Interpersonal Interaction of Metadiscursive Nouns in Academic Discourse: Comparative Study on Native English and Chinese Writers

Ping Huang and Shuai Xu

Abstract Metadiscursive nouns (such as *fact*, *belief*, *analysis*) are frequently utilized in academic discourse to encapsulate chunk of information and make prediction on what is going to be present. However, less discussed is the interpersonal interaction made by metadiscursive nouns employed by scholars from different cultures. In this chapter, we explore interpersonal function (for example, stance construction) of metadiscursive nouns present in "metadiscursive nouns + *that* complement" structure with 60 research articles written by Chinese and English writers.

The results reveal that Chinese writers tend to use less nouns of almost each category to construct discourse due to their inadequacies of English knowledge and the following of local academic community. Native writers show preference to use nouns of quality to enhance their propositions and win credibility for the research using positive quality nouns. At the same time, some pedagogical implications can be applied to promote L2 academic writing.

Keywords Metadiscursive nouns · Academic discourse · Complement structure · Interpersonal interaction

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Academic writing, which is an objective and impersonal kind of discourse designed to deal with the presentation of facts, has been thoroughly examined in the past two decades. However, it is the nature of academic discourse that persuades readers and

P. Huang (✉) · S. Xu
Chongqing University, Chongqing, China
e-mail: pinghuang@cqu.edu.cn

engages with them as well. Social interaction in academic discourse has attracted considerable attention. Features such as citation, hedges, first person pronouns boosters and attitude markers are investigated from differenct perspectives (e.g., Hyland, 2004, 2005a, 2005b; Biber, 2006). There is one feature that gains less attention. It is the use of nouns to promote writers' persuasive goals. Some studies concern nouns' cohesive function in organizing discourse (e.g., Flowerdew & Forest, 2015; Francis, 1986).

Research on metadiscursive nouns has gained considerable attention in the past decades. It is Francis (1986) who firstly presents the term metadiscursive nouns interchangeably with "anaphoric nouns," referring to the cohesive function of nouns. Various names have been labelled to illustrate these nouns, for Halliday and Hasan (1976) *general nouns*, for Ivanič (1991) *carrier nouns*, for Schmid (2000) *shell nouns,* and for Flowerdew (2003, 2015) they are *signaling nouns*.

As most of these names suggest, however, authors have mainly concerned with the discourse-organizing functions of these nouns, focusing on the role they perform as a cohesive device by reviewing or previewing the previous or upcoming discourse. They fail to give systematic exploration of the stance-taking characters of these nouns. In this chapter, we cast our eyes to a less mentioned interpersonal function of metadiscursive nouns that express writers' attitude to propositions and stance taken by them.

The interpersonal functions of metadiscourse are investigated in presenting attitudes or stance towards propositions in 52 research articles written by both Chinese and English authors. We also attempt to investigate the similarities and differences on the employment of noun use and conclude some patterns of use in different cultural backgrounds.

2 Metadiscursive Nouns

2.1 *Definition of Metadiscursive Nouns*

The term metadiscursive nouns is firstly present by Francis (1986) interchangeably with "anaphoric nouns," referring to the cohesive function of nouns. They are frequently used in academic discourse (Charles, 2003, 2007; Gardner & Davies, 2013; Flowerdew & Forest, 2015). However, different names are employed to illustrate their interactive functions based on different research angles.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) refer metadiscursive nouns to *general nouns* because they play roles in establishing lexical cohesion through the generalized reference within the major noun classes such as *idea* and *business*. Francis (1986) describes the anaphoric features of what she names *anaphoric nouns*. In contrast, Tadros (1993) investigates *enumerable nouns* that predict upcoming discourse. Ivanič (1991) used *carrier nouns* to show their organizing function from in-clause as well as across clause. Schmid (2000) describes *shell nouns* as "conceptual shells" mainly from cognitive viewpoint. Flowerdew (2003) and Forest's (2015) *signaling nouns* regard this types of nouns as cohesive signals from discourse perspective.

Despite a spate of interests have been distributed to the understanding of abstract nouns, it is Schmid (2000) who first carried out systematic study of them based on large corpus. His pioneering works identify *shell nouns* using objective criteria and describe their semantic features and multi-functions in detail. According to Schmid (2000), *shell nouns* play three functions simultaneously, i.e., "characterization" and "linking" (pp. 14–20). Semantically, *shell nouns* characterize what they refer to and give readers an idea of the shell content. Textually, *shell nouns* phases bear the function of linking shell content.

However, previous definitions delineate metadiscursive nouns in terms of their function in making cohesive discourse and organizing proper propositions, and their stance-taking (interactional) roles receive less attention.

Thus, Jiang and Hyland (2017) make further refinement on the basis of previous research and define *metadiscursive nouns* as "those which refer to the organization of the discourse or the writers' attitude (interactional roles) towards it" (p. 2). For example, this research examines the **notion** that guilt, the negative emotion stemming from a failure to meet a self-held standard of behavior, leads to preferences to the original source of the guilt. [Marketing]

> "Notion" is metadiscursive nouns and their vagueness is remedied by immediate reference. To explain it is unclear what "notion" refers to in (1) until it is specified cataphorically in the subsequent complement clause. (Jiang & Hyland, 2017, pp. 2)

Previous studies on metadiscursive nouns focus on their disciplinary variation. For example, Jiang and Hyland (2018) once explore the function of metadiscursive nouns in eight disciplines from interactional dimension and interactive dimension, respectively. Further study has been conducted on these nouns from both hard and soft science in abstract moves, investigating how they frame and manage arguments as well as claim disciplinary legitimacy (Jiang & Hyland, 2017). Less interests have been arisen in variation on the employment of metadiscursive nouns by Chinese and English writers.

In this chapter, we will compare the pattern of nouns use in Chinese and English native writers in the field of applied linguistics. Some findings on the different performance in same disciplinary community across cultures will be noticed and implications could also be offered to promote Chinese writers' ability in constructing knowledge and publications.

2.2 *Categorization of Metadiscursive Nouns*

The classification on metadiscursive nouns has experienced a long process of rectification in the past 20 years (Schmid, 2000; Flowerdew & Forest, 2015; Jiang & Hyland, 2015). Different models of metadiscursive nouns cover various perspectives in terms of different emphasis. Schmid's (2000) classification pays much attention to their function semantically but ignores their functional characteristics. As a result, overemphasis of semantic meaning on classification would "fail to distinguish the

clear rhetorical options that stance nouns make available to authors (Jiang & Hyland, p. 6)." Additionally, Flowerdew and Forest's (2015) six-category model on metadiscursive nouns is regarded as unreliable because of its ambiguity in differentiating epistemic judgements of status and assertions of actualities (Jiang & Hyland, 2015). After taking previous studies (Labov, 1972; Thompson & Hunston, 2000) on exploring the ensured function of *the fact that* structure into consideration, Jiang and Hyland (2015) make refinement on the issue and produce the model in Table 1.

This more water-tight classification shows that metadiscursive nouns are used to mark *entities*, describe *attributes* of entities and discuss the *relations* between entities.

Nouns that characterize *entities* refer to present writers' judgement or assessment of object, event, discourses, and cognition (Jiang & Hyland, 2015). Nouns representing *object* refer to something concrete, for example, *texts*, *papers,* and *extract* are the member of this category. Nouns concerning *event* indicate actions, processes, and status of affair. *Change*, *processes,* and *evidence* are normal in the category. *Discourse* nouns take a stance to verbal propositions and action of speech, for example, *argument*, *claim,* and *conclusion*. *Cognition* nouns refer to beliefs, attitude that writers take, and factor of cognitive decision, such as *decision*, *idea*, *belief,* and *doubt*.

Nouns that concern to *attribute* indicate writers' evaluation of quality, status and formation of entities. *Quality* nouns convey the attitude and emotional judgement toward entities. *Advantage*, *difficulty,* and *danger* are frequently used in providing positive or negative evaluation on propositions. Metadiscursive nouns relating to *manner* describe circumstances of actions and state of affairs, for example, *time* and *method* and *method* describes the way that they are carried out. *Status* nouns make judgement of epistemic, deontic, and dynamic modality. *Possibility* and *trend* could be the representative in the category.

Table 1 Classification of metadiscursive nouns (Jiang & Hyland, 2015, p. 535)

Entity	Description	Examples
Object	Concretizable metatext	Report, paper, extract
Event	Events, processes, status of affairs	Change, process, evidence
Discourse	Verbal propositions and speech acts	Argument, claim, conclusion
Cognition	Cognitive belief and attitudes	Decision, idea, belief, doubt
Attribute	**Description**	**Examples**
Quality	Traits that are admired or criticized, valued or depreciated	Advantage, difficulty, value
Manner	Circumstances of actions and state of affairs	Time, method, way, extent
Status	Epistemic, deontic, and dynamic modality	Possibility, trend, choice, ability
Relation	**Description**	**Examples**
Cause-effect, difference	Cause-effect, difference, relevance	Reason, result, difference

Nouns relating to *relations* are concerning with the ways of which writer perceives relationships and relevance in the viewpoints. Nouns such as *reason*, *result*, and *difference* bear the role of speculating the corresponding relationships between the nouns chosen and the proposition expressed.

2.3 **Nouns Complement *Construction***

Nouns Complement construction is a grammatical structure in which a head noun takes a nominal complement in following four forms including *that* clause, *to-infinitive, of-prepositional* and *preposition –wh*-clause. Schmid (2000) indicates that syntactic patterns such as *metadiscursive nouns + that complement* allow speakers to introduce their attitude towards something "in a highly subtle way" (p. 310). After putting the noun as topic information, the writer suggests that its meaning can be taken for granted (Schmid, 2000).

However, few writers have examined the interpersonal roles of *Noun Complement* clauses. Biber et al. (1999), Biber (2006), and Hyland and Tse (2005a, 2005b) have explored complement clauses and taken it as an important way that writer can syntactically mark their attitude or stance by putting nouns before accompanying propositions. It is Biber (2006) who first recognizes the interpersonal function of *Noun complement* and gives some instructions of so-called epistemic, attitude and communication nouns with focus on frequently used verb and adjective complement clauses. Charles (2007) also realizes the stance-making function but she restricted it to *Noun that* pattern. Her classification of nouns provides a possibility for the further exploration on the issue.

To sum up, the *Noun Complement* construction ensures writers to construct a clear stance by providing a range of stance choices and pre-modification. This stance could fit into the perspectives and conventions of particular discipline and achieves a set of rhetorical practices. We will first describe our method and analysis procedures, then go on to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do Chinese and English writers differ in their choice of metadiscursive nouns? Why?
2. What stance options are available to academic writers through choices of metadiscursive nouns?

3 **Methodology**

The study aims to explore the employment of metadiscursive nouns by native English writers and Chinese writers and study their stance taken in the impersonal academic writing. Thus, two self-built corpora are constructed to make comparisons between writers from different cultural backgrounds. We will present our

procedures on corpora construction, data analysis, and the methodology employed on guiding analysis respectively as follows.

3.1   Construction of Corpus

To carry out a contrastive study of abstracts written by English native and Chinese authors, we constructed a corpus of 52 articles around 40,000 tokens published in two applied linguistics journals: an international journal—*Journal of Second Language Writing* (*JSLW*); a Chinese journal—*Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics* (*CJAL*). The first journal published in the USA is selected as a leading journal of applied linguistics because of its high impact factor present by Incite Journal Citation in 2017. The second journal *CJAL*, serving as a channel to study for the international community, seems to be the only applied linguistics journal published in English in Mainland China. The decision on selecting the top-tier journals was based on the assumption that research articles written by top-tier researchers could be regarded as the modeling paper in academic community.

To ensure the study was conducted with least variables, the number tokens in two corpora must be strictly controlled to get relative equal tokens. First, we selected 30 research articles of each journal and compared their overall tokens using *AntConc*. However, we found that the total number of tokens in *JSLW* has enormously outnumbered that of *CJAL*, which could negatively influence the results as the inequality in tokens may indicate the difference on employment of metadiscursive nouns could be attributed to the different length of articles rather than what we plan to compare. After reducing the *JSLW* to 22 articles, we found that the number of two corpora are relatively equal.

Additionally, all the articles were selected from issues published between 2012 and 2017 because sampling articles published in recent period was to reflect the features of "present-day" academic research writing (Biber & Gray, 2016).

Another important consideration in this study was the identification of authors' L1 status. It was more straightforward to determine Chinese authors publishing in *CJAL* as their Chinese names and affiliations to institutions in China were highly indicative. To identify the native English-speaking writers, names concerning Anglophone origin were first identified, and then institutional affiliations were examined to look into their personal information available at the homepage. The articles whose author's name appear to be vague will be excluded from our corpus.

3.2   Data Analysis

First, all the PDF format article will be converted into TXT format using AntFileConverter (), which is an automatic file converting software with relatively high accuracy. To wipe out all the messy codes in the conversion, we further clean

and edit the materials by TextEditor, a simple and user-friendly file editing software allowing people to process disorder materials in piles. Since we plan to search meta-discursive nouns at syntactic level, especially *Nouns Complement Construction*, we would tag the materials using *Treetagger 2.0*, an automatic tagging software with correction rate higher than 95% which means there still exist 5% possibilities of having errors on tagging. Biber and Gray (2011) also admit that the automated tagging system is not completely accurate.

Thus, after uploading all the tagged materials into AntConc (), we will input

NN∗ to_TO#VV for *Noun to do*
NN∗ that for *Noun That*
NN∗ of_IN#VVG for *Noun of doing*
NN∗ # IN #WP/ WDT/WRB for *Noun preposition how/what/which*

to search for the four types of *Noun Complement Construction* and extract metadiscursive nouns. Due to the possible wrongly tagged occurrences, we will read the results line by line and manually remove those disqualified occurrences. The software sometimes may identify some of the fixed collocations as *Noun Complement Construction* as they share some common structure, for example, "in order to" and "in terms of" could be recognized as *Noun to do* and *Noun of doing* structure, respectively, which are also removed to guarantee the accuracy of findings.

Finally, all the qualified nouns will be categorized in terms of the classification of metadiscursive nouns established by Jiang and Hyland (2015). The nouns that may be controversial in their classification will be re-examined by another disciplinary insider. All the frequencies will be counted and interpreted on the basis of statistical results.

4 Results and Discussion

We identified 1322 occurrences of metadiscursive nouns in *Noun Complement* clauses in the corpus, an average of 18 cases per article. Metadiscursive nouns occurred significantly more often in research articles written by native English writers than Chinese writers, with 780 in discourse of English writers and 542 in Chinese writers' discourse. Table 2 illustrates the overall frequency of different types of metadiscursive nouns. In other words, 59 percent of all metadiscursive nouns occur in English writers' articles.

The relative absence of the use of metadiscursive nouns in the Chinese writers suggests a less discursive and overtly persuasive discourse (Jiang & Hyland, 2018). Nouns tend to be more technical and disciplinary specific, fully lexicalized within each field and with fixed meaning and no general purpose counterparts (Flowerdew & Forest, 2015). We turn next to expand on our discussion of different appearance of metadiscursive nouns from each functional category of metadiscursive nouns and try to answer the following research questions:

Table 2 Overall frequency of different types of metadiscursive nouns

Entity	English writers	Chinese writers
Object	91	43
Event	189	136
Discourse	54	38
Cognition	122	112
Attribute	**English writers**	**Chinese writers**
Quality	15	18
Manner	135	80
Status	142	106
Relation	**English writers**	**Chinese writers**
Cause-effect, difference	32	9
Total	780	542

1. To what extent do Chinese and English writers differ in their choice of metadiscursive nouns? Why?
2. What stance options are available to academic writers through choices of metadiscursive nouns?

4.1   Choice of Metadiscursive Nouns in Chinese and English Writers

4.1.1   The Use of Entity Metadiscursive Nouns

Entity metadiscursive nouns refer to those conveying writers' judgement of texts, events, discourses, or aspect of cognition. English writers, however, show preference to use entity nouns than Chinese nouns in every aspect with 456 to 329, respectively. We will present examples to illustrate how English writers and Chinese writers project their judgement and take stance respectively and explore the reasons.

The difference of employment of entity nouns concerning concrete metatext is salient in Chinese and English writers. Chinese writers demonstrate reluctance to entity metadiscursive nouns. It is likely that describing and defining information and knowledge using second language is a difficult task for Chinese writers. Our finding is in accordance with Jiang's (2015) research results concerning argumentative writing between Chinese and English writers. The absence of *cognition*, *text,* and *event* metadiscursive nouns is not benefit for writers to construct viewpoints and achieve communicative purposes. In contrast, English writers are more familiar with the way of expressing academic knowledge and strengthening their propositions using *cognition*, *text,* and *event* metadiscursive nouns, for example,

1. Further criticisms might include the *fact* that students had relatively few opportunities to practice drafting and incorporating feedback.

(English Writer)

2. This tends to strengthen the *argument* that feedback is having an effect on the gains informal accuracy and appears, indeed, to be a prerequisite for gains in for malaccuracy to be made.

(English Writer)

Event nouns, as the most frequently used metadiscursive nouns in entity category, are closely related to real-world activities, or empiricism, and cognition types to interpretative rationality, indicating different modes of knowing and sources of knowledge in the disciplines (Chafe & Nichols, 1986). Linguistics, a typical soft science, highly relies on cognitive interpretation and the construction of theoretical modes of understanding. Hyland (2015) found out applied linguistics stand out in taking stance toward events, which reflects the preference of this discipline for empirical research with real-world focus. It may partly explain the situation that both Chinese and native English writers employ a great number of event nouns like *fact*, *interaction,* and so on.

Additionally, Jiang and Hyland (2018) point out that entity metadiscursive nouns play interactive functions to express willingness to "step into their texts to explicitly organize their discourse and set up expectations for the readers of what is to come" (p. 13). The positivity of this authorial intervention to guide readers through the argument shows English writers' confidence and activeness in initiating a discussion and shares the possible promising research results. Chinese writers, in contrast, may still be constricted to cultural conservativeness in China and rarely make strong certainty on what is being discussed. For example,

3. These findings challenge the *belief* that L2 writers plagiarize more frequently than L1 writers due to cultural and linguistic inadequacies.

(English Writer)

4. My role in this study, as a peer-tutor, was thus to provide feedback on linguistic issues of Lu's writing, with the *possibility* of touching upon content issue.

(English Writer)

The author here actively engages the reader, exercising agency by informing readers of "how information can be tracked in the text" (Dahl, 2004). Becher and Trowler (2001) illustrate that linguistics is a relatively "loosely knit academic community." Thus, the use of metadiscursive nouns in the above examples helps to establish a frame of reference and guides readers regarding the grounds for and interpretation of further claims. On the other hand, English writers' activeness could further get readers involved in the communities and persuade them with a strong evidence-based propositions.

Entity metadiscursive nouns also help to create logical coherence from discourse cohesion, shaping texts to what readers will find most familiar and persuasive. If we look back example 3, the authors' *belief* set up perspective reference to the information that follows in the post-nominal clause, creating a cohesive discourse. Due to the unfamiliarity to second language, Chinese writers still need to make promotion in constructing cohesive and water-tight logic in presenting propositions.

4.1.2 The Use of Attribute Metadiscursive Nouns

Attribute metadiscursive nouns concern judgement and evaluations of the quality, status and formation of entities. Within the attribute category, author's judgement always concerned the status of referents, commenting on the certainty or necessity of something. We can see from Table 2 that status and manner attributes take a great proportion of the whole category with only 33 quality attributes.

It is a common sense that academic discourse is an impersonal and objective genre that demands less emotional expression. Thus, writer should deprive of much of their personal bias or judgements to the information subsequent to metadiscursive nouns. However, nouns characterized quality attributes to assess whether something is admired or criticized, valued or depreciated. The less preference of employment of them may indicate that both Chinese and English writers are conscious of academic principles and find their way to follow it as much as possible.

Furthermore, our findings show that both Chinese and English writers display their willingness to positive quality attributes rather than negative ones. Positive judgement could express epistemic certainty of writers' statements and gain credibility for their own research. For example,

5. Regardless of the reason for their different values, this finding points to the *importance* of examining teacher beliefs and values regarding the content that they teach and assisting novice teachers in developing coherent and appropriate pedagogical content values.

(English writers)
6. Many researchers have realized the *significance* of investigating the relationship between foreign language anxiety and other learner variables.

(Chinese writers)

Status metadiscursive nouns indicate the author's judgements of epistemic, deontic and dynamic modality (Palmer, 2001). However, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) describe that authors in applied linguistics frequently add a "descriptive gloss" because of disciplinary characters that subject to contextual and human caprice. As the examples below show, this propositional elaboration may specify an alternative possibility of events.

7. Therefore, there is *possibility* that the relationship between the two constructs is non-linear.

(English writers)
Chinese writers, however, are not comparable to native English writers in employing status metadiscursive nouns. We would attribute this phenomenon to the English capability gaps in such serious presentation of uncertain disciplines.

4.1.3 The Use of Relation Metadiscursive Nouns

Relation metadiscursive nouns refer to demonstrate how a writer understands the connection or relationship of information to information in a proposition. It functions as the tools to extend the content under discussion and enlarge discourse space

(Jiang, 2015). Chinese writers fail to use relation metadiscursive nouns in present propositions and make connections among them. Native English writers show expertise on developing relationships among propositions and appropriately describe the condition of upcoming content.

8. Even though these factors were identified as influential in oral activities, there is every *reason* to believe that they may also impact upon learner engagement with written tasks and consequently mediate the effectiveness of written CF.

(English writers)

9. A number of researchers have focused on the *effect* of rating experience on rating results.

(English writers)

4.2 Stance Expressions Through the Choice of Metadiscursive Nouns

Current conceptions of stance have encompassed a wide variety of terms to serve the function that convey a speaker or writer's personal attitudes and assessment. In this section, we will analyze what stance has been taken in academic writing by native English writers and Chinese writers.

As we noticed in Table 2, the employment of *entity* metadiscursive nouns, especially nouns concerning *object* and *event*, by English writers has exceedingly outnumbered that of Chinese writers. Nouns which characterize entities do so by either conveying writers' judgement of object, events, discourse, or aspects of cognition (Jiang & Hyland, 2018). The less employment of *entity* by Chinese writers may suggest that making definition on *object* and *event* and describing knowledge territory in a second language could pose challenges to them since a more advanced proficiency of language level is required to delineate knowledge boundaries that may overlap with neighbor community. However, academic discourse requires writers to construct their disciplinary community and try to persuade readers by clearly showing their personal evaluation and judgement. English writers are excel at positioning themselves in the academic discourse and giving clear attitudinal stance to express their evaluation to propositions. For example,

10. Despite the *fact* that writing the monitoring of the output does not need to be carried out in parallel with producing the output, L2 writers might experience difficulties in heeding both linguistic accuracy and the discourse structure in the monitoring process.

(English Writer)

Additionally, English writers also use more *attribute* metadiscursive nouns than that of Chinese writers. Nouns referring to *manner* and *status* are attributed to the gaps between Chinese and English writers.

Manner metadiscursive nouns mainly deal with the circumstances and formation of actions and states of affairs. English writers employ different *manner* nouns to

articulate how the experiments or propositions are constructed and show their well-organized steps while drawing conclusion. In contrast, Chinese writers fail to use enough *manner* nouns possibly due to their limited number of vocabularies. For example,

11. This study has shown that conceptual mapping is a useful *means* for advancing students development of genre knowledge, and for providing them with opportunities for reflection.

(English Writer)

Status nouns relate to the judgement of epistemic modality, deontic modality, and dynamic modality (Jiang & Hyland, 2015). Epistemic modality deals with possibility and certainty; deontic modality demonstrates obligation and necessity; and dynamic modality describes ability, opportunity, and tendency. The wide cover of *status* nouns displays *epistemic stance* which marks certainty (or doubt), actuality, precision, or limitation or indicates the source of knowledge or the perspective from which the information is given (Biber et al., 1999). The more employment of *status* nouns by English writers may suggest the fact that they avoid making absolute statements to propositions and leave space for further discussions on disagreement. For example,

12. Therefore, raising the possibility that instrument variability might have had an effect on the findings.

(English Writer)

As for the *relation* nouns, our finding is similar to that of Jiang (2015) about the use of *relation* in Chinese students writing. *Relation* nouns could be helpful in extending content and enlarging discourse space (Jiang, 2015). For example,

13. There is every *reason* to believe that they may also impact upon learner engagement with written tasks and consequently mediate the effectiveness of written task.

(English Writer)

However, Chinese scholars, who share some common points with Chinese students, are also unfamiliar with the function of *relation* nouns and relatively do not create enough space for a further discussion on viewpoints. We suggest that the reason may lie in the difficulties for Chinese writers to unfold a long logic sentence in their second language.

To sum up, compared with Chinese writers, English writers may be much bolder to make personal judgement and evaluations to propositions in academic writing. Meanwhile, they still withhold their commitment to viewpoints by taking epistemic stance. An appropriate extent of stance was taken to gain credibility for what the writers want to convey in a more persuasive manner. Due to the constraints of language proficiency, Chinese writers, however, display insufficient employment of metadiscursive nouns in projecting personal voice and starting a further negotiation of underexplored area. Their authorial visibility could be weakened, which may lead to a less favorable mean on persuasion. Appropriate stance-taking could be a delicate rhetorical craft that requires deep perception of discipline community and

skillful display of personal voice in academic writing. To understand the specificity of discipline may provide scholars a more comprehensive perspective to convey their message in a disciplinary approved way.

5   Conclusion

Academic writing is a dynamic form of textual interaction where writers make research claims, express a stance, and get their voice heard. Interpersonal interaction is the means by which academics take ownership of their work: making epistemic and evaluative judgement concerning entities, attributes, and the relations between materials to persuade readers of their right to speak with authority and to establish their reputations. The *Noun Complement* construction is one instrument to achieve this: a constructive way to build stance choosing metadiscursive nouns that can define and characterize the proposition in the complement. We hope to display that the syntactic structure provides writers a powerful way of gaining credit for their ideas.

Our study has sought to establish the frequency and significance of this construction and show how writers from different countries use them to manage their definitions of the world and construct knowledge. The nouns that writers choose are reflection of the thinking patterns and personal capability.

Native English writers are excel at constructing cohesive discourse and take more positive stance in presenting propositions. They show strong ability to make connections between disciplines and real world using relation nouns. When confronting with the topic that carries uncertainties, they will select the nouns with cautiousness and avoid making over definite statements.

Chinese writers, however, display a disadvantage compared to native writers. It is a difficult task for them to define or describe entities using second language. Thus, some rhetorical strategies are employed in an inappropriate way but it is understandable. Additionally, Chinese writers are relative conservative in expressing propositions. We suggest that cultural background may play a role in causing the differences between these two types of writers.

Chinese writers, therefore, should arouse their attention on focusing the specificity of academic writing. Hyland (2002) suggests that the success of ESP approach in equipping writers with writing in a disciplinary approved way supports the specificity of ESP, which could be acquired by catching up linguistic features and informing themselves with community conventions. However, some Chinese writers are exceedingly influenced by the rigid and stiff writing skills acquired at high school or university level for the sake of passing examination. To follow the "standard" way of writing has been a habit of them as soon as they encounter with English writing task. Ignoring the specificity of disciplinary writing would lead to the disqualified writing style that fails to convey propositions approved by community. Thus, it would be necessary for Chinese writers to take disciplinary specificity as a useful tool to manage their process of knowledge construction. Additionally, writing with

native English disciplinary counterparts would also be a practical way to improve academic writing without distributing extra time on the correction. Instead, the simulation and immersion to native tones may create a more natural writing style as well as disciplinary writing manners.

Our analyses show that interpersonal interaction is not only a grammatical phenomenon, but also a demonstration of cultural and personal capability. This study contributes to map both the functions and distribution of these nouns across nations, and to apply the functional classification to a wide range. The classification reveals how they can be understood as performing interpersonal interactions and encourages others to include metadiscursive nouns in their research of academic writing.

References

Becher, T., & Trowler, P. (2001). *Academic tribes and territories: Intellectual enquiry and the culture of disciplines*. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

Biber, D. (2006). *University language: A Corpus-based study of spoken and written registers* (Vol. 23). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Biber, D., & Gray, B. (2011). Grammatical change in the noun phrase: The influence of written language use. *English Language and Linguistics, 15*(2), 223–250.

Biber, D., & Gray, B. (2016). *Grammatical complexity in academic English: Linguistic change in writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman grammar of spoken and written English*. Harlow: Longman.

Chafe, W., & Nichols, J. (1986). *Evidentiality: The linguistic coding of epistemology. Ablex publishing. Discourse approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Charles, M. (2003). 'This mystery': A corpus-based study of the use of nouns to construct stance in theses from two contrasting disciplines. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 2*(4), 313–326.

Charles, M. (2007). Argument or evidence? Disciplinary variation in the use of the noun that pattern in stance construction. *English for Specific Purposes, 26*(2), 203–218.

Dahl, T. (2004). Textual metadiscourse in research articles: A marker of national culture or of academic discipline? *Journal of Pragmatics, 36*, 1807–1825.

Flowerdew, J. (2003). Signalling nouns in discourse. *English for Specific Purposes, 22*(4), 329–346.

Flowerdew, J. (2015). Revisiting metadiscourse: Conceptual and methodological issues concerning signaling nouns. *Ibérica, 29*, 15–34.

Flowerdew, J., & Forest, R. W. (2015). *Signalling nouns in English: A corpus based discourse approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Francis, G. (1986). *Anaphoric nouns. English language research*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham.

Gardner, D., & Davies, M. (2013). A new academic vocabulary list. *Applied Linguistics, 35*, 305–327.

Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. Harlow: Longman.

Halliday, M., & Matthiessen, C. (2014). *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Hyland, K. (2002). Specificity revisited: How far should we go now? *English for Specific Purposes, 21*, 385–395.

Hyland, K. (2004). *Disciplinary discourses: Social interactions in academic writing*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Hyland, K. (2005a). *Metadiscourse: Exploring interaction in writing*. London: Continuum.

Hyland, K. (2005b). Stance and engagement: A model of interaction in academic discourse. *Discourse Studies, 7*(2), 173–192.

Hyland, K. (2015). *Academic publishing: Issues and challenges in the construction of knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hyland, K., & Tse, P. (2005a). Evaluative that constructions: Signaling stance in research abstracts. *Functions of Language, 12*(1), 39–63.

Hyland, K., & Tse, P. (2005b). Hooking the reader: A corpus study of evaluative that in abstracts. *English for Specific Purposes, 24*(2), 123–139.

Ivanič, R. (1991). Nouns in search of a context: A study of nouns with both open-and closed system characteristics. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, 29*(2), 93–114.

Jiang, F. (2015). Stance nouns in Chinese and American argumentative essays: A corpus-based comparative study. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, (5), 8–14.

Jiang, F., & Hyland, K. (2015). 'The fact that': Stance nouns in disciplinary writing. *Discourse Studies, 17*(5), 529–550.

Jiang, F., & Hyland, K. (2017). Metadiscursive nouns: Interaction and cohesion in abstract moves. *English for Specific Purposes, 46*(3), 1–14.

Jiang, F. K., & Hyland, K. (2018). Nound and academic interactions: A neglected feature of metadiscourse. *Applied Linguistics, 39*(4), 508–531.

Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the inner City: Studies in the black English vernacular*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Palmer, F. (2001). *Modality and the english modals*. London: Addison-Wesley Longman.

Schmid, H.-J. (2000). *English abstract nouns as conceptual shells: From corpus to cognition*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Tadros, A. (1993). The pragmatics of text averral and attribution in academic texts. In M. Hoey (Ed.), *Data, description, discourse* (pp. 98–114). London: HarperCollins.

Thompson, G., & Hunston, S. (2000). Evaluation: An introduction. In S. Hunston & G. Thompson (Eds.), *Evaluation in text: Authorial stance and the construction of discourse* (pp. 1–27). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ping Huang Professor/Ph.D., the director of ESP Studies in the Research Centre of Language Cognition and Application, Chongqing University, is the president of CQ ESP branch and the executive member of China ESP Association. She is now the supervisor for the master degree program of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics. Her main interest is ESP studies, ranging from ESP language studies, ESP course design, needs analysis, materials production, and teaching methodology. She published more than 50 articles and 3 works.