Review research paper

METADISCURSIVE NOUNS IN ACADEMIC ABSTRACTS: A CORPUS-BASED COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MUSIC STUDENTS' DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS IN CHINA AND THE US

Yun Liu, Jing Chen

School of International Studies, Hangzhou Normal University, China

Abstract. *The growing interests in metadiscursive noun make it a heated topic for scholars to conduct various intradisciplinary and interdisciplinary researches in this field. However, the research about academic writing in the discipline of music still remains blank. This article makes a comparative study to explore the use of all categories of metadiscursive nouns in a corpus of 40 English abstracts of music students' doctoral dissertations in China and the US. The research results have indicated: 1) L1 students of English tend to use more metadiscursive nouns to express their stance and promote their research; 2) They also employ diverse lexico-syntactic structures to encapsulate these metadiscursive nouns, thus making the abstracts coherently link together; 3) Students from China and the US both prefer to use entity nouns in "Determiner+N" sentence pattern. This comparative study has pedagogical implications for EFL teaching in China and raises Chinese music students' awareness to improve their academic writing skills.*

Key words: *metadiscursive nouns, English abstract, academic writing, music discipline, comparative study*

1. INTRODUCTION

The abstract noun use has gained wide attention in the research of academic discourse. The earlier studies have given different names for abstract nouns: "general nouns" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976); "anaphoric nouns" (Francis, 1986); "carrier nouns" (Ivanič, 1991); "shell nouns" (Schimd, 2000); "signaling nouns" (Flowerdew, 2003). The earlier studies have recognized the role of abstract nouns as critical resource in academic interactions, for instance, the importance of abstract nouns in organizing cohesive discourse (Flowerdew & Forest, 2015; Francis, 1986), and the interpersonal function to construct writer's stance (Schimd, 2000; Charles, 2007; Jiang, 2015). Jiang and Hyland (2015) coined the term "metadiscursive nouns" for abstract nouns that possess these dual functions.

In the past decade, a number of studies have explored the interdisciplinary differences in the use of metadiscursive nouns among soft disciplines and hard disciplines, including applied linguistics, marketing, philosophy, electronic engineering, medicine and physics

(Jiang & Hyland, 2015; 2018; 2021). In addition to doing the researches in different registers, the cross-cultural comparison of metadiscursive nouns are also conducted in the discipline of applied linguistics (Huang & Xu, 2017; Fang, 2021). However, up until now, in both interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary studies, the metadiscursive noun use in the discipline of music still remains a relatively neglected field.

The music discipline has struggled to gain its "legitimate" position in academic research. The particularity of the subject makes people pay excessive attention to the production of musical works, but ignore music students' or scholars' endeavors in academic writings. In fact, they also write articles about music theory or do musical empirical studies; and then publish them in academic journals to promote their analysis. By doing so, musicians or music lovers around the globe can better appreciate the compositions or traditional musical instrument in one's own culture. From this perspective, their language use in academic writing is also worth investigating.

In China, the doctoral dissertation for music discipline is written in Chinese. But music students are required to insert an English abstract in their graduate thesis to advocate their studies to the international academic circles in the field of music. Since the English abstract in Chinese doctoral dissertations are not usually polished by English professionals, it can reflect Chinese music doctoral students' true level of English proficiency. Besides, the relatively standardized construction and condense form of abstract make it an "excellent material for genre analysis" (Bondi, 1997).

So, this study focuses on the discipline of music and choose the English abstracts in music students' doctoral dissertations as the research subjects. It compares the overall use of metadiscursive nouns from two different cultural groups: Chinese and English. Through a corpus-based examination, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

(1) Are there any differences between the use of metadiscursive nouns in the abstracts of Chinese and US music students' doctoral dissertations? If yes, to what extent do Chinese and the US music students differ in the use?

(2) What are the frequently-used lexico-grammatical structures and functions of metadiscursive nouns in the abstracts of Chinese and the US music students' doctoral dissertations?

The significance of this study is more than covering up the research blank in metadiscursive nouns but also in its cross-cultural contexts. The cross-cultural comparisons can make Chinese students aware of the use of metadiscursive nouns in academic writing and it has pedagogical implications for their future English academic writings. They can imitate the use of L1 users of English to make their work be better understood and accepted by the international academic circle.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definitions and Classification of Metadiscursive Nouns

Metadiscourse is an important concept in applied linguistics. It was first put forward by Harris in 1959, and the concept has been developed by many linguists. According to Hyland (2005), it is the "cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text". So metadiscourse plays a crucial role in facilitating communication and building relationships with the audience in academic writing. The term "metadiscursive noun"

is a sub-category of metadiscourse coined by Jiang & Hyland (2015). The definition of metadiscursive nouns refers to "the organization of the discourse or the readers' understanding of it" (Jiang & Hyland, 2015). As a subset of abstract nouns, metadiscursive nouns have "both a constant meaning and a variable, pragmatic meaning which depends on contextual lexicalization" (Jiang & Hyland, 2017), as shown in Example (1) and (2).

(1) This *dissertation* brings light to a corner of the clarinet repertoire seldom explored and heard today. (Corpus EA)[1]

(2) The narrative of "A" is actually quite welcomed by romantic musicologists in the 19th century. Later, I will provide a detailed analysis and review on such a *misinterpretation.* (Corpus CA)[2]

The unspecific meaning of metadiscursive nouns *dissertation* and *misinterpretation* is supplemented by immediate reference. *Dissertation* with a demonstrative "this" exaggerates the contributions made by the current thesis; while *misinterpretation* is an anaphora, referring back to the previously mentioned trend. Previous studies mainly focus on analyzing the functions and structures of metadiscursive nouns.

According to the framework proposed by Jiang & Hyland (2017), the function of metadiscursive nouns is two-fold: one is the interactive function to establish cohesion in the text and the other is interactional function to engage the readers and show writers' stance. The interactive dimension can be shown that these nouns can either "refer backward to encapsulate earlier material, or forward to prospect forthcoming information" (ibid). The functional classification of metadiscursive nouns is based on their stance options: how writers use these abstract nouns to "mark entities, describe attributes of entities and discuss the relations between entities" (ibid). Table 1 presents the detailed classification of metadiscursive nouns. We can discover writer's stance, attitude and engagement of reader by analyzing these metadiscursive nouns.

Table 1 A functional classification of metadiscursive nouns (Jiang & Hyland, 2017)

	Description	Examples
Entity		
object	concrete metatext	*article, paper, study*
event	events, processes, and evidential cases	*change, case, observation*
discourse	verbal propositions and speech acts	*argument, claim, notion*
cognition	cognitive beliefs and attitudes	*decision, idea, notion, aim*
Attribute		
quality	traits that are admired or criticized, valued or depreciated	*advantage, difficulty, failure*
manner	circumstances of actions and state of affairs	*time, method, way, extent*
status	epistemic, deontic and dynamic modality	*possibility, trend, choice*
Relation	cause-effect, difference, relevance	*reason, result, difference*

As for the study on syntactic structures of metadiscursive nouns, Schimd in 2000 has discovered four types of most-frequently used lexico-grammatical patterns of shell nouns:

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[1] Corpus EA contains 20 English doctoral dissertation abstracts written by music doctoral students in the US
[2] Corpus CA contains 20 English doctoral dissertation abstracts written by music doctoral students in China

N+post-nominal clause; Determiner+N; N+be+complement clause; Determiner+be+N. The abstract nouns in these sentence types can fulfill various syntactic functions and they can perform the cohesive function to introduce new information into the text. Charles (2003) concentrates on the analysis of shell nouns which occurs at sentence initial position in "This+N" pattern. Liu & Wang (2016) add new syntactic structures to Schimd's existing model, for example N-Cl-clause, N-EP structure (like, such as), N-be/V-to/doing, etc. Liu & Deng (2017) probes the N-be-that construction in popular and professional science articles with a focus on abstract nouns.

Based on the framework of metadiscursive nouns proposed by Jiang & Hyland (2017), this study investigates both the functions and the structures of metadiscursive nouns to enable readers to have a thorough understanding of the metadiscursive noun use in the doctoral dissertation abstract in the discipline of music.

2.2. Related Studies on Metadiscursive Nouns in China and Abroad

A number of intradisciplinary and interdisciplinary studies have been conducted to compare the use of metadiscursive nouns from different angles. Some linguistic scholars focus on its use in different disciplines: Charles (2003) discovered disciplinary differences in the use of metalinguistics nouns in doctoral thesis. She found politics tend to use more of these abstract nouns than material science. Jiang & Hyland (2015) analyzed research articles published in international journals in eight disciplines (electronical engineering, medicine, cell biology, physics, applied linguistics, marketing, philosophy and sociology), they found that the soft discipline uses more stance nouns. Jiang & Hyland (2017; 2021) further probed the interdisciplinary use of metadiscursive nouns in academic abstracts and later discovered the diachronic changes of these nouns in four disciplines (applied linguistics, sociology, biology and engineering). It can be inferred from the previous studies that metadiscursive nouns were not evenly distributed across disciplines.

Other researchers concern about the different use of stance nouns between first language and second language students. Flowerdew (2010) demonstrated that Cantonese speakers use fewer signaling nouns in terms of overall frequency and range of use than their L1 users of English counterparts in argumentative writings. Lou (2013) compared Chinese linguistic MA students' thesis with English native students; then found that Chinese students lack diversity in using shell nouns. Jiang (2015) found that first language students are more skillful in expressing their stance in argumentative essay. Huang & Xu (2017) revealed that Chinese writers tend to use fewer metadiscursive nouns of almost each category than L1 users of English in international journals of applied linguistics.

From the review of previous studies, it has been noticed that the research of metadiscursive nouns covers a wide range of disciplines and academic genres. But no attention is paid to music discipline; and the cross-cultural comparisons mainly focus on the discipline of applied linguistics. So, this study aims to make a comparative study to investigate the intradisciplinary difference of metadiscursive noun use in the discipline of music between Chinese and the US doctoral students.

3. METHOD

This study draws on the analysis of 40 English abstracts in doctoral dissertations. It consists of two self-built corpora. One is called Corpus of Chinese Students' Abstracts (Corpus CA) and the other is called Corpus of English Students' Abstracts (Corpus EA).

Each corpus contained 20 English abstracts accompanying doctoral dissertations published between 2018 to 2020. All of these doctoral dissertations were randomly selected on CNKI and ProQuest in the discipline of Music. The authors of the doctoral dissertations in English were from American universities; and the authors in Chinese were from Chinese universities. As to ensure the authors of the selected dissertations are L1 users of English, we carefully chose authors who have traditional English surnames (the name like Stanchev, Koo were removed from the corpus). When building the corpora, in order to make the two corpora more comparable, the dissertations we chose are all theoretical studies about music theories or appreciations about music. The total number of words in Corpus CA is 9147 tokens, and 4612 in Corpus EA. Table 2 is the description of the corpora.

Table 2 Description of the corpora

Corpus	No. of texts	Total No. of tokens	Average text length
Corpus CA	20	9147	457.3
Corpus EA	20	4611	230.6

The analytic procedure is divided into 3 steps. First is data annotation. Based on the concept proposed by Jiang & Hyland (2017) (see Table 1), we manually identified all categories of metadiscursive nouns. The dissertations were all annotated for three times to assure its accuracy, and the three results achieved 98% agreement. Due to their context-dependent nature, some abstract nouns were excluded because they did not perform the interactional and interactive functions mentioned previously, though they may be counted as one in other cases. For example, the italicized word "analysis" and "review" in the following sentence from Corpus CA were not counted because they only performed as a noun phrase not the dual functions:

Later, I will provide a detailed *analysis* and *review* on such a misinterpretation. (Corpus CA)

The second step is to find out the lexico-grammatical structures of these metadiscursive nouns. We classified these sentences according to the model proposed by Schmid (2000) and Liu & Wang (2016): (1) N+v/be+nominal phrases; (2) N+v/be+complement clause; (3) N+prepositional phrase; (4) N+clause; (5) Determiner+N and (6) Determiner+be+N (In all these patterns, N refers to metadiscursive nouns). We first used TreeTagger (v.3.2) to tag the passage and then imported the data into AntConc (v.3.5.9, Anthony, 2020). We searched the regex expressions to find the above six lexico-grammatical structures. In order to confirm the prior classifications, we also checked all the results manually to ensure its accuracy.

The final step is data calculation and data analysis. Raw numbers of each category of metadiscursive nouns were all counted in these two corpora and converted into frequencies per 1000 words. Then we employed Loglikelihood and Chi-square Calculator (v.1.0, Liang, 2012) to check out whether there were significant differences in the use of metadiscursive nouns in the two corpora. The raw frequencies of the above 6 types of lexico-grammatical patterns were also counted and their ratios were calculated to find the most preferred patterns by Chines and English music students.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Different Distributions of Metadiscursive Nouns in the Two Corpora

After careful examination, 286 cases of metadiscursive nouns in the two corpora, totaling 13758 tokens, have been found. 117 metadiscursive nouns are identified in Corpus EA, averaging 25 per 1000 cases; while 169 cases in Corpus CA, just 18 per 1000 words ($\chi2=6.83$, $p<0.05$). The given Chi-square results can indicate that there is a significant difference in the use of metadiscursive nouns in Chinese and English music students' doctoral dissertation English abstracts. The specific distribution of the functional classification of metadiscursive nouns in the two corpora is shown in Table 3.

As can be seen in the table, the distributions of three main groups of metadiscursive nouns in the two corpora are relatively similar. Both Chinese and English music students most prefer to use entity nouns in their writing of abstracts. The ratio of entity nouns is 67.5% and 78.1% respectively in Corpus EA and CA, which is the most frequently-used category of metadiscursive nouns, while the relation nouns are used least by both two cultural groups. Although the usage of attribute nouns ranked second in both two cultural groups, L1 students of English are more likely to use this category than Chinese doctoral students. Then we will make a further explanation about the different and similar use of these nouns by doctoral students from two cultural groups:

Table 3 Distribution of metadiscursive nouns in the two corpora

Categories	Corpus EA			Corpus CA		
	Total no. of items	Items per 1000 words	% of total metadiscursive nouns	Total no. of items	Items per 1000 words	% of total metadiscursive nouns
Entity	79	17	67.5%	132	14	78.1%
Objects	31	7	26.5%	54	6	32%
Events	23	5	19.7%	41	4	24.3%
Discourse	6	1	5.1%	8	1	5%
Cognition	19	4	16.2%	29	3	17.2%
Attribute	35	7	30.8%	27	3	16%
Quality	11	2	9.4%	10	1	6%
Status	1	0	0.9%	0	0	0%
Manner	23	5	19.7%	17	2	10%
Relation	3	1	2.6%	10	1	6%
Total	117	25	100.0%	169	18	100,0%

4.1.1. Entity nouns

Entity nouns embody "writers' judgment of texts, events, discourse or aspects of cognition" (Jiang & Hyland, 2017). It can be further classified into four subcategories: object, event, discourse and cognition nouns.

Among all the subcategories of entity, the object nouns are the most commonly used, usually referring to writer's own written work. The reason for the repetitive use of object nouns is that it makes the target readers aware of the "novelty and contribution" of this academic research (Jiang & Hyland, 2016). The italicized words in sentence (3) and (4) are the examples. However, we have noticed that Chinese and English doctoral students

are prone to use different words to mention their dissertations. The Chinese students seem especially indulged to use the word *paper*, it occurs 29 times but only 2 times in Corpus EA. The English music students like to use *dissertation* instead. Besides, L1 students of English employ various terms to refer to their metatext, like *document, study*. It can enrich the lexical diversity of the abstract. So far, we can only find *document* in corpus EA and it can be assumed as a distinct object noun in music discipline. The excessive use of *paper* in Chinese students' writing is due to their limited vocabulary and lack of general knowledge about English culture. In English, *paper* usually refers to "term paper" or "scholarly paper" whereas *dissertation* is the proper name for doctoral degree thesis.

(3) Specifically, this *dissertation* will analyze how certain arrangers have adapted western art music for steel pan chamber ensemble while discussing the possible methods the arranger used to create this adaptation. (Corpus EA)

(4) This *paper* intended to examine the Chinese modern music which emerged after the early 20th century. (Corpus CA)

One of the findings in this study different from previous ones is that both Chinese and English music doctoral students use more object nouns than event nouns. It is contrary to the findings discovered in other soft disciplines, such as applied linguistics and sociology (Jiang & Hyland, 2016). The reason behind this phenomenon might be the academic genre being analyzed is different. The abstracts selected by Jiang & Hyland were from academic journals; but in this study, they were chosen from doctoral dissertations. Furthermore, the chosen dissertations are all theoretical ones; they are more concerned about the values or aesthetics of the music work. From this perspective, their explanation may more rely on writer's own interpretation and understanding rather than empirical work. So, they will use fewer evidential nouns, but more object nouns to emphasize the importance of their written work.

The cognition nouns can help readers to foreground what can be expected to read in the main content. In addition, it makes the text flow naturally from one part of the abstract to another. Example (5) and (6) are typical cases of these functions. As can be seen from Table 3, the cognition nouns appear at least one time in each abstract from the two corpora. Swales (1990) suggested that it is common to present research purpose in the writing of abstract. Doctoral students who are close to the academic circles have received academic training for a long time, they must clearly know the organization of a standard abstract. So, both Chinese and English students tend to employ academic word clusters, like *the purpose of...*, *the aim of...* to illustrate what they desire to achieve in their dissertation, which all have cognition nouns.

(5) The *purpose* of this dissertation is to examine Joachim Raff's life and to provide historical, contextual, stylistic, musical, and idiosyncratic elements of each of Raff's available choral works. (Corpus EA)

(6) The main *purpose* of this thesis is to explore the current Chinese music art from the perspective of image communication in the context of visual culture. (Corpus CA)

4.1.2. Attribute nouns

Researchers have revealed that academic writings are more than just to present scholars' findings, but also show their evaluations and comments of the results (Hyland & Tse, 2005).

The employment of attribute nouns evaluates the quality, status and formation of entities. Its further subcategory includes quality nouns, manner nouns and status nouns.

Quality nouns assess writers' value towards a statement. In most cases, the quality nouns can best represent writer's stance and achieve the interactional function of metadiscursive nouns. The data in the two corpora show that L1 doctoral students use more quality nouns than Chinese students in the abstract, indicating that they are more skillful to express their stance. However, both L1 and L2 students of English prefer to add a premodifying adjective to the quality nouns to show their judgment about an event. In sentence (7), by using the noun *issue*, the author is informing the readers that the piano reduction in orchestral composition may have serious impacts on pianists, and he holds negative opinions about this phenomenon. The same is to the word *problem* in sentence (8), conveying writers' concerns about the development of oriental music culture.

(7) However, the reduction has various *issues* that make performing this composition challenging for pianists. (Corpus EA)

(8) This is also a common *problem* for the inheritance and development of Oriental music culture. (Corpus CA)

As for manner nouns, they "describe the circumstances and formation of actions and state of affairs" relating to time, method and way (Jiang & Hyland, 2016). It is interesting to find that L1 students of English tend to use more manner nouns, of which the number is twice as many as used by Chinese students. Though the selected dissertations are theoretical in nature, L1 doctoral students like to explain the constructing principle of a concept, and the possible methods that the musician (who are being analyzed in their dissertation) used to create his/her work. However, Chinese doctoral students only mention their own adopted methods when conducting their research. Besides, the manner nouns used to depict a specific time or to mark the time boundary only occurs once in Corpus CA but none in Corpus EA. Their scarce occurrence is resulted from the nature of the music discipline. Unlike the experiments conducted in hard discipline, music work or skill is not transient and the production of music work will not be confined in time. The following are examples of manner nouns:

(9) The *mechanisms* for creating musical identity during much of the modern period were based on the elements of pitch, rhythm, harmony and form. (Corpus EA)

(10) Through this research, more scholars, researchers, and performers become aware of the fundamental *techniques* that make these works successful. (Corpus EA)

(11) At the same *time*, the development of tourism economy makes Sabah begin to pay attention to the economic effect of aboriginal traditional music culture. (Corpus CA)

The nouns that relate to status express "judgement of epistemic, deontic and dynamic modality" (ibid). The authors usually use these nouns to denote the likelihood of the research results or their ability to do something. As shown in Table 3, the occurrence of status nouns in both two corpora is scarce. Only one hit was found in Corpus EA, but none in Corpus CA. The L1 students of English like to use the adjective counterparts of relation nouns to express epistemic modality, such as "possible", "accessible" to show their evaluation. However, even the adjective forms are rare in Corpus CA. This finding can be explained by Hu & Li's statement (2015) that "the manipulation of epistemic modality in academic writing is particular problematic for the L2 students".

4.1.3. Relation Nouns

Relation nouns are usually used to indicate the connection or relationship of information in the discourse, which can embody the writer's understanding towards the connections or relationships of information. The use of relation nouns is important in conveying writers' stance, since it can directly point out the logical relationship between each proposition and make the statement more reliable and convincing. By using words like *impact* or *basis*, it reveals writers' agreement that something plays a fundamental role (as shown in Sentence 13), while *imbalance* discloses contradictions and disapprovals. According to the research result, the ratio of relation nouns occupies least position in the two corpora, with the normalized frequency of one word per 1000 words in the two corpora. It can suggest that both Chinese and the US students lack the awareness to use relation nouns to make their abstract more logically organized and persuasive.

(12) In addition, Elgar included numerous musical quotations from earlier compositions... As a *result*, many reviews critiqued the work as lacking compositional originality and creativity. (Corpus EA)

(13) It combined with the theory of chaos to analyze the deterministic behavior and uncertain behavior of the whole music structure organization. This has a direct *impact* on the psychological preset before creation. (Corpus CA)

It can be concluded that the use of metadiscursive nouns in doctoral dissertation abstracts is more flexible and richer by L1 music students of English than Chinese music students. The use by Chinese doctoral students is monotonous and simple. It indicates that L1 students are more adept at constructing their stance in academic writing. They are familiar with the ways to effectively build up their arguments and strengthening their propositions by using different categories of metadiscursive nouns. The reason for Chinese students using fewer metadiscursive nouns may arise from their disciplinary writing tradition. It is normal for Chinese music students to make a brief introduction about the musician or the music work at the beginning of the abstract, which hardly contains any metadiscursive nouns. But the US music doctoral students usually skip that part, only focusing on introducing their study in the abstract, which explains why their abstracts are shorter than Chinese students. Another reason can be that Chinese students lack systematic training of academic writing which in turn accounts for their lack of consciousness to employ these rhetorical skills.

4.2. Lexico-Grammatical Differences of Metadiscursive Nouns in the Two Corpora

The syntactic structures of metadiscursive nouns are diverse to meet writers' demands. The link between the head noun and its complement content can both achieve textual and pragmatic functions. By interpreting their lexico-grammatical patterns, metadiscursive nouns are assumed to "signal the relationships between parts of the text and address the management of information flow" (Jiang & Hyland, 2017). This study adjusted and fused the classification of lexico-grammatical structures by Schmid (2000) and Liu & Wang (2016). Table 4 presents the detailed data about the distribution of these 6 types of structures in Corpus EA and Corpus CA. From the table, we can see clearly that the syntactic pattern of metadiscursive nouns used by Chinese music doctoral students is different from English students. We will discuss the similarity and difference in the sub-sections.

Table 4 Frequency of the lexico-grammatical patterns in the two Corpora

Lexico-grammatical structures	Corpus EA		Corpus CA	
	Raw number	Frequency	Raw number	Frequency
Noun+V/be nominal phrase	9	7.7%	6	3.6%
Noun+V/be complement clause	12	10.3%	14	8.3%
N+ prepositional phrase	22	18.8%	47	27.8%
N+clause	26	22.2%	17	10.1%
Determiner+N	45	38.5%	84	49.7%
Determiner+be+N	3	2.6%	1	0.6%
Total	117	100.0%	169	100.0%

4.2.1. Structure "Determiner+N"

The ratio of the structure "Determiner+N" occupies most in both Chinese and English students' doctoral dissertation abstracts. However, this structure takes up 49.7% in corpus CA, but 38.5% in corpus EA. This result is similar to that of Jiang & Hyland (2017): authors in the discipline of applied linguistics, marketing, philosophy, electronical engineering, etc. also like to use this syntactic pattern most in their writing of abstracts. By using this simple and direct syntax, writers can save the textual space and explicitly express their intentions. In most cases, the metadiscursive noun in this lexico-grammatical structure is accompanied with a proximal demonstrative determiner "this" to highlight the significance of this paper work; and they always appear at the beginning of the sentence or clause to "create cohesion in a text" (Gray, 2010)

However, Chinese music students seems to overuse this simple sentence pattern due to their low English capacity. The English proficiency of most Chinese music students is not that good because the English requirement for them to admit to university is normally lower than the students in other disciplines. But for L1 students of English, they have received qualified education in English writing since primary school. There is no doubt that they are more proficient in using other syntactic patterns.

We also made a comparison according to its functional classifications (see Figure 1), both Chinese and English students most likely use the entity nouns, particularly object or event nouns in this pattern.
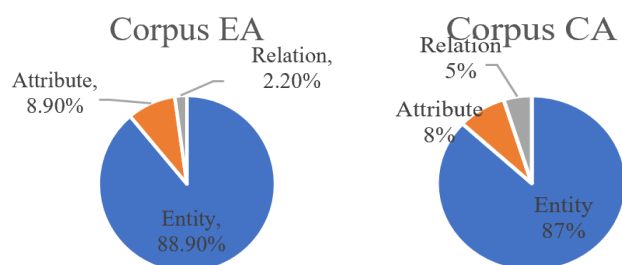

Fig. 1 The Functional Distribution of Metadiscursive Nouns in "Determiner+N"

Since an abstract is the miniature of the whole dissertation, writers want to divert readers' attention to what they have achieved in this present study, so they will use *this*

dissertation, *this paper, this analysis* to "promote the accompanying article" (Jiang & Hyland, 2016). In sentence (14), *this dissertation* is used to mention what this study has contributed. The same is to *this paper* in sentence (15), the author states clearly what he intends to achieve in this thesis. In addition, we can also find the cataphoric use of "Determiner+N", for example in sentence (3) above, *this adaptation* refers back to the things that arrangers used to adapt the western art music, thus making the reference much more precise and contributing to the coherency of the text.

(14) Through several engraving projects and performances, this *dissertation* brings light to a corner of the clarinet repertoire seldom explored and heard today. (Corpus EA)

(15) This *paper* attempts to sum up its unique technique in the traditional instrumental music theory, and then probe into the law of music form contained therein. (Corpus CA)

4.2.2. Structure "N+clause"

The lexico-grammatical structure of "N+clause" is the secondly most-used pattern in corpus EA. In this pattern, the postnominal clauses express the propositional contents of the metadiscursive nouns clearly. In addition, we can also discover writer's stance by analyzing the head nouns. Schimd believes that the choice of abstract nouns in this structure can "determine the conceptual status of clauses" (2000). In Sentence (16), by using the ontological noun *fact,* the author strongly believes what he says in the following proposition is true. It can be considered as "self-source" which is discovered by the author himself in the dissertation (Charles, 2007). If we change *fact* into *belief*, the claim is much weaker. Writers also express their attitudes towards the proposition in *that* clause, the epistemic noun *hope* in example (17) can show their wish about the expected influence of their study. The premodifiers in the pattern "N+clause" is rare, but in case (17) the evaluative adjective "fundamental" exaggerates the importance of using the techniques discussed in the dissertation to make composition successful.

(16) Despite the *fact* that many of these pieces are innovative and well-written, few, if any, have entered the standard repertoire. (Corpus EA)

(17) It is my *hope* that through this research, more scholars, researchers, and performers become aware of the fundamental *techniques* that make these works successful. (Corpus EA)

Chinese students rarely use this sentence pattern in their writing of abstract compared to its use in Corpus EA. In Chinese culture, when building up the whole sentence, Chinese people are prone to add descriptions before the nouns rather than after them. Chinese syntax has the characteristics of "left-branching" (Lian, 2010). So, under the influence of their first language, Chinese music students may rarely use this sentence pattern. Besides, the use of "N + clause" complement requires a more complicated language use for it "requires a nomination of an event" (Jiang, 2015). We can infer that Chinese music students' linguistic proficiency is not sufficient for them to master this sentence pattern well.

As we can see in Figure 2, the doctoral students in the US and China prefer to use different category of metadiscursive nouns in this lexico-grammatical structure. The L1 speaker likes to use attribute nouns, especially manner nouns. By adding a complement clause to the manner noun, the authors make the readers be specific about the methods or approaches they have adopted in their study, which are crucial to their further reading and

understanding. However, we cannot infer Chinese students' preference in our corpus due to the limited data. But both cultural groups will not choose to use relation nouns and object nouns in this structure. Because relation nouns are used to describe the relationship among entities, so if they want to use relation nouns (i.e. *relationship*, *difference*), they would follow the convention of English grammar: to add a prepositional phrase (i.e. *between* or *among*) after the head nouns.
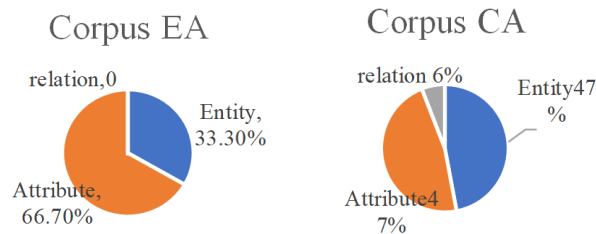
Corpus EA   Corpus CA

relation,0   relation 6%   Entity47
%

Entity,
33.30%

Attribute,   Attribute4
66.70%   7%

Fig. 2 The Functional Distribution of Metadiscursive Nouns in "N+clause"

4.2.3. Structure "N+prepositional phrase"

Among all the post-modifiers, "prepositional phrases are by far the most common variant" (Biber, Grieve, Iberrishea, 2010), and nominal prepositions phrases are "very much common phrasal postmodifiers in L2 English academic research writing" (Hernandez, 2022). As can be seen from Table 4, the use of "N+prepositional phrase" is popular among Chinese music students, and they especially like to collocate the metadiscursive nouns with the preposition "of". The word after "of" is usually "a deverbal noun, deadjective noun or gerund" (Flowerdew & Forest, 2015), like in example (18). But we consider "developing" is a wrong use of "development" by Chinese students. In sentence (19), the preposition is used to indicate the relationship between two cultures. Almost all categories of metadiscursive nouns can be shown in this pattern (see Figure 3). It is a means of introducing and signaling the realizations of the head noun. Chinese music students like to use event nouns or cognition nouns in this structure, which has some relations with the formulaic chunks, for example *with the preparation of…*, *the change of…*, *give an overview of…*, these phrasal clusters all contain event nouns. They also like to use the expression *an analysis of…*, and then add the title of the concerto or the music theory being analyzed in the dissertation as the post modifier to stress the research focus.

(18) The research of this paper explores the *process* of the developing from the original sampling to the whole sound works. (Corpus CA)

(19) This will also try to expound how Chinese folksong is used in Chinese modern music works and explore the influence of the transition *relation* between traditional culture and the ideological trend of time culture to the works. (Corpus CA)

We also discover that the lexico-grammatical patterns of N+V/be+ nominal phrases, N+V/be +complement clause and Determiner+be+N are not commonly used by either group of students. According to our data, cognition nouns usually occur in the "N+V/be+complement clause" pattern because of the academic cluster *the purpose of… be to…*. Nevertheless, L1 doctoral students of English still use these three patterns more

frequently than Chinese students. In the abstracts of Chinese doctoral students' dissertations, we found problems of low syntactic complexity when using the metadiscursive nouns, which also results from their restrictive English storage.
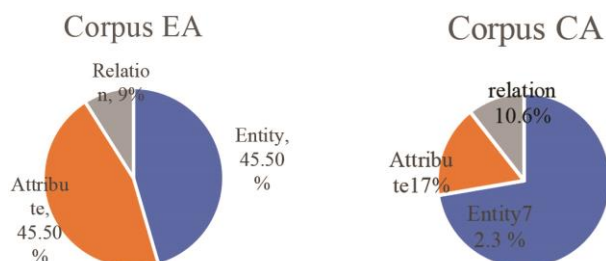

Fig. 3 The Functional Distribution of Metadiscursive Nouns in "N+prepositional phrase"

5. CONCLUSION

In this comparative study, we have analyzed the metadiscursive nouns used in the English abstracts from music students' doctoral dissertations written by two different cultural groups. This study indicates that there are significant differences between the use of metadiscursive nouns by Chinese and the US doctoral students in the discipline of music. Both two groups of doctoral students prefer to use entity nouns most in their English abstracts and relation nouns are used least by them. Despite the overall similarity in its category distribution, there are variations in its specific data. L1 doctoral students of English tend to use more stance nouns in the dimension of entity, attribute and relation of metadiscursive nouns to express their attitudes towards the music work being discussed in the texts, reflecting their high proficiency in constructing stance in academic writing. But due to the peculiarity of the music subject, both groups use more object nouns than event nouns, which is different from previous study (Jiang & Hyland, 2017). We also found metadiscursive nouns that are distinct in music discipline like *document*. As for the lexico-grammatical structures, the pattern "determiner+N" is the most popular one used by two groups, in which object or event nouns are most likely to be found; and this result is similar to Jiang & Hyland (2017). Besides, L1 students adopt diverse syntactic patterns to use these metadiscursive nouns.

The cultural factors account for the different use of metadiscursive nouns by Chinese and English students. Being influenced by the syntactic construction in their first language, Chinese students use fewer "N+clause" patterns. The thinking mode in Chinese traditional culture also informs them to be prudent when evaluating other's or one's own work. So, Chinese students tend to be conservative when expressing their stance, which leads to the fewer occurrence of stance nouns in their articles. But it can also reveal that Chinese music students are not skillful in academic writing: in addition to their overuse of object nouns and simple syntactic patterns, we can also find many grammatical errors in their abstracts. It is necessary for them to learn some essential skills in English academic writing during their doctoral education. They need to be equipped with such rhetorical knowledge like using metadiscursive nouns to establish a good link with target readers in their research papers.

Apart from its relatively small size of corpus and limited data, this article is a good attempt to enrich the inter-cultural study in the field of metadiscursive nouns and it investigates into the academic writing of music discipline which has not been analyzed before. It also sheds lights into developing students' rhetorical consciousness in future EFL teaching, especially in the teaching of academic writing. If EFL learners want to publish articles in the international context, they have to master the rhetorical skills accordingly. EFL teachers can also rely on corpus to unpack the authentic use of native speakers and to use it accordingly in their own texts (Malakhovskaya et al., 2021). However, more research is needed to deepen the understandings about the metadiscursive noun use in the music discipline. The size of the corpus can be enlarged to make the results more accurate. More resources, such as journal articles, postgraduate thesis in the music discipline, are suggested to be incorporated in analyzing these metadiscursive nouns in future studies.

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