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## **Metadiscourse repertoire of L1 Mandarin undergraduates writing in English: a cross-contextual, cross-disciplinary study.**

### **Abstract**

This article presents a qualitative, comparative study of metadiscourse in the academic writing of two groups of undergraduate students working in two different disciplines. The groups of students were: 1) Native speakers of Mandarin studying in China through the medium of English; 2) Native speakers of Mandarin studying in the UK through the medium of English. For each group of students, we examined writing undertaken in two undergraduate disciplinary courses: Literary Criticism and Translation Studies. Our aim was to extend research into English writing by L1 Mandarin speakers, and to identify patterns of difference and similarity both between educational contexts and between disciplines. Results suggest that patterns of metadiscourse use in our corpus are associated with both disciplinary and contextual factors, but that contextual factors may have a stronger effect than disciplinary factors. For our data, local institutional culture seems to have a noticeable influence on student writers' use of metadiscourse.

### **1. Introduction**

Our study examines writing in two disciplines, Literary Criticism and Translation Studies. The claim that writing in different disciplines varies systematically along a range of macro and micro dimensions of text is well established; Hyland (2000) and Silver (2006) are book length treatments of the issue. Becher & Trowler (2001) argue that "it is... through the

medium of language that some of the more fundamental distinctions [between disciplines] emerge” (p. 46). Hyland (2009) argues that “Overwhelmingly ... it is *disciplinary* variation which underlies most specificity [in academic texts].” (2009, p.7). The reason suggested is that academic disciplines are language using communities which vary in their practices; texts produced by members of disciplinary communities are the concrete realisation of those varied practices.

Becher & Trowler (2001) offer a well-known framework for understanding similarities and differences between academic disciplines, using the two continua of Hard↔Soft and Pure↔Applied. Under such a scheme, Literary Criticism might be categorised as ‘soft pure’ and Translation Studies as ‘soft applied’. The two disciplines are different enough for texts within them to show variation on the basis of discipline, but not so different as to make it impossible to obtain comparable samples of texts.

Various studies compare texts from disciplines which are similarly related. For example Bondi & Mazzi (2008) take a lexical approach, comparing the use of lexical items relating to epistemological constructs in Economics writing and History writing. Bruce (2010) takes a genre based approach, looking at undergraduate essays in Sociology and in English from social and cognitive perspectives. He finds differences in a range of textual resources used, for example that Sociology essays include more metadiscoursal mapping at the beginning of the essay, and that English essays make more use of direct quotation to express arguments (2010, p.162). Samraj (2008) compares masters theses from a wider range of disciplines, looking first at macro organisation and then specifically at first person pronoun usage and at

citations. She finds that first person pronoun usage is more frequent in Philosophy than in either Biology or Linguistics, and that its use tends to realise different functions in the writing of each discipline. For example, Philosophy writers tend to use it to present their arguments, whereas Biology writers seem to use it to portray themselves as an agent in a research process (2008, p.63-64).

These studies make clear arguments to the effect that academic writing varies systematically across disciplines, but seem to pay less attention to the possible effects of context. Our own study, in contrast, investigates context as a possible factor accounting for variation. Our writers share the same macro-cultural and linguistic background, but their undergraduate English writing in either discipline takes place in, and has developed in, different educational contexts: B\*\*\*\*\* University, PRC, and W\*\*\*\*\* University, UK. As we argue below, this would appear to have an influence on their writing.

Our model of context in this paper is a local one; we refer to the specific institutions and departments in which the writing of these undergraduates developed. Lea and Street (1999, 2006) argue that academic writing should be seen as a highly situated practice; it is important to note that they refer not only to situation within disciplines, but also within specific places, times, and micro-communities. They argue that tutors' expectations of student writing are shaped by departmental and institutional priorities as well as by disciplinary practices, and that these expectations are in turn likely to impact on the writing which students produce. Scholars investigating the writing needs of first year undergraduate students (e.g. Hendersen & Hirst, 2007; Murray, 2010) argue that students

and instructors should be explicit about (and, if necessary, critical towards) the literacy practices that are valued in the specific institutional contexts in which writing takes place.

The language analysis perspective that we use for our comparisons is that of Metadiscourse. We argue that this perspective is a highly suitable one to investigate both disciplinary and contextual variation in the writing of undergraduate students. The concept of metadiscourse offers “a broad perspective on the way that academic writers engage their readers; shaping their propositions to create convincing, coherent texts by making language choices in social contexts peopled by readers, prior experiences, and other texts” (Hyland & Tse, 2004, p.167). Various researchers have argued that the management of such interaction is particularly challenging for undergraduate students (Ivanic & Simpson, 1992; Mitchell, 1994; White, 1998) and for second language writers (Cadman, 1997; Gao, 2007; Hu, 2005). Metadiscourse is a linguistic resource through which the writer may project their voice or, more deterministically, through which a writer’s voice may find itself constructed. For a writer with a broad repertoire of metadiscourse at their disposal, we suggest that these linguistic resources permit an intentional manifestation of stance in text. Yet for a writer without such a repertoire, the fact of being constrained to limited resources may construct for them a stance and voice which they would not intentionally have chosen

A number of studies have been conducted on metadiscourse in undergraduate essays written in English (Cheng, 1994; Cheng & Steffensen, 1996; Shi ,2004; Tang & John, 1999; Wu, 2007). However few studies focus specifically on the writing of Chinese students, and those which do (e.g. Deng, 2006; Jin, 2004; Liu ,2007; Luo, 2003; Xiong, 2007; Zhao, 2003)

tend to concentrate specifically on textual conjunctions and transitions rather than on the full range of metadiscourse functions. Our own work, in contrast, is based on a model of metadiscourse which weights interpersonal features of metadiscourse equally with textual organisation features. This allows us to provide a fuller picture of the writing of Chinese English medium undergraduates than has tended to be shown by previous research.

A range of studies support the notion that metadiscourse, as a key indicator of author presence in text and author positioning within an academic community, is a useful perspective from which to investigate variation across disciplines. For example Hyland (2009) discusses a range of metadiscourse features which, he argues, are particularly fruitful to throw light on variation in disciplinary writing. He discusses each feature in turn, showing that they occur with different frequencies, in different positions, and realise different functions, in the writing of a range of disciplines. Lafuente Millan (2010) focuses very specifically on self mentions, comparing exclusive first person markers in the writing of four disciplines. He too argues not only that the frequency of this feature varies, but also its function varies across disciplines. He concludes that “the results presented here suggest that the way writers construct the authorial self varies according to the specific epistemological and social norms of their own disciplinary communities” (2010, p.153).

In this paper, we use metadiscourse as a prism to examine variation in author voice in two disciplines and two contexts. We aim to contribute to both disciplinary and contextual research on student writing, but more importantly, to bring the two perspectives together.

## **2. Research questions**

Our research questions were: *1. What were the similarities and differences of metadiscourse use between writing in the two contexts studied?* and *2. Within each context, what were the differences of metadiscourse use between the two disciplines studied?* Taken together, these questions not only allow an overall comparison between the two contexts, but also throw light on the relative importance of discipline and of educational context in influencing the writing of the students whose work we examined.

## **3. A corpus based approach**

Our study takes a corpus based approach and is representative of two contemporary trends in corpus based work.

First, our work involves a small, specific purposes corpus. Early corpus research had the goal of gaining insight into the language as a whole and in order to do this constructed very large corpora (Sinclair, 1991, 1994). In more recent years, there have been more studies using small corpora for specific contextual research purposes, and our own work is in this tradition. Examples of research on specialised corpora are Bolton et al. (2002) who study the writing of university students in Hong Kong and the UK, or Zhao (2003) who uses a corpus of Chinese undergraduates' writing. Although such corpora do not provide a basis for generalised claims about language use, they have the advantage of allowing the researcher to identify patterns that may be specific to the contexts researched.

Second, our work involves a major qualitative dimension in the preparation of corpus data. Traditionally, corpus based work was associated with quantitative research into such issues as word frequency or collocational patterns and has relied on the computer's ability to identify linguistic items irrespective of context. (McEnery & Wilson, 1996). The present work, however, represents a newer type of corpus based work. Here, texts were qualitatively coded before any quantitative work took place. Metadiscourse functions were identified in context and items realising these functions were labelled. The labels were then manually tagged into the corpus. The qualitative coding procedure, then, treats 'metadiscourse function' as a qualitative, nominal variable with a number of specific categories; it is on the basis of this qualitative categorisation that subsequent quantitative work is undertaken.

#### **4. Developing a model for analysis**

As was briefly mentioned above, there are two trends in metadiscourse related research which were important in first selecting, and then developing, an appropriate model for analysis in this study.

The first shift is an increased emphasis on the interpersonal function of metadiscourse in academic texts. Earliest studies (Lautamatti, 1978; Williams, 1981) tended to focus on textual connective functions related to the achievement of cohesion and coherence. This remains the emphasis of various practical studies in the Chinese context (e.g. Chiang, 2003; Zhao, 2003; Yu, 2004 in Tseng & Luo, 2006). However some more recent studies (Hyland, 2005; Ifantidou, 2005) argue that such a focus is limiting. Hyland argues that all



metadiscourse, whether apparently focused on text organisation or on addressing the reader, is related to interaction: this is the reasoning behind Hyland's (2005) labelling of his framework as an interpersonal model of metadiscourse. For Hyland, even so-called textual metadiscourse is chosen by the writer to guide readers' understanding and to lead them towards a writer's preferred interpretations. All metadiscourse therefore reveals the writer's awareness of imagined readers' needs for elaboration, clarification, and interaction.

A second shift with which we identify is away from a focus on identifying and classifying metadiscoursal language items and towards an emphasis on interpretation in context. Early investigations of writing from the perspective of metadiscourse, (e.g. Williams, 1981; Crismore, 1983; Vande Koppel, 1985) tend to focus on identifying those language forms which represent non-propositional content, but for contemporary researchers metadiscourse is a resolutely functional concept, not inexorably linked to specific linguistic items. In this pragmatic, rhetorical approach, writers' use (and analysts' identification) of metadiscourse is closely tied to the context of writing (Hyland, 1998, 2004, 2005).

In the light of these trends, we chose to base our work on Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse. Hyland categorises metadiscourse into two major functions: Interactive Metadiscourse, where the writer seeks to connect individual propositions in line with their own preferred interpretation, restricting the reader's selection of alternative interpretations; and Interactional Metadiscourse, where the writer expresses a persona, which in academic writing is influenced by discourse community conventions.

For each function, Hyland proposes a number of sub categories. Within the Interactive function there are: Transitions, Frame Markers, Endophoric Markers, Evidentials, and Code Glosses . Within the Interactional function, Hyland suggests: Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers, Self Mentions, and Engagement Markers. Although Hyland gives a number of examples of linguistic resources that can potentially realise each metadiscourse function, he is very clear that a function should only be identified in context, emphasising that “there are no simple linguistic criteria for identifying metadiscourse” (2005, p.27). For example, he lists linguistic items that can function as transitions, but emphasises firstly that these items may not always function in this way, and secondly that the metadiscoursal function of transition could be realised by an item not in his list. As he says, “metadiscourse can be seen as an open category to which writers are able to add new items according to the needs of the context” (2005, p. 27). Hyland is also clear that any given linguistic item might realise more than one metadiscoursal function simultaneously.

Conceptually, then, Hyland’s model was the starting point for this research. We approached the texts with an open mind as to what language forms we might find realising various metadiscoursal functions, and also with an awareness that student writers may make errors of language form. As we worked with our data, we found it necessary to make some small modifications to Hyland’s model. These were mainly in the subcategories of Transitions and Evidentials. Our work therefore offers a reflexive perspective on Hyland’s model; it develops and adjusts the model to take particular account of the texts produced by our writers.

In the following sections, then, we will illustrate our final coding model with extracts from our own corpus data. We will indicate where our model differs from that of Hyland and will explain the reasons for the modification

## **5. Interactive metadiscourse**

This function of metadiscourse allows a writer to connect individual propositions in line with their preferred interpretation. It includes a number of subcategories, which we will discuss in turn.

### *5.1. Transitions (TM)*

Language forms in this category are used to mark transitions between clauses. Within the category, we found it helpful to further classify into Hyland's subcategories of Addition, Comparison and Consequence (2005, p.50) since our initial reading of texts suggested that there was considerable variation in different student groups' deployment of different semantic relations. We added a fourth subcategory 'Misuse'. This subcategory was deemed necessary to account for the relatively frequent syntactic or discoursal infelicity which was noted in students' deployment of this function. We found examples of students using words or phrases which looked like transitions, but which expressed an inaccurate or inappropriate semantic relation between clauses. Transitions, then, are labelled in our model in subcategories of: Addition (TM1); Comparison (TM2); Cause/Consequence (TM3); Misuse (TM4). Some examples of the categories are:

1) In addition (TM1), the beginning of the narration of her tragic life, which is a turning point of the story, contradicts the festive atmosphere the author describing.

(W\*\*\*\*\* LC-1)

2) Second version, however (TM2), does not share the same communicative purpose with the first one. (W\*\*\*\*\* TS-1)

3) Although (TM2) I haven't translated it into a different genre, but (TM4) it still got some features of Free Translation. (W\*\*\*\*\* TS-15)

4) As (TM3) the target audience is Chinese readers, so (TM4) I have used a lot terms which the Chinese will familiar. (W\*\*\*\*\* TS-14)

Examples 3 and 4 above indicate classically misused metadiscourse devices in Chinese students' EFL writing. In 3), *although* and *but* appear in the same sentence and *as* and *so* are used at the same time in 4). These syntactic structures would be appropriate in Mandarin, but not in English.

## 5.2. Frame markers (FM)

This category covers items used to signal discourse acts in text. Again, we separated the category into a number of subcategories, using Hyland's (2005, p.51) discussion of levels of delicacy within this function. As with transition markers, we found it useful to be able to distinguish between writers' deployment of different aspects of the function. The subcategories are: Sequencers (FM1); Stage labels (FM2); Announcements of goals (FM3); Topic shifters (FM4) . We noted that numbers and letters before subheadings, points and examples often represent the sequence of the author's main topics and statements.

Therefore, items such as 1, 2, 3, I, II, III, a., b. and c. also belong to this category and are labelled as FM1, sequencers. This example is in the form of a numbered subheading:

5) (1) Introduction (FM1) (B\*\*\*\*\* LC-5)

### 5.3. *Endophoric markers (EnM)*

Endophoric markers, references to other sections of essays, were straightforward in our data. Some examples from the data are:

6) As I mentioned in the first section (EnM), the translator should not only be faithful to the author, but also be responsible to the readers. (W\*\*\*\*\* TS-6)

7) As I mentioned in the above paragraph (EnM) I choose people who know little about foreign religion as my target readers. (W\*\*\*\*\* TS-10)

### 5.4. *Evidentials (E)*

These are resources used to annotate citations within a community-based literature, and they provide important support for arguments in academic writing (Hyland, 2005). Due to the particular characteristics of our data and the variety of ways that the evidential function was realised within it, we found it necessary to develop a number of subcategories of evidentials. Our more detailed categories are: Standard evidentials (E1); Special evidentials (E2) ; Unquoted evidentials (E3).

Standard evidentials (E1) refer to proper referential notes or indicators, annotating authorial statements or scholars' comments from references. For example,

8) As Reiss and Vermeer's book stipulates, 'A translation (of TT) is determined by its skopos' (Reiss and Vermeer 1984: 119) (E1). (W\*\*\*\*\* TS-9)

Special evidentials (E2) refer to quotations from works of literature or examples from dictionaries and text books rather than from authorial statements or opinions. Although not differing in form from E1 above, these evidentials assign a different status to the data quoted. They were frequent in the essays in our corpus data; an example is

9) Such as in line 3 and 4 (E2) the 'bamboo horse' and 'blue plums' is a metaphor that refers to a boy and girl growing up together and fall in love with each other in Chinese culture. (W\*\*\*\*\* LC-2,)

Unquoted evidentials (E3) refer to an apparent reference to an authorial source, without the provision of information to enable the source to be located. For example

10) According to Hans J. Vermeer's skopos theory (E3)... (W\*\*\*\*\* TS- 7)

### 5.5 *Code glosses (CG)*

Code glosses are brief reformulations and exemplifications. They were again straightforward in our data and are not divided into further subcategories. An example is:

11) Furthermore, the first piece of translation is also in written and I kept some features of the source text in my first translation, such as (CG) the clear structure, and simple phrases. (W\*\*\*\*\* TS - 12)

## 6. **Interactional metadiscourse**

This function of metadiscourse allows the writer to bring their voice into the text explicitly. Again, it has various subcategories, which will be discussed in turn.

### 6.1 *Hedges (H)*

These are language items used to withhold authorial commitment and open dialogue. In the extract below, a student advances a possible interpretation of character motivation:

12) Maybe (H) we can give his cruel action a reason: the more deeply he falls in love, the more crazily he hates. (B\*\*\*\*\*-LC-17)

### 6.2 *Boosters (B)*

These are resources used to emphasize the writer's certainty. The writer below aligns her/himself strongly with the value of 'dynamic equivalence' in translation:

13) ...obviously (B), there are more advantages to adopt dynamic equivalence rather than formal equivalence. This is also proved (B) through the examples' comparison. (W\*\*\*\*\* TS-9)

### 6.3 *Attitude markers (AM)*

Attitude markers are devices that represent the writer's emotional attitude such as surprise. In the extract below, the student has chosen to express this through exclamation marks, a technique which is arguably not register appropriate.

14) But when finally he gets remarried with Sue, all of his situations begin to change better! (AM) How satire it is! (AM) (B\*\*\*\*\*-LC-15)

#### 6.4. *Self mentions (SM)*

Self mentions are explicit references to the writer. They are of course particularly significant in academic writing, and yet in some contexts students may have been trained to avoid them (Hyland, 2002). The extract below is from the W\*\*\*\*\* corpus; as we will see when results are discussed, there were very few in the B\*\*\*\*\* corpus.

15) Another point I (SM) would like to cover is about the translation of the Chinese four words phrases. (W\*\*\*\*\* TS-8)

#### 6.5. *Engagement markers (EM)*

These are resources that explicitly address readers and involve them in the discourse, often by the use of reader pronouns such as *you* or inclusive *we*.

16) So, if we (EM) want to learn English well, we (EM) must do well in these five aspects (B\*\*\*\*\* TS-12)

In 16), the inclusive pronoun *we* and the obligation modal *should* work together to doubly emphasise the reader's involvement and the interaction between the writer and reader. The combination of the second person pronoun or inclusive first person plural with obligation modal verbs is common in English writing by L1 Mandarin speakers, and there are a number of examples of this feature in our corpus.

### 7. **Methods**

Having explained the model for analysis, we will now discuss the corpora which we built and the methods we used for coding our data.



### *7.1. Building a corpus and designing appropriate subcorpora*

We collected texts written by L1 Mandarin undergraduates studying through the medium of English, whether in the PRC or the UK. B\*\*\*\*\* university, like others in the PRC, has adopted the policy of teaching and assessing some English language related courses through the medium of English. W\*\*\*\*\* university in the UK offers a cultural studies based degree course specifically to students from the PRC, and integrates language development within the curriculum. We selected two disciplines for comparison: Literary Criticism and Translation Studies. These are taught to final year undergraduates in both contexts through the medium of English. In both contexts, assessment is via a final written essay. From these final assignments we selected 80 academic essays in total, made up of four sets of 20 essays each: The B\*\*\*\*\* Literary Criticism sub-corpus, the W\*\*\*\*\* Literary Criticism sub-corpus, the B\*\*\*\*\* Translation Studies sub-corpus, and the W\*\*\*\*\* Translation Studies sub-corpus. The essays, which all received passing grades, were collected over two years from two consecutive final year cohorts at each university.

The set of essays can be divided and recombined into discipline-based and context-based subcorpora. This design of subcorpora allowed us to organise our data to make a range of comparisons: between contexts, between disciplines within contexts, and between groups of students within disciplines. This allowed us to investigate variation in metadiscourse use in our corpus from the perspectives of both discipline and context.

### *7.2. Coding of the data*

The first step in analysis was that of qualitative data coding: identifying and labelling metadiscourse features in the analysed texts, using the model outlined above. The ongoing analysis was recorded in the corpus files through a process of annotation. Garside et al (1997, p.2) define annotation as “the practice of adding interpretative, linguistic information to an electronic corpus”. Our chosen corpus software, UAM CorpusTool 2.0, includes a facility for annotation which allowed the selection and labelling of qualitatively chosen chunks of text. Importantly, it allows for simultaneous labelling of a chunk of text under more than one heading, so that where language forms were interpreted as realising more than one metadiscoursal function simultaneously, they were annotated as both. Full details of the procedure followed can be found in [Author] (2010).

Our data was coded initially by one author, and then reviewed by the other. A limited amount of data was additionally coded by postgraduate students in our classes. Any cases of disagreement were discussed between the authors and a decision made.

### *7.3 Describing variation between sets of subcorpora*

Having coded the data, it was possible to interrogate a series of sub-corpora to find out how metadiscourse was used in different groups of texts. For each subcorpus presented here, and on the basis of the qualitative coding discussed above, we report the following quantitative results:

1. Total number of metadiscourse items per 10, 000 words of text. These figures show in broad terms which subcorpora include more, or fewer, metadiscourse items.

2. Number of interactive metadiscourse items as a proportion of all metadiscourse items. These proportional figures allow us to see which sets of texts make more use of metadiscourse resources to organise ideas.
3. Number of interactional metadiscourse items as a proportion of all metadiscourse items. This allows us to see which sets of texts include more direct writer-reader interaction.
4. Number of metadiscourse items in specific metadiscourse categories as a proportion of all metadiscourse items. This allows for a very specific discussion of the metadiscourse resources used in the various subcorpora.

## **8. Results and discussion**

In research describing frequency of occurrence of specified linguistic features, practice varies as to the reporting of quantitative results. Studies based on smaller corpora, such as Bruce (2010) or Samraj (2008) discussed above, seem to present raw counts. Studies based on larger corpora, such as Hyland (2009) or Lafuente Millan (2010) tend to present frequencies per 10,000 words. As our corpus here was quite large, we begin by presenting frequencies of items per 10,000 words. Then, following Gee (2005, p.41) we use percentages to indicate relationship of proportion. We do not use these numbers as a basis for claims of statistical significance, but rather to indicate the areas in which variation between subcorpora might most profitably be explored.

*8.1. Similarities and differences of metadiscourse use between the two contextual student groups*

In this section we look at the two contextual groups as wholes without taking account of discipline. We will see differences between the W\*\*\*\*\* group and the B\*\*\*\*\* group on a number of dimensions, despite the fact that the two groups of students share the same Chinese language and cultural background. This suggests that educational context may have an influence on the students' use of metadiscourse on some of the dimensions discussed below.

**Table 1: Metadiscourse use by two contextual student groups**

	Number of items per 10,000 words		Proportion of total metadiscourse	
	B***** context	W***** context	B***** context	W***** context
Metadiscourse	556.3	796.8	100%	100%
Interactive resources	345.3	459.8	62.06%	57.71%
Interactional resources	211.1	337.0	37.94%	42.29%
Transition markers	131.0	212.0	23.54%	26.60%
Frame markers	87.0	61.6	15.64%	7.73%
Endophoric markers	20.4	17.9	3.66%	2.25%
Evidentials	68.8	122.6	12.36%	15.39%
Code glosses	38.0	45.7	6.84%	5.74%
Hedges	52.6	70.5	9.46%	8.85%
Boosters	50.3	37.8	9.04%	4.75%
Attitude markers	17.7	18.6	3.17%	2.33%
Self mentions	5.5	126.4	0.10%	15.87%
Engagement markers	84.7	83.5	15.23%	10.48%

The table shows that W\*\*\*\*\* based writers employ metadiscourse more frequently than B\*\*\*\*\* based writers. Both contextual groups make more use of interactive than interactional resources, but there is a noticeable difference in the respective proportions. In the B\*\*\*\*\* corpus interactive metadiscourse accounts for 62.06% of total metadiscourse use and interactional metadiscourse accounts for 37.94%, a difference of 24.12 percentage points. In the W\*\*\*\*\* corpus interactive metadiscourse accounts for 57.71% of total metadiscourse and interactional metadiscourse for 42.29%, a difference of 15.42 percentage points. This suggests that the distribution of interactive and interactional metadiscourse is more balanced for the W\*\*\*\*\* based writers.

### 8.1.1. Interactive metadiscourse resources

In both contextual corpora, transition markers are the most commonly employed interactive device, although they account for a smaller proportion of total metadiscourse in the B\*\*\*\*\* corpus than in the W\*\*\*\*\* corpus. Looking at the numbers of different types of transition markers in the contextual corpora, we find:

**Table 2: Types of transition per 10,000 words in two contexts**

	Num. per 1,000 words	
	B***** context	W***** context
<b>TM1</b>	43.9	80.1
<b>TM2</b>	38.8	48.3
<b>TM3</b>	45.6	79.8
<b>TM4</b>	2.5	3.7

These numbers indicate that W\*\*\*\*\* based writers use more transition markers per 10,000 words than their B\*\*\*\*\* counterparts in all categories, though the difference is most noticeable in the categories of Addition (TM1) and Cause/consequence (TM3). Perhaps because of their greater use of transition markers overall, W\*\*\*\*\* based writers also seem to make slightly more mistakes, with 3.7 Misuses (TM4) per 10,000 words as opposed to 2.5 for B\*\*\*\*\* based writers. Looking in more detail at which transition markers tend to be chosen, we find that B\*\*\*\*\* writers tend to use simpler markers like *but* and *so* whereas W\*\*\*\*\* based writers also use *however* and *therefore*. This suggests that W\*\*\*\*\* based writers may have a wider repertoire of transition resources, but may not be secure in using them appropriately.

The second most used category of interactive metadiscourse is that of evidentials, again in both contextual corpora. Looking in detail at evidentials we see that both groups tend to

quote more content or examples than authorial statements, i.e. they make more use of E2 than E1. However, the W\*\*\*\*\* group uses many more standard evidential (E1) than does the B\*\*\*\* group; for B\*\*\*\* writers, this is the least used category of the three. B\*\*\*\*\* writers also show slightly more use of E3, unquoted evidentials, than do the W\*\*\*\* group. Taken together, numbers in these categories suggest that B\*\*\*\* writers may have some difficulties with standard citation practices.

**Table 3: Types of evidential per 10,000 words in two contexts**

	Num. per 10,000 words	
	B***** context	W***** context
<b>E1</b>	5.7	31.3
<b>E2</b>	43.4	72.6
<b>E3</b>	19.6	18.5

### 8.1.2. *Interactional metadiscourse resources*

Within interactional metadiscourse, the category of self mentions is perhaps the most interesting. Self mentions are almost absent from the B\*\*\*\*\* corpus (0.10%), but are frequent in the W\*\*\*\*\* corpus, where they account for 15.87% of total metadiscourse.

Both groups of writers are from the same Chinese language and secondary education background, and previous research has found that Chinese writers are reluctant to express a direct authorial persona because of the influence of traditional Chinese rhetoric which values collectivism more highly than individualism (Bloch & Chi, 1995). We might therefore expect that SMs would be infrequent in both groups. The fact that they appear much more

strongly in the W\*\*\*\*\* context corpus leads us to infer that educational context and institutional culture may have influenced this aspect of metadiscourse use.

Conversely, engagement markers and boosters are more salient in the B\*\*\*\*\* corpus. Engagement markers are particularly noticeable. In the B\*\*\*\*\* corpus they account for 15.23% of total metadiscourse compared to 10.48% for W\*\*\*\*\*. Boosters, in the B\*\*\*\*\* corpus, account for the same proportion of total metadiscourse as do Hedges; whereas for the W\*\*\*\*\* corpus, Boosters account for only half as much metadiscourse as do Hedges. This suggests that B\*\*\*\*\* writers are more inclined to address imagined readers through engagement markers and to employ boosters to support their assertions, whereas W\*\*\*\*\* based writers are more inclined to employ hedges to make non-committal statements.

8.2. *Within-context differences of metadiscourse use between the two disciplinary groups*

In this section we will explore the extent to which the contextual patterns discussed in the previous section might be differentially accounted for by writing in each discipline.

**Table 4: Metadiscourse use in two disciplines within two contexts**

	B***** context		W***** context	
	Literary Criticism	Translation Studies	Literary Criticism	Translation Studies
Total metadiscourse items per 10, 000 words	384.7	655.2	649.7	865
Interactive metadiscourse/ Total metadiscourse	58.72%	69.67%	58.02%	57.99%
Interactional metadiscourse/ Total metadiscourse	41.28%	30.33%	41.98%	42.01%
Transitions/ Total metadiscourse	30.0%	21.01%	27.21%	26.22%



Frame markers/ total metadiscourse	9.7%	17.95%	4.68%	7.88%
Endophoric markers/ total metadiscourse	1.23%	5.95%	2.41%	2.14%
Evidentials/ Total metadiscourse	14.71%	15.88%	18.32%	15.99%
Code glosses/ Total metadiscourse	3.08%	8.9%	5.41%	5.76%
Hedges/ Total metadiscourse	11.63%	7.58%	12.17%	8.12%
Boosters/ Total metadiscourse	15.0%	6.48%	5.55%	4.44%
Attitude markers/ Total metadiscourse	4.15%	1.76%	4.35%	1.88%
Self mentions/ Total metadiscourse	0.91%	0.42%	9.23%	17.62%
Engagement markers/ Total metadiscourse	9.51%	14.06%	10.70%	9.93

### 8.2.1. B\*\*\*\*\* context

First of all we will discuss differences and similarities between the disciplines within the B\*\*\*\*\* context. As we saw in the previous section, the B\*\*\*\*\* corpus differs more than the W\*\*\*\*\* corpus in terms of proportions of interactive and interactional metadiscourse. However, the proportions of interactive and interactional metadiscourse are not the same in B\*\*\*\*\* LC and B\*\*\*\*\* TS. For B\*\*\*\*\* LC the proportions are 58.72% and 41.28% respectively, a difference of 17.44 percentage points. For B\*\*\*\*\* TS the proportions are 69.67% and 30.33%, a difference of 39.34 percentage points. This indicates that the high proportion of interactive metadiscourse in the B\*\*\*\*\* corpus is accounted for principally by Translation Studies writing.

If we compare proportions of interactive and interactional metadiscourse in the LC and TS corpora overall (i.e. without taking account of context), we find that interactive resources accounted for a higher proportion of metadiscourse use in both corpora, but there the differences were 18.4 percentage points for LC and 26.72 percentage points for TS. respectively. These figures would have seemed at first sight to suggest a disciplinary difference, but here we can see that the difference is accounted for disproportionately by the B\*\*\*\*\* TS writers.

Focusing now on interactional resources in B\*\*\*\*\* LC and B\*\*\*\*\* TS, we note that Boosters account for 15.0% of metadiscourse in B\*\*\*\*\* LC and only for 6.48% of metadiscourse in B\*\*\*\*\* TS. Engagement markers, on the other hand, account for 9.51% of metadiscourse in B\*\*\*\*\* LC and 14.06% in B\*\*\*\*\* TS. When we compared the B\*\*\*\*\* and W\*\*\*\*\* contexts overall, we saw that B\*\*\*\*\* writers were using more of both of these categories, but here we see that the two subcorpora, B\*\*\*\*\* LC and B\*\*\*\*\* TS, are contributing differentially to the overall picture. B\*\*\*\*\* LC contributes more to the salience of Boosters, whereas B\*\*\*\*\* TS contributes more to the salience of Engagement markers.

### 8.2.2. *W\*\*\*\*\* context*

Now to comment on any differences between disciplines within the W\*\*\*\*\* context.

Overall, there seems to be a lot of similarity between W\*\*\*\*\* LC and W\*\*\*\*\* TS. Both subcorpora contain more interactive than interactional resources, and the gap is similar – 16.04 percentage points and 15.98 percentage points respectively.

The proportions of interactive metadiscourse categories are also similar between W\*\*\*\*\* LC and W\*\*\*\*\* TS. In other words, W\*\*\*\*\* based writers deploy this range of resources in similar proportions in both disciplines. However, if we look in more detail at the category of Transition Markers, we notice a subtler difference. W\*\*\*\*\* TS writers show more instances of TM4, Misuses, than do W\*\*\*\*\* LC writers; it is this group, then, who contribute most to the relatively high proportion of TM4 seen in the W\*\*\*\*\* corpus overall.

There is more difference however when it comes to the W\*\*\*\*\* based writers' deployment of interactional resources in LC and TS. The W\*\*\*\*\* LC subcorpus contains a higher proportion of both hedges and attitude markers than does the W\*\*\*\*\* TS (Hedges: 12.17% of W\*\*\*\*\* LC, 8.12% of W\*\*\*\*\* TS. Attitude markers: 4.35% of W\*\*\*\*\* LC, 1.88% of W\*\*\*\*\* TS). But for self mentions, the picture is reversed (Self mentions: 9.23% of LC, 17.62% of TS). This is an interesting mirror effect. In the overall contextual comparison we saw that W\*\*\*\*\* based writers used more self mentions than B\*\*\*\*\* based writers; here we see that it is W\*\*\*\*\* TS writers who make the very most use of this resource.

## **9. Concluding discussion**

We will discuss the significance of our findings from three perspectives: disciplinary vs. contextual variation, pedagogic implications, and metadiscourse research.

### *9.1. Summary of significant findings: Disciplinary vs. contextual variation in our corpus*

Our study suggests a certain amount of disciplinary variation in metadiscourse use, but overall our series of comparisons seems to indicate that context is a more powerful factor than discipline in accounting for variation, in that we found more notable differences between contexts than between disciplines. In making this point, we acknowledge that the two disciplines that we studied are somewhat similar, and that a different choice would probably have led to a stronger disciplinary effect. In the current study, the choice of relatively similar disciplines has allowed contextual differences to show through; and this, we would argue, strongly supports the idea that academic literacy needs to be seen as a *locally* situated practice. As Lea and Street (1999) argue, university contexts transmit the expectations of the institution and of individual tutors just as much as they convey the expectations of disciplinary communities.

This point can be further illustrated via a consideration of the particular linguistic items which are most frequently used to realise metadiscoursal functions. In the overall B\*\*\*\*\* corpus, the single most frequent metadiscourse item is *should* used as an engagement marker; the 4<sup>th</sup> most frequent is *we* and the 9<sup>th</sup> most frequent is *must*. It seems that the B\*\*\*\*\* writers choose relatively strong persuasive and collective engagement markers when addressing the reader and in order to make assertive claims. On the other hand, for W\*\*\*\*\*-based writers the single most frequent metadiscourse item is the self mention *I* and the 5<sup>th</sup> most frequent the self mention *my*. These writers choose to present as individuals rather than collectively, and do not consistently associate first person pronouns with engagement markers. We would suggest that these differences may be attributable to

guidance that students receive, with B\*\*\*\*\* based tutors valuing collective engagement markers, and W\*\*\*\*\* based tutors encouraging an individual first-person presence in student texts.

The distinctive frequency of *must*, *should* and *we* in the B\*\*\*\*\* corpus is consistent with the findings of previous studies (e.g. Kang, 2006; Liu, 2007; Li, 2000) which suggest that Chinese writers use strong assertions in their rhetoric, and use expressions such as *we must* and *you should* to engage with target readers (Xu & Gong, 2006; Li, 2007; Deng & Liu, 1989).

B\*\*\*\*\* writers seem to use hedges and boosters in equal proportion, but W\*\*\*\*\* based writers use more hedges, indicating a preference to diminish their commitment to propositions. Hyland and Milton (1997), comparing the writing of Hong Kong and UK undergraduates, found that the latter made far more use of hedges. It seems reasonable to suggest that hedging might be valued in UK HE and that the W\*\*\*\*\* based tutors might guide students to make use of relevant metadiscourse resources.

W\*\*\*\*\* based writers show slightly less use of unquoted evidentials than do B\*\*\*\*\* based writers, and show much more use of standard evidentials. This may indicate the effect of academic training in the W\*\*\*\*\* context, where tutors place emphasis on the need to follow citation conventions. Previous research (e.g. Hu, 2005; Gao, 2007; Shi, 2004) has argued that Chinese undergraduate students are not used to formal citation practices and may be unconscious about issues of plagiarism; but in the W\*\*\*\*\* context, plagiarism is a salient issue and tutors are required to provide explicit guidance to students on how to avoid it.

Our findings can be interpreted in the light of research into larger scale contextual influences on academic writing. For example Sanderson (2008) studied the writing of English and German academics in different disciplines. Although she found apparently distinctive patterns for the discipline of Philosophy, a more detailed examination revealed that the apparently distinctive features were used systematically by writers from different contexts to realise different functions. She noted that English speaking Philosophers tend to use *we* as a self-mention, whereas German speaking philosophers use it to mean 'we humans'. Sanderson concludes that contextual differences are more important than (apparent) cross-cultural disciplinary similarities.

Yakhnontova (2006) also reports on a cross cultural and cross disciplinary study of research writing. Focusing on the use of *I* and *We* by writers in two language contexts and two disciplines, she identifies differences along both disciplinary and cultural lines. For example, she notes that Slavic texts eschew personal pronouns in favour of agentless passive constructions. Considering the relative influence of culture and disciplines, she suggests that "established conventions of writing seem to maintain their stability through intertextuality, imitation, and both implicit and explicit learning" (2006, p.164).

Discussions of disciplinary affiliation and distinctions between disciplines (e.g. Becher, 1990; Pinch, 1990; Becher & Trowler, 2001; Brew, 2008) all problematise the notion of homogeneous disciplines which could influence writing conventions within them. Becher

(1990) argues that disciplines include ranges of smaller components and specialised groupings of academics, some of which are temporary and contingent. Our study seems to support the notion that these contingent, specialised groupings – such as university departments – might be responsible for much of the “implicit and explicit learning” referred to by Yakhontova above. Undergraduate students are likely to pay more attention to tutor feedback on their own writing than to examples of disciplinary writing to which they may be exposed. For undergraduates, then, an institutional context would be more normative than a wider disciplinary culture. This is perhaps one explanation for our findings in this study.

## 9.2. *Pedagogic implications*

Some patterns have been found which are independent of context or of discipline. For example in any comparison undertaken, the proportion of interactive resources used is higher than that of interactional resources. Within interactive markers, transition markers are consistently the most frequent and endophoric markers are consistently the least used. However the two contextual groups do differ when it comes to the detail of frame markers, with B\*\*\*\*\* writers most likely choose sequencers and W\*\*\*\*\* writers showing more of a balance between sequencers and announcing goals.

Patterns which may be associated with the student’s common language background indicate some possible pedagogic implications for training Mandarin speaking students to make effective use of metadiscourse when writing in English. Experimental studies (e.g. Cheng & Steffensen, 1996; Cheng & Jiang, 2004) suggest that writers can benefit from specialised training in metadiscourse, and our research indicates specific areas where such

training might be best concentrated. Interactive metadiscourse is, arguably, already well covered in writing instruction for Chinese students, and transition markers are frequently emphasised (e.g. Crewe, 1990; Chiang, 2003; Deng, 2006). Our research suggests that our writers are relatively comfortable with these, but that their repertoire of interactional metadiscourse is narrower. Here, then, is the danger of being pushed by a narrow repertoire into seeming to speak in a voice which one would not have chosen. To lessen this risk, students may benefit from teaching which emphasised interactional resources.

We found that certain metadiscoursal functions were, in our corpus, regularly realised by language items not mentioned in Hyland's (2005) appendix list of metadiscourse items. We would not want to make too much of this point, since Hyland himself is very clear that his list is not intended to be exhaustive. Nevertheless, we found it interesting to identify some realisations that may be specific to our particular corpus. For example, the pattern *would like to + verb* used as an engagement marker, indicating the writer's intention to involve the reader: *In this assignment, I would like to (EM) talk about four different translations of...* (W\*\*\*\*\* LC-3). Another example is the use of superlative forms to function as Boosters. We found examples of superlatives functioning to emphasise certainty, though Hyland does not mention this possibility: *The most accepted theory (B) is that parataxis plays an important role in Chinese and hypotaxis in English.* (B\*\*\*\*\* TS-2)

Pedagogically, it would be useful to make student writers aware of any practices which may be non standard, and to introduce them to alternative possibilities. Again, the goal would be to broaden the repertoire and encourage reflection on the significance of choices made. As



Elton (2010) argues, many difficulties in academic writing arise due to the tacit nature of its conventions.

### *9.3. Implications for metadiscourse research*

As a final point, we would like to discuss the usefulness of our adaptations to Hyland's model. As we saw above, some of our more detailed categories did prove useful in identifying similarities and differences between corpora. The introduction of categories such as TM4 or E3 allowed us to identify apparent mistakes in metadiscourse use; the different categories of frame marker allowed us to see how B\*\*\*\*\* writers had a very narrow range of resources available to realise this function.

Our category E2, special evidentials, is particularly useful. Other metadiscourse related research which examines citation practices, such as Bruce (2010) or Samraj (2008) is not able to distinguish between the quoting of an authority in support of an argument, and the quoting of data or examples. For example Bruce (2010) finds that English essays make greater use than Sociology essays of direct quotation. It seems to us likely that many of these quotations are 'special evidentials', quotations from the text under discussion; but Bruce's framework does not allow him to make this distinction. We would argue, then, that it is valuable to adapt and alter widely accepted taxonomies of metadiscourse in order to account for the features of specific sets of data.

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