explore the real or research world context. Stance was more balanced in the British writing, with greater use of **Evoked Graduation** to **Soften the reality of the phase** (e.g., *suggest, sought to, belief*) so as to evoke the negative value that the prior research was incomplete, or to

evoke a dialogic space for disagreement with the writers' suggestions or opinions. They also used more **Evoked Graduation** to predict results (e.g., *the optional feedback group was expected to utilize feedback to a lesser extent and perhaps view it more casually*), or to increase negative evaluations (e.g., *their perception of feedback was unclear*) or the importance of the research focus (e.g., *contribute, enhancing*). In their conclusions, **Evoked Graduation**, particularly upgraded **Non-specific numeration** (e.g., *the current study thus yielded several kernels of information*), was used to consolidate results in order to evoke a positive value of productivity. **Evoked Graduation** (e.g., *such, more specifically, specific*) was also used by the British writers to evoke a contractive stance and suggest specific ways to improve the real world.

The findings suggest that both the Chinese and the British authors are aware of the need to argue for their own opinions and maintain good relationships with their readers, but choose contrasting ways to realize these same purposes. These findings provide evidence to challenge the hypothesis that Chinese writers are more implicit, more modest and more positive, but they also support the view that Chinese writers are less evaluative and less engaging. Therefore, this paper argues that although culture might affect rhetorical choice, we need to explore beyond the simple cultural stereotypes (e.g., that Chinese writers devote greater energy to saving 'face').

Because the statistically significant differences in stance and voice strategies revealed in this paper indicate differences between Chinese and British scholars' argumentative styles, they suggest the need for a new way of perceiving Chinese ethnolinguistic impact on research writing, and might also inform the teaching of academic writing in the social sciences.

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