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# Differences in engagement: a comparison of the strategies used by British and Chinese research article writers

## Abstract

This paper explores the way academics from two different cultural backgrounds engage with their discourse community in published international research articles. The Introduction and Conclusion sections of 30 research articles in the field of applied linguistics were analysed in terms of the Engagement system within Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), using the UAM Corpus Tool (O'Donnell, 2011). Half of these articles were written by authors who had been educated and were working in the UK, while the other half were by Chinese authors who had been educated and were working in Mainland China or Taiwan. Engagement items in the articles were examined individually (e.g., *may*) and in combination (e.g., *although + may + not*). Although the authors shared comparable disciplinary expertise, and all the articles were taken as expert performances, the analyses revealed that the Chinese and British academics used somewhat different engagement strategies, to differing extents, and that the different combinations of engagement items that they used resulted in different interactive effects. The findings are of potential interest to novice research writers and those who support them, and to journal editors and reviewers considering article submissions from around the world.

**Keywords:** academic discourse, engagement, argument, cultural differences, Chinese writers

## 1. Introduction

Research writing aims not only to represent an external reality, but also to engage with readers to challenge established knowledge and validate new claims (Chang & Schleppegrell, 2011; Hunston, 1994; Hood, 2004; Hyland 2005). Strategies which guide readers towards the acceptance of these claims are particularly common in research article introductions, where argumentation is used to convince readers of the need for the new research, and conclusions, where argumentation is used to convince readers that the new research questions have been answered (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995).

Writers run the risk of damaging their rapport with the discourse community, however, if they promote their own views at the expense of those that are established, as Cheng and Unsworth (2016) point out. Subtle and complex strategies are required in order to mitigate this potential damage. A number of researchers have suggested that the choices writers make in this regard may be influenced by national culture, and the expectations of the local discourse communities they know best. This possibility has been examined with reference to research articles written in English by authors from European countries [e.g. Denmark (Shaw, 2003), Finland (Mauranen, 1993), Germany (Sanderson, 2008), France (Vassileva, 2000), Italy (Molino, 2010), and Spain (Sheldon, 2013)], who have usually been compared to English or American authors. In these studies a wide range of relevant language features have been explored, including personal pronouns, hedges, negations, counter claims, proclaims, conjunctions, and reporting verbs. However, in the very few published studies that have focused on engagement in English research articles produced by Chinese authors, only a limited number of relevant features have been investigated: reporting verbs (Hu & Wang, 2014) and hedges (Chen & Zhang, 2017). Although conclusions about the influence of Confucian culture have been drawn from these studies, analysing just one feature in isolation do not show how writer-reader relationships are built up by multiple means.

The current paper will contribute to this line of enquiry by analysing a wider range of engagement repertoires in English research articles produced by Chinese writers, as compared to those in research articles produced by British writers. We have used the Engagement system within Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) for our analysis, to facilitate comparison to other studies, and the replication of our methods by other researchers. The paper will also explore a new approach to the application of Appraisal Theory, by examining Engagement resources not only individually (e.g. *may*) but also in combination (e.g. *although may not*). It is hoped that this will offer new insights into the way Engagement resources are co-articulated in the construction of writer-reader relationships.

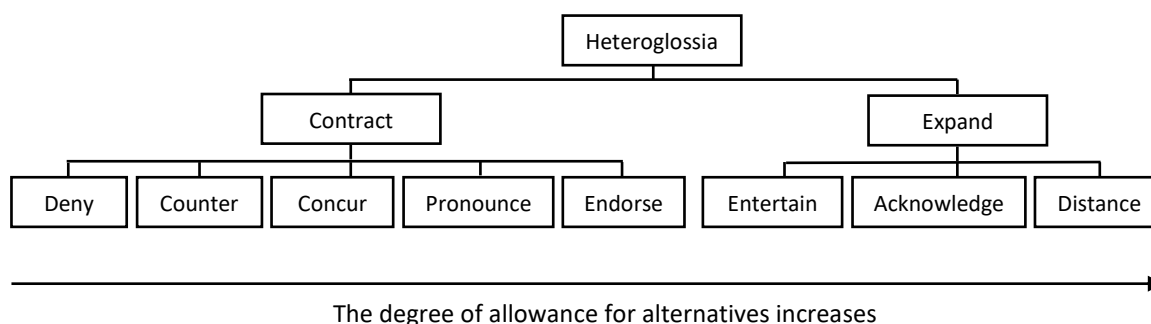
## **2. Theoretical background: the Engagement domain within Appraisal Theory**

The most widely adopted approaches to the analysis of stance and engagement within research writing are those of Biber (1988), who identified a cluster of linguistic features associated with persuasion, Hyland (2005), who developed an Engagement framework and Martin and White (2005), who are responsible for the Engagement domain within Appraisal Theory. For our investigation we chose the Engagement domain within Appraisal Theory, because of its particular focus on writer-reader relationships and its emphasis on context. The Engagement domain is designed for the particular purpose of examining the extent of writers' solidarity with their readers, and the way they position readers by anticipating their possible objections to claims. This perspective is absent from Biber's persuasive dimension. The Engagement domain within Appraisal Theory also explores the way solidarity is constructed through the use of language resources that commonly perform other functions. For example, hedges in Hyland's framework are commonly interpreted as devices which withhold complete commitment to a proposition, so they are not included as engagement resources. Within Martin and White's Engagement framework, however, hedging devices are regarded as a way of allowing for alternative viewpoints. The three paradigms also take different approaches to the identification of engagement resources. Biber's categories rely heavily on overt grammatical devices (e.g. *that*-clauses) that signal the presence of engagement, and Hyland's approach relies on a list of previously identified items. These approaches are relatively easy to apply and so can be used for corpus analysis on a large scale. However they also neglect the influence of context and co-text, at least to some extent. Martin and White's framework, on the other hand, acknowledges that Appraisal language resources tend to extend across a phase of discourse, irrespective of grammatical boundaries. This means that context has to be taken into account each time a resource is identified. This approach has resulted in some very detailed accounts of writer-reader relationships in academic discourse (Hood, 2004; Sheldon, 2013; Geng & Wharton, 2016).

The Engagement domain within Appraisal Theory builds on Bakhtin's (1981) concept of Heteroglossia, which requires the speaker/writer to signal recognition of possible alternatives to their own viewpoint. The statements *This information is likely to be correct*, or *I think this information is correct*, or *Smith argues that this information is correct* all indicate heteroglossia. Martin and White (2005) added a contrastive phenomenon, Monoglossia, to refer to the cases where the speaker/writer makes bare assertions without recognizing different viewpoints or negotiating with them, and thus without giving dialogic space to the audience as in the statement *This information is correct*.

In order to mark the degree to which a heteroglossic utterance makes allowances for dialogically alternative positions and voices, Martin and White proposed two related concepts,

Contract and Expand. Contraction occurs when the speaker/writer reduces the space for other views to be considered. When writers use Contraction, they are still acknowledging the possibility that others might hold alternative views, but they make more of an effort to guide the reader towards their own opinion. Expansion occurs when the speaker/writer provides an opening for other viewpoints; it creates greater dialogic space than Contraction. Figure 1 shows the semantic domains associated with Contraction (Deny, Counter, Concur, Pronounce, Endorse) and Expansion (Entertain, Acknowledge, Distance), and how they are placed on a continuum from offering little space for alternatives to fully opening up the space.



**Figure 1.** The Heteroglossia system (Martin & White, 2005)

For each of these semantic domains, one standard example extracted from our data is given below. These are mapped on to the examples provided by Martin and White (2005) and other studies that have investigated research articles. We do not pass judgement on the writers' choices of semantic domain, as our main concern in this study is to identify the rhetorical behaviour exhibited in our data, rather than pronounce on its appropriacy.

In the domain associated with Contraction, Deny is realized by means of words such as *not* and *no*, and Counter is realized by means of words such as *however* and *although*. In Example 1, the writer guesses that his/her readers may have some doubts about his/her methods, and directly rejects these doubts by using 'not'. In Example 2, the writer guesses that readers might criticize his model as provisional, and uses *although* to set up his/her counter claim.

- 1) We are of course **not** dealing with one monolithic hegemonic English voice...
- 2) **Although** provisional, our model has implications for pedagogy.

Concur closes down the dialogue by assuming that readers will share the position of the writer, and is expressed through markers such as *of course* and *obviously*. In Example 3, the writer believes his/her readers will consider positive affect to be beneficial, and uses *obviously* to overtly signal agreement.

- 3) This encouragement can lead to positive affect, which is **obviously** beneficial to longer-term learning behaviour...

Pronounce items signal that the claim is convincing, for example via locutions such as *there is no doubt that*. Endorse signals that the writer accepts the reported claim as correct, as illustrated in Example 4 through the use of the verb *show*.

- 4) However, empirical research has **shown** that greetings are usually realized by great variability of pragmalinguistic constructions.

Other reporting verbs such as *prove*, *demonstrate*, *find*, and *point out* can also function to Endorse.

In the domain associated with Expansion, which further opens up the dialogic space, Entertain resources assess likelihood, for example via modal auxiliaries (e.g., *may*, *might*, *could*, *must*), modal adjuncts (e.g., *perhaps*, *probably*, *definitely*), modal attributes (e.g., *it's possible that*, *it's likely that*) or evidence/appearance-based postulations (e.g., *it seems*, *it appears*, *in my view*, *my sense is that*). In Example 5, the Entertain resource *perhaps* is used to signal that other possible reasons might exist in addition to or instead of the reason given by the author.

- 5) Such situations occur where teachers or tutors have not paid sufficient attention to the linguistic resources used in academic writing, **perhaps** because they have come from an English literature background and more focused on ideas...

On the other hand, Acknowledge conveys a neutral position. In our study, *according to* is considered to be an Acknowledge item, together with reporting verbs such as *report* or *suggest*, as in Example 6. Distance signals that the speaker/writer does not take responsibility for what is being reported, for example through the use of reporting verbs such as *claim*, as in Example 7.

- 6) He **suggests** that DMs have a procedural meaning.
- 7) They also **claimed** that more reticent students became involved.

When a sentence does not include any of the types of Heteroglossic marker described above, it is counted as Monoglossic in this study.

### 3. Literature review

A number of researchers have reported differences in the way Chinese and Anglophone researchers cite prior research and use hedging devices, with indications of cultural influence.

Hu and Cao (2011), Mu *et al.* (2015) and Chen and Zhang (2017) examined the use of items such as epistemic modals (e.g. *might*), epistemic copulas (e.g. *appears*), and adjectives/adverbs expressing probability (e.g. *likely*), as hedging resources used to modulate commitment claims, acknowledge the existence of differing opinions, and mitigate face-threatening criticisms. They all found that in applied linguistics research articles Chinese writers hedged markedly less than Anglophone writers.

Hu and Wang (2014) explored citation verbs (e.g. *shown*, *found*, *suggest*, *claim*) in applied linguistics research articles. Their categories drew on Endorse, Acknowledge and Distance in a modified version of Appraisal theory. They considered **descriptive verbs that do not project reported claims** as Acknowledge markers. The verb *include* in Example 8 is an example of this. Using these categories, the Chinese writers were found to be more likely to use citation verbs to endorse prior claims, rather than to acknowledge or contest them.

- 8) Other conceptualizations **include** experiential knowledge (Wallace, 1991), pedagogic content knowledge (Shulman, 1987), local knowledge (Allwright, 2003), and pedagogical knowledge base (VanPatten, 1997).

These studies suggest that Anglophone researchers value the acknowledgement of contrasting viewpoints, while Chinese researchers prefer to present a unified position. This unified position is argued to be more in accordance with Confucian cultural beliefs. For example, it has been claimed that Confucian culture regards language as a tool for conveying knowledge rather than as a medium for partaking in knowledge construction (Bloch & Chi, 1995). Evidence for this interpretation can be found in the declaration by Confucius, that “I transmit but do not innovate; I am truthful in what I say and devoted to antiquity” (述而 不作, 信而好古; 1983 p.57) and his exhortation that “it is enough that the language one uses gets the point across” (辞达而已矣; 1983 p.159). This view may be responsible for encouraging a style that has less need to engage rhetorically with alternative viewpoints and voices, or to construct knowledge by building on different opinions (Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Hu & Wang 2014). If language simply transmits what is already known, hedging devices are not necessary, and prior research can be endorsed without question.

However, although reporting and hedging are important evaluative resources in academic discourse, there are other means by which Chinese and Anglophone writers interact with their discourse community, for example, through denying and countering objections from putative readers, or proclaiming shared opinions. To draw stronger conclusions about cultural influences, we need to consider researchers use of the full range of engagement resources.

This full range has been examined in some investigations into academic genres other than research articles applied. The approach taken in these studies helps to point a direction for the current study. Xie (2016) examined all types of engagement in Masters dissertation literature reviews written by English majors studying at Mainland Chinese universities, and found that these reviews were significantly more monoglossic than heteroglossic. Xie’s finding indicate that Chinese students allow less space in their writing for alternative views, but it contrasts with the findings of Geng and Wharton (2016), who compared the use of the same engagement resources by Chinese and British doctoral students, and found a great deal more heteroglossia than monoglossia in both datasets, with no significant differences between the two groups. In Geng and Wharton’s study, however, the participants were all enrolled in the same university department outside China, and it is possible that they might have been influenced by exposure to an Anglophone research writing culture during their course of study. Indeed, an earlier study by Li and Wharton (2012), comparing the English-medium writing of undergraduate native speakers of Mandarin studying in China and the UK, found that the China-based students made stronger assertions, and that the UK-based students preferred “to diminish their commitment to propositions” (2012: 353). The discrepancy between the findings of Geng and Wharton (2016) and those of other studies suggests that while analysing use of the full range of engagement resources, the educational background of the writers (China-based or not) should not be neglected.

Building on these prior studies, we will examine the full range of engagement resources used by Chinese researchers based in China, and British researchers based in the UK, and address the first research question of this paper:

- 1) How do Chinese and British researchers use individual engagement resources to represent claims and engage with the applied linguistics research community?

- 9) Apart from analysing the use of individual engagement resources, we also need to consider the ways in which Chinese and Anglophone writers combine the use of engagement resources. Lancaster (2014) found that different combinations of resources can generate different rhetorical effects in academic discourse. For example, he argues that the configuration of Contraction + Expand allows the writer to take a cautious position based on the evidence. Example 9, extracted from Lancaster (2014) illustrates this effect. A reverse configuration (Expand + Contraction) might result in an overly bold or hasty expression of stance. Such differences can occur because “components of what is functionally a single overall evaluation are spread out through the clause, clause-complex, or even longer stretches of text” (Lemke, 1998:43). A recent survey of physician satisfaction by Harvard Medical School **found [Contract]** that physician autonomy and the ability to provide high-quality care, **not [Contract]** income, are most strongly associated with changes in job satisfaction. Thus, it **seems [Expand]** reasonable to assume that health care providers would take advantage of the greater bargaining power to improve the quality of care.

However, Lancaster only examined the effects of sequencing Expand and Contract resources in broad terms, and did not go so far as to consider Expand and Contract subcategories (e.g. Counter + Deny + Entertain) in any detail. A scrutiny of engagement resources in combination may shed further light on engagement strategies that enable researchers to position themselves and engage with the discourse community, and this is an area that has not previously been examined. Therefore this study attempts to take the lead in exploring the co-articulation of engagement resources through addressing the second question:

- 2) How do Chinese and British researchers use combinations of language items to represent claims and engage with the applied linguistics research community?

The findings from this investigation may help to raise awareness of the communicative effects created by engagement strategies favoured by expert researchers working in different cultural contexts, and thus may be of particular value to those providing writing support for novice research writers, and to those reviewing and editing research produced internationally.

## 4. Methodology

### 2.1 Data collection

Applied linguistics research articles were chosen for this study in order to facilitate comparison with findings from earlier studies of Anglophone and Chinese evaluation strategies, many of which have focussed on applied linguistics, particularly in research articles (Hu & Wang 2014; Hu & Cao 2011; Mu *et al.* 2015). All our writing samples came from articles published in international journals; we therefore treated the British and the Chinese authors as sharing “comparable disciplinary expertise”, and producing “pedagogically relevant expert performances” (Tribble, 2017: 34) within the same discourse community (international other than local).. We also expected them to have a similar, if not identical, command of English.

Many academics have an international educational background, and/or co-write papers with academics from other parts of the world. However, we wanted to reduce as far as possible the influence of other cultures on our two groups of writers, thus avoiding ‘cultural contamination’, a possibility in Geng and Wharton’s study (2016). For this reason, we researched writer backgrounds quite extensively before selecting the articles for our study. This background check

was not undertaken in prior investigations of research articles by authors regarded as ‘Chinese’. In our study, the name and email pair provided in Elsevier documentation was used in online Google searches for the author’s background. All the Chinese-authored articles chosen for the study had been written by researchers who had studied for their PhDs in Mainland-China/Taiwan and were working in Mainland China/Taiwan, according to the online information. Having identified a Chinese RA on a certain topic, we searched for British RAs on the same or a similar topic, and we conducted a similar background check of the author(s) to confirm that they had studied for their PhDs in the UK and were working in the UK. Multiple articles by the same author (s) were not chosen for the corpus, to avoid the influence of individual stylistic features.

Although in recent years there has been a massive increase in the number of Chinese-authored journal publications, the acceptance rate for papers written by authors from China is about half that of the ‘traditional publishing nations’ (which are mostly Anglophone) (Luo & Hyland 2016). According to Elsevier’s *World of Research* report (2015: 65) the amount of publications from China in the Humanities and the Social Sciences is considerably less than half the worldwide average, and in fact it seems that very few Chinese academics based in Mainland-China/Taiwan publish successfully in international applied linguistics journals. A pilot check found that during 2012 and 2013, only five research articles written solely by “home-grown” Chinese writers were published in *Applied Linguistics*, the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, and *English for Specific Purposes*. Due to the paucity of the available data, we compiled only a small corpus of 15 Chinese-authored articles published between 2010 and 2015. These were matched with 15 British-authored articles on similar topics published over the same period. The average impact factor for the journals represented in each corpus was checked to make sure that the quality of the two groups of journals was similar (0.82 for the Chinese corpus and 1.20 for the British corpus). Details of the selected articles are shown in the Appendix.

We excluded from the two corpora figures, tables, captions, and footnotes. We also excluded all sections apart from introductions (up to but not including sections describing data and methods) and conclusions (all sections following the section containing the research results). Thus we counted as Introductions every section up to the presentation of data and methods (this would include a literature review if this was a separate section), and we counted as Conclusions every section following the presentation of data and methods (this would include a discussion section if this was presented separately from the Conclusion). These parts of the research article generally contain the most argumentation, and hence require more Engagement strategies. Table 1 shows the make-up of the two corpora.

	Chinese sections (words)	British sections (words)
<b>Introduction</b>	17,887	16,437
<b>Conclusion</b>	10,273	8,861
<b>Total</b>	28,160	25,298

**Table 1** The Chinese and British corpora

The two corpora were imported into UAM CorpusTool version 3.0, a free-download program for annotating texts at multiple levels (O’Donnell, 2011).

## 2.2 Data analysis

The Engagement domain within Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) was applied for data annotation. Although only 30 articles were examined, a great deal of data was obtained because



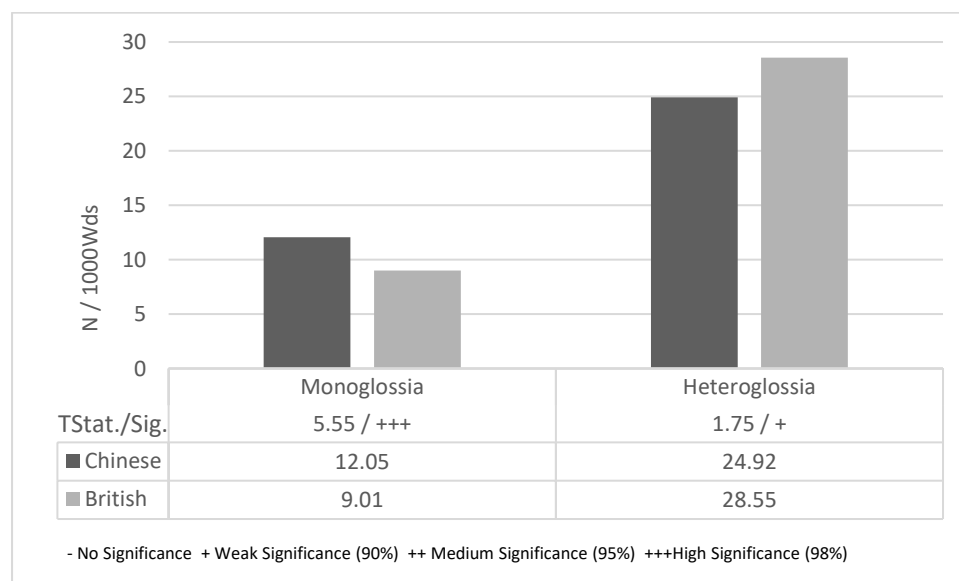
the manual analysis of context-based engagement resources is very detailed, and entails examination of every sentence (4312 in total).

To minimise the level of subjective judgements, two coders were involved in the coding process, and inter-coder and intra-coder reliability measures were implemented. The two authors independently annotated three RAs according to the framework. They both agreed on approximately 95% of the classifications made. The two coders discussed every case where they had not agreed on the same category, and developed new, more specific category descriptions. They eventually reached consensus on all the categories, and one of the authors then annotated the rest of the data based on these new category descriptions. When the author encountered any doubt over any particular feature, this was discussed with the other author and solutions were agreed by both coders. After three months, the corpus was annotated again by one author to ensure that there was no inconsistency in the coding.

## 5. Results

The frequencies of markers of Heteroglossia and Monoglossia were calculated using the UAM CorpusTool, and significant differences between the two corpora were calculated using the one-tailed t-test provided within UAM. In the following figures and tables, marker frequencies have been normalized to 1000 words to facilitate comparison. Freely combining multiple items cannot be quantified in this way, however, and hence the second research question concerning combinations of linguistic resources was addressed through a close analysis of the raw data.

Figure 2 shows that although there was much more Heteroglossia than Monoglossia in both corpora, there was a significant preference for individual item Heteroglossic resources in the British corpus as opposed to the Chinese corpus, and a highly significant preference for Monoglossic sentences in the Chinese corpus as opposed to the British corpus.



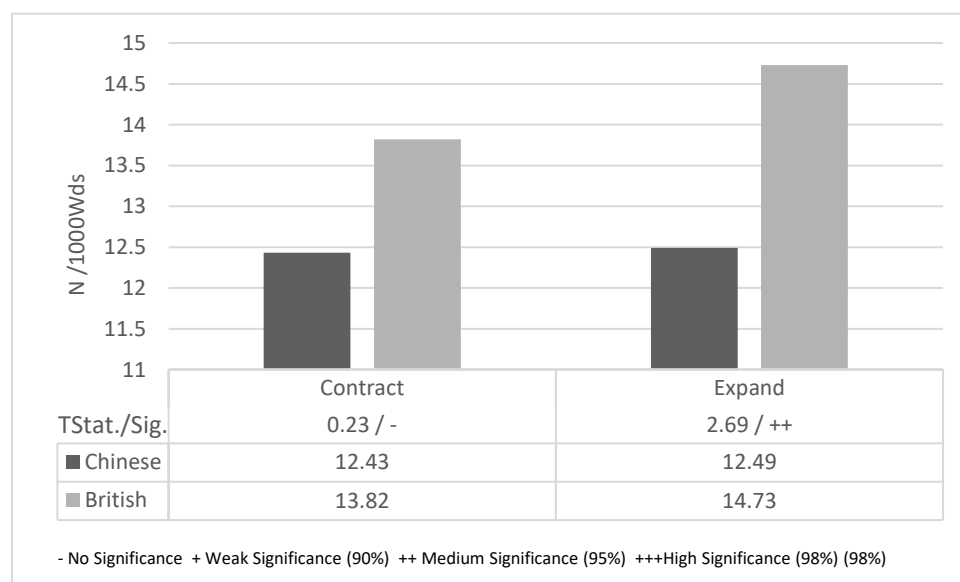
**Figure 2.** Differences in the use of Engagement resources

Examples 10 to 13 are Monoglossic sentences from the Chinese corpus in which propositions are presented as facts.

- 10) Research on discourse markers (DM) in the last few decades has become an important topic.
- 11) The main problems of the traditional English language learning consist in excessive non-circumstance information, direct and abstract knowledge transmission, and second-hand experience confined to the classroom environment (Jiang, 2000).
- 12) Such a self-discovery process is not only applicable in an instructional setting but also beneficial in raising students' email awareness outside the classroom.
- 13) In sum, this study extends the research of punctuations in linguistics.

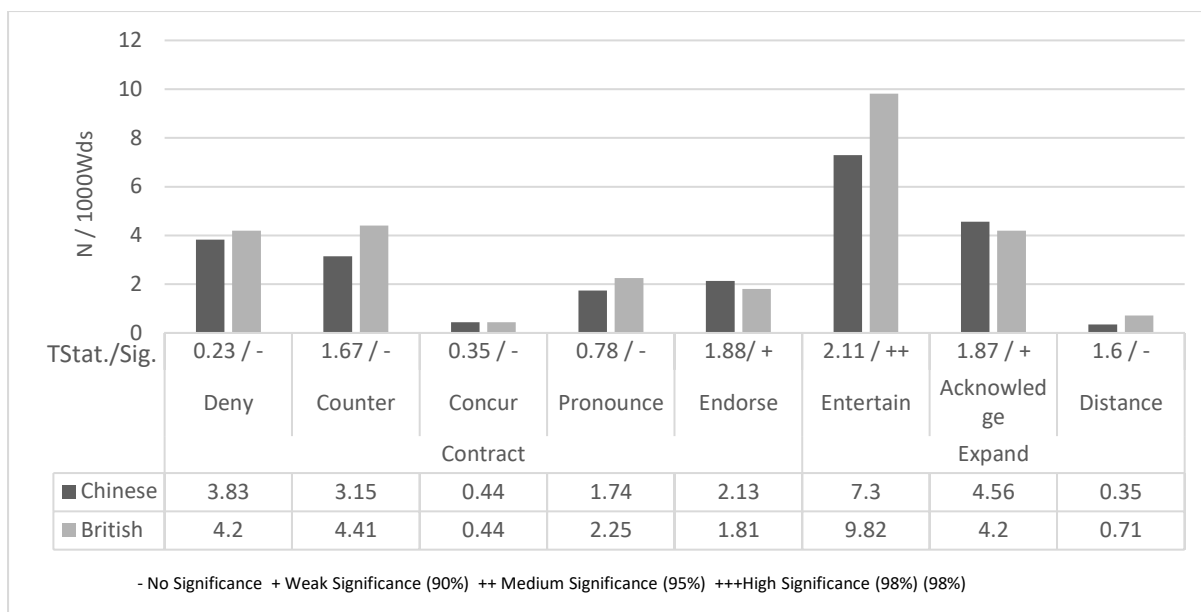
These examples illustrate the way authors can use Monoglossia to establish the importance of their topic and align themselves with the researchers that they have cited. Of course these types of monoglossic claims have their place within any research article, and are also made by the British writers. Not all claims need to be opened up for negotiation, and the judicious decision to include monoglossic sentences can add to the communicative force of an argument. However it is interesting to see that this strategy was used significantly more often by the Chinese writers.

The British authors also allowed for alternative voices to a much greater extent. Figure 3 shows a particularly significant difference between the two groups in terms of their use of Expand resources.



**Figure 3.** Differences in the use of Heteroglossia

Frequencies of the different types of Expand and Contract resources are shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4:** Differences in the use of types of Contract and Expand

The most significant difference was in the use of items in the Entertain domain. These items are shown in Table 2.

Chinese corpus	N	British corpus	N
can	71	may	65
may	65	can	57
might	24	<b>would</b>	44
could	22	<b>might</b>	38
seem	16	could	17
would	12	likely	13
likely	8	<b>perhaps</b>	11
possible/possibly	7	possible/possibly	9
tend to	6	appear	8
potential/potentially	5	seem	8
probable/probably	3	potential/potentially	5
appear	2	probably	3
easy	1	tend to	3
liable to	1	unlikely	2
maybe	1	likelihood	1
unlikely	1	my sense is	1
		presumably	1

**Table 2:** Entertain items in the two corpora

While most realizations occurred in both corpora, *would* and *might* were more common in the British corpus, and *perhaps*, which was also common in the British corpus, was not used by the Chinese writers at all.

Most of the other Contract and Expand types were more frequent in the British corpus, but two types were more frequent in the Chinese corpus: Endorse, which indicates approval of the

external source, and Acknowledge, which takes a neutral position towards the external source. Examples 14 and 15 show the use of Endorse items in the Chinese corpus, where previous research is presented as valid and warrantable.

- 14) Previous research has **shown** that L2 students' email requests to faculty contain a variety of pragmatic infelicities.
- 15) For instance, young learners were **found** to perform differently on both text comprehension (e.g., Langer, 1985) and production (e.g. Hidi & Hidiard, 1983)...

Table 3 shows items in the two corpora in the Endorse domain. *Discover* and *point out* were not used by the British writers, while they used *show* almost twice as much as the Chinese writers.

Chinese corpus	N	British corpus	N
find	32	find	27
show	12	show	20
point out	8	reveal	2
discover	5	demonstrate	2
prove	4	confirm	1
reveal	4	prove	1
demonstrate	4		
confirm	1		
verify	1		

**Table 3:** Endorse items in the two corpora

Examples 16 and 17 show the use of Acknowledge items in the Chinese corpus, indicating a neutral attitude towards claims and proposals made in the prior literature.

- 16) **According to** Bou-Granch (2006), the framing moves are more interpersonally oriented and highly formulaic.
- 17) A number of researchers (Meara, 1996; Qian, 1999; Read, 1989; Wesche & Paribakht, 1996), **proposed** that the two dimensions of vocabulary knowledge be known as 'depth' and 'breadth'.

Items in the two corpora belonging in the Acknowledge domain are presented in Table 4. *According to* was most frequently used by the Chinese academics, while *suggest* was most frequently used by the British academics. Although both *according to* and *suggest* function to acknowledge opinions from other sources, they seem to be slightly different – *according to* seems to present the source as one of the many possible voices, but *suggest*, as a verbal process, seems to be inherently more argumentative, evoking a more debatable situation. Thus the British authors might have been slightly more provocative when they took a neutral position towards prior research.

Chinese corpus	N	British corpus	N
<b>according to</b>	17	<b>suggest</b>	25
suggest	15	note	7
propose	11	argue	6
argue	8	seen	5
conclude	8	report	5
consider	7	acknowledge	4
believe	6	identify	4
note	6	illustrates	4

indicate	6	indicate	4
define	4	according to	4
acknowledged	3	describe	4
put forward	3	explain	3
report	3	highlights	3
advocate	3	accepts	2
added	2	points to	2
explained	2		
summarized	2		
mentions	2		
offered	2		
identified	2		
developed	2		
provides	2		

**Table 4:** Acknowledge items in the two corpora

### 5.1. Combinations of Engagement items

Engagement markers sometimes occur close to each other in our data, or close to items which maximise the force of the writer's claim such as *most* or *always*. Items in the Entertain domain were particularly likely to combine with items from other domains, as shown in Table 5.

<b>British corpus</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Chinese corpus</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Entertain + Entertain</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Entertain + Entertain</b>	<b>3</b>
perhaps + possible	1	may + probably	1
would + seem	1	may + seem to	1
		could + likely	1
<b>Entertain + Deny (+maximizer)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Entertain + Deny (+maximizer)</b>	<b>4</b>
may + not	3	would + not	2
would + not	2	may + not	1
seem + not	2	may + rather than	1
may + not + always	1		
may + not + most	1		
<b>Counter + Entertain(+ Deny)(+maximizer)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Counter + Entertain (+ Deny) (+maximizer)</b>	<b>1</b>
but + may	2	although + may	1
although, + seem	1		
although + may	1		
though + may + not	1		
but + may + not + always	1		
<b>Deny + Entertain (+maximizer)</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Deny + Entertain (+maximizer)</b>	<b>0</b>
not + may	1		
not + may + severely	1		
<b>Other sequences with Entertain</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Other sequences with Entertain</b>	<b>0</b>
can + but + would + not	1		
can + but + not + most	1		
possible + may + not + but + may	1		

**Table 5:** Co-occurrences of Entertain and other Engagement markers

It can be seen from Table 5 that the British authors were more inclined than the Chinese authors to use combinations of markers including Entertain. This sometimes resulted in quite complex wording, used for example to express the following combinations, listed in Table 5:

- **Entertain + Deny (+ maximiser)**
- **Counter + Entertain (+Deny) (+maximiser)**
- **Deny + Entertain (+ maximiser)**

The first of these - **Entertain + Deny (+ maximiser)** – can be realised by sequences such as Example 18. The Deny marker signals that the writer does not agree with the claim relating to output in the English language class, but recognizes that readers may support it. To allow for this contingency the writer adds a maximising marker (*always*); this reduces the number of people the writer disagrees with, distinguishing those who hold the claim from those who hold an extreme version of the claim. Adding the Entertain marker acknowledges the opinion of this reduced group of people, and thus basically gives dialogic space to all opponents.

- 18) Output in the English language class **may not always** be a productive or necessary use of classroom time

The combination **Counter + Entertain (+Deny) (+maximiser)** can be realised by sequences such as Example 19. The Counter marker signals the writer's belief that the claim about the effect of the sample size would be the 'normal' opinion for readers to hold, although not the writer's own belief. He/she challenges the reader's opinion by putting forward a contrasting claim that there is attrition over time. However, adding an Entertain marker (*may*) in the first clause also shows the writer's awareness of the existence of readers who differ from the 'normal' position, and thus enables the writer to explicitly align with readers who share his/her own opinion.

- 19) **Although** this **may** in part due [sic] to the relatively small sample size, there is attrition over time and therefore there is a need to regularly revisit target items.

**Counter + Entertain (+Deny) (+maximiser)** can also be realised by sequences such as Example 20. Here, the inclusion of a Deny marker indicates a different intention on the part of the writer: the Denied claim (these ideas are *not* ... driving educational policy) represents the 'normal' position the writer expects of his/her readers. However the negation (*not*) prepares readers for a less extreme claim (that the ideas are 'influencing attitudes'). The writer intends to challenge 'normal' opinion, but at the same time does not want to completely disalign with any of his/her readers. He/she therefore includes an Entertain marker (*may*) between Counter and Deny, to allow for those who agree with the first, more extreme claim, and completes this persuasive strategy by narrowing opponents down to those who disagree with the second, less extreme claim.

- 20) **Though** these ideas **may not** be driving educational policy, they are influencing attitudes in ways that have the potential to affect outcomes.

The combination **Deny + Entertain (+ maximiser)** can be realised by sequences such as Example 21. In this case, the writer uses Denial to create a scenario ('*not* to do so') and predicts a very bad consequence ('severely weaken the findings'). At the same time, the writer moderates this extreme outcome by using an Entertain marker (*may*), and thus allows for the possibility of disagreement. Some of the same meaning could have been expressed by saying 'to do so may greatly enhance the findings of both', but **Deny + Entertain + maximiser** combined with a

negative claim has the advantage of introducing a possible opposing view; expressing negativity is also perhaps a more powerful persuasive tool.

21) **Not** to do so **may severely** weaken the findings of both.

Combinations of Engagement markers which do not include Entertain are listed in Table 6.

British corpus	N	Chinese corpus	N
<b>Deny + Deny</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Deny + Deny</b>	<b>2</b>
don't + deny	1	no + not	1
<b>Deny + comparative + Pronounce</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Deny + comparative + Pronounce</b>	<b>0</b>
no + less + obvious	1		
<b>Counter + Deny</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Counter + Deny</b>	<b>13</b>
although + neither + shows	1	however + cannot	3
but + without	1	however + not	1
but + none	1	however + no	1
		although + cannot	2
		although + not	1
		nevertheless + not	3
		though + not	1
		but + no	1
<b>Pronounce + Counter</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Pronounce + Counter</b>	<b>0</b>
clearly + although	1		
must + although	1		
<b>Other</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>1</b>
showed + though	1	Although + should	1
but + without + would + not	1		

**Table 6:** Other combinations of Engagement markers

Although the number of these other combinations, without an Entertain element, is quite small, Table 6 indicates that the Chinese authors were more inclined to use them than the British authors. The difference in the use of **Counter + Deny** combinations is particularly noticeable. **Counter + Deny** disaligns the writer from the reader quite boldly, and was particularly favoured by the Chinese authors. It contracts rather than expands the dialogue because it projects particular beliefs or expectations onto the reader and rejects them, as in the following examples:

- 22) *However*, these technological media and social activities *cannot* be integrated into our formal teaching activity completely.
- 23) *Nevertheless*, how these strategies work in the authentic Chinese university EFL classrooms in terms of advanced usage of English lexis remains as a *not* fully touched upon [sic] until very recently.

Some of the **Counter + Deny** combinations counted in Table 6 were complex and included more than one clause, taking the form of:

- **Counter + Deny + clause 1 + clause 2**
- **Counter + clause 1 + Deny + clause 2**
- **clause 1 + Counter + Deny + clause 2**

The first of these, **Counter + Deny + clause 1 + clause 2**, occurred in the three **Counter + Deny** combinations with *although*, as in Example 24. In this combination, **Deny + clause 1** represents the position the writer expects the reader to hold. The denied claim made in clause 1 (that the data is conclusive) is a stronger version of the claim made in clause 2 (that the data provides a suggestive picture), and although the writer counters readers who would accept the stronger claim, at the same time he/she hopes to convince readers of the validity of the claim in clause 2. This combination is therefore quite accommodating of alternative views, and does not impose the writer's argument to the same extent as the second and third combinations, which rearrange the **Counter + Deny + clause** elements.

- 24) **Although** the current data **cannot** be conclusive about performance..., the study is aimed at providing a suggestive picture...

**Counter + clause 1 + Deny + clause 2** and **clause 1 + Counter + Deny + clause 2** are more overt rejections of the views of readers. **Counter + clause 1 + Deny + clause 2** occurred in sequences such as Example 25. **Clause 1 + Counter + Deny + clause 2** occurred in sequences such as Example 26. In both cases the writer told readers that the claim in clause 1 was correct, but overtly disaligned with readers who might take the claim in clause 1 as evidence to support the claim in clause 2 (e.g. that the media remove psychological barriers, or that vocabulary knowledge correlates with listening comprehension).

- 25) **Although** advanced communication media are a powerful support for modern education, they **cannot** solve the problem of psychological barriers.

- 26) Vocabulary knowledge is significantly correlated with reading comprehension; **however**, such findings **cannot** be overgeneralized to listening.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

The results reported above reveal how the Chinese and the British researchers used engagement resources individually and in combination to represent claims and engage with the applied linguistics research community.

Although we only worked with 30 articles we examined the introduction and conclusion sections in great detail; we were able to identify large numbers of instances of each type of engagement resource (2365 in total), and find statistically significant differences between the way they were handled by the two sets of writers.

Both groups of writers preferred Heteroglossia to Monoglossia, indicating that they wished to position themselves and their texts within a discourse community which might hold a variety of views. However, this position is preferred to significantly different extents in the two groups. The Chinese authors asserted their statements (through Monoglossia), much more frequently than the British authors who more often opened up the dialogic space (through Heteroglossia). This finding is in accordance with the results reported for Chinese students' dissertations and theses (Xie, 2016; Li & Wharton, 2012), and might well be associated with the cultural influence of Confucius. As Peng and Nisbett (1999: 747) and Hu and Wang (2014) noted, the sayings of Confucius may have led over time to the epistemological belief that "verbal debate and argumentation are not meaningful tools for understanding truth and reality", and the idea that



knowledge is self-evident rather than something constructed through discussion and argument. Whereas the British writers were more likely to assert their critical voice and open up the dialogic space, indicating their polite awareness of the views of others, the Chinese writers' tended to take a unified position and close down debate. This strategy might be regarded as a form of positive politeness in the context of Confucius culture, but on the other hand ignoring the existence of potentially opposing views and projecting an authoritative voice might also be interpreted as a threat to negative face, especially by readers outside the Confucian cultural sphere.

As in previous investigations of hedging in Chinese and Anglophone writing (Hu & Cao 2011; Jiang & Tao, 2007; Chen & Zhang 2017; Mu et al 2015), we found a particularly marked preference for Entertain markers in the British texts. We also found a marked preference for Endorse markers in the Chinese texts, as in Hu and Wang's study of Chinese and Anglophone citation strategies (2014). However the more neutral Acknowledge marker was used more often by Chinese writers in our study, and more often by Anglophones in Hu and Wang's study (2014), a difference that may be accounted for by the fact that Hu and Wang included a wider range of items in their Acknowledge category, as discussed in our literature review. Even so, the current findings seem to strengthen Hu and Wang's argument regarding the influence of Confucius culture and the idea that the most prominent, time-honoured sources should normally go unquestioned.

Our close and systematic examination of the full range of Heteroglossic resources in this study has not only added support for some prior findings, but has also provided new evidence in relation to Engagement devices overlooked in the prior literature, such as contractions achieved through denying/countering objections from putative readers, and proclaiming shared opinions. The British authors' preference for these markers indicates their relatively active participation in debate and argumentation with their audience and their tendency to raise a more critical voice, behaviour that seems dispreferred in Confucius culture.

It is possible that our findings were affected by the fact that English was a foreign language for the Chinese authors, and that they might not have had access to all the lexicogrammatical resources available to the British authors. There seems to be no way that we can test this hypothesis. However the research articles examined in this study had been published in international journals, and they had presumably passed inspection by editors and reviewers. This might serve as a sort of guarantee that the Chinese writers had reached an acceptable level of English language proficiency. Moreover, engagement can be achieved through the use of very common words which have common Chinese equivalents, particularly those that function as Deny (e.g. 没有 *no*, 不 *no*), Counter (e.g. 但是 *however*, 虽然 *though*) and Entertain (e.g. 可能 *may*, 可以 *can*). In order to entertain alternative viewpoints the Chinese authors could always have chosen a common English equivalent for a common Chinese word (e.g. *may* as a translation of 可能). In this study, the differences in engagement preferences between the two groups were detected on the basis of the total number of items in each category; any language deficit should not have affected the total number of words that performed a certain engagement function, but should rather have reflected the authors' different strategies for managing writer-reader relationships.

In addition to our quantitative findings regarding Engagement strategies, our new analysis of the way the resources combine shows that the British authors were more likely to balance the projection of their critical voice through the use of Expand markers, particularly through their

combination of Deny, Counter and Entertain resources, in a variety of different sequences. These combinations are used to disagree with the putative readers' viewpoints and simultaneously open up space for alternative positions. The Chinese authors used more combinations of Contract markers to further close down the space given to alternative voices. The variety of combinations on the data was so great that we were only able to find limited numbers of examples of each combination. Nevertheless our findings in this respect have revealed further positioning strategies, and also point the way forward for future analyses.

All research writers inevitably make use of some Engagement resources, so this study will probably be of interest to novice research writers and writing tutors in all cultural contexts, rather than solely in Britain and in China. Academic writing tutors might find it useful to draw the attention of novice researchers to the various effects discussed in this paper. Our findings might also help to sensitize readers, and particularly gatekeepers such as editors and examiners, to the complexity of Engagement strategy choices open to academic writers, and the possible reasons for the strategies they choose.

Further research might examine a larger number of research articles, concentrating solely on particular resource combinations. Our study provides important indication of how such research might proceed, for example by identifying categories of resource that are likely to combine, and the different effects created by the positioning of combinations within the sentence.

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#### Appendix: Selected articles

Chinese RAs	British RAs:
Gao, Y. (2011). Cognitive linguistics—Inspired empirical study of Chinese EFL teaching. <i>Creative Education</i> , 02(04), 354–362.	Elwood, J. A., & Bode, J. (2014). Student preferences vis-à-vis teacher feedback in university EFL writing classes in Japan. <i>System</i> , 42, 333–343.
Yang, X. (2010). Intentional forgetting, anxiety, and EFL listening comprehension among Chinese	Lamb, T. (2011). Fragile Identities: Exploring Learner Identity, Learner Autonomy and

college students. <i>Learning and Individual Differences</i> , 20(3), 177–187.	Motivation through Young Learners' Voices. <i>The Canadian Journal of Applied linguistics, Special Issue</i> 14(2), 68–85.
Wen, W. (2014). Assessing the roles of breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge in Chinese EFL learners' listening comprehension. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied linguistics</i> , 37(3), 29–56.	Vandergrift, L., & Baker, S. (2015). Learner variables in Second language listening comprehension: An exploratory path analysis. <i>Language Learning</i> , 65(2), 390–416.
Liu, H. (2010). Dependency direction as a means of word-order typology: A method based on dependency treebanks. <i>Lingua</i> , 120(6), 1567–1578.	MacDonald, M. C. (2013). How language production shapes language form and comprehension. <i>Frontiers in Psychology</i> , 4, 226.
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Chien, C., Kao, L., & Wei, L. (2008). The role of Phonological awareness development in Young Chinese EFL learners. <i>Language Awareness</i> , 17(4), 271.	Moyle, M. J., Heilmann, J., & Berman, S. S. (2013). Assessment of early developing Phonological awareness skills: A comparison of the preschool individual growth and development indicators and the Phonological awareness and literacy Screening–PreK. <i>Early Education &amp; Development</i> , 24(5), 668–686.
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