

A Contrastive Study of Evidentiality in English and Chinese MA Thesis Abstracts

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Abstract—Evidentiality is a linguistic category which is about the speaker's expression of source of information. The linguistic forms of evidentiality are termed as evidential or evidential markers.

The present study is based on a total of 60 MA thesis abstracts written by Chinese and US MA students in the different disciplines from 2006 to 2018. The abstracts are selected from different fields of discipline, such as agriculture, chemistry, biology, education, language, psychology, sociology and so on.

This paper is a combination of quantitative study and qualitative study, aiming at illuminating: first, the frequency and distribution of evidential types in English and Chinese MA thesis abstracts; second, the discourse features of MA thesis abstracts reflected by the use of evidentials; third, the similarities and differences of the use of evidentials between two languages; fourth, the factors resulting in these differences. Through the analysis, it is found that the use of evidentials is in low frequency and lack of variety. It is revealed that in both corpora, the reporting and inferring evidentials are more frequently adopted than sensory and belief evidentials. The choice of the evidentials clearly reflects the objective, highly-reliable and concise features of the MA thesis abstracts. This paper is also expected to throw some light on the writing and reading of research articles.

Keywords—evidentiality; evidentials; MA thesis abstracts; English; Chinese

I. INTRODUCTION

Evidentiality, in linguistics, is about the speaker's expression of the source of information and his commitment to the reliability of information. The linguistic forms of evidentiality are called evidentials or evidential markers. There are two kinds of markers, that is to say, morphological markers and lexical markers.

The next step is to consider the following statements adapted from scientific articles:

(1a) Concerning differences, this study *suggested* that there is some room for internal variation across languages in the construction of opinion columns.

(1b) From the linguistic composition of the textual metadiscursive markers, this study *discovered* that there are

no statistically significant differences in the way Spanish and English opinion columns articulate these items.

(1c) These forms *seem* to be used to create a sense of solidarity with readers when discussing issues that are in fact divisive.

(1d) Transferring these findings to pedagogical grounds, *I believe* there is an evident need to include metadiscourse markers, specifically interpersonal ones, in L1 and L2 writing courses.

(Adapted from Yang Linxiu, 2009:136)

The statements above include four different evidentials denoting different evidential types and different degrees of certainty that writers bear for these statements. In (1a) and (1b), the verb *suggest* makes (1a) tentative and the verb *discover* make (1b) a stronger assertion. In example (1c), the verb *seem* is used to make the statement more tentative and show a low degree of certainty. In example (1d), *I believe* as a belief evidential is also a tentative way to make a scientific claim, but it is the most explicit and subjective way for the writer to intrude into the statement.

Evidentiality, as a linguistic phenomenon, is pervasive in all languages. The languages involved in evidential studies are English, French and German as well as the less known languages like the Amercian Indian languages, Tibetan, Turkish and Burmese and so on. Evidentiality has been widely studied cross-linguistically.

Willett (1988) compares the grammatical evidential markers in thirty-eight languages. Johanson & Utas (2000) and Aikhenvald & Dixon (2003) made their study of evidential in some lesser known languages such as Turkic, Iranian and so on. Based on an examination of over 500 languages, Aikhenvald (2003, 2004) finds that not all the languages have evidentiality as a grammatical category and the evidentiality systems in different languages differ in how complex they are. In China, it also aroused a number of scholars' interest. They applied the study of evidentiality into Chinese. (Hu, 1994a, 1994b; Niu, 2005; Fang, 2006; Tang, 2007; Yang, 2009).

Based on the studies of different languages, the conclusion can be drawn from the following aspects.

Firstly, from the study of evidentiality in different languages, it is found that Evidentiality, as a linguistic phenomenon, is pervasive in all languages.

Secondly, from the above review of the study of evidentiality in different languages, it can be concluded that for the unique characteristic evidential systems and expressions of evidentiality, the studies of evidentiality in different languages may have quite different research orientations and focuses.

From the study of evidentiality on different languages, it is noted that not all the languages have grammaticalised evidential. Some have the grammatical evidential systems, some languages have lexical ways, and some have both.

Evidentiality has really acquired the concern and interest of a great number of scholars worldwide. Domestically, the topic of evidentiality has also been studied by a large number of Chinese researchs such as Hu Zhuanglin (1994, 1995), Yan Chensong (2000), Niu Baoyi (2005), Zhu Yongsheng (2006), Fang Hongmei (2006, 2008), Yang Linxiu (2009), Xie Quncao (2010), Li Xiaoguang (2012) and Xu Jiju (2013). They have studied evidentiality from different perspectives, such as typology, grammaticalization, cognitive linguistics, syntax and pragmatics. And the recent study puts emphasis on the discourse features of evidentiality.

The applied studies of evidentiality in different discourses have already attracted the attention of linguistic researchers. Chafe (1986) makes a comparison between conversational English and academic English writing. Mushin (2000, 2001) studies the pragmatics of evidentials in narrative retelling discourse. She finds that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the actual sources of information and the evidential used in the discourse, and the bond between them can be influenced by some pragmatic factors. Precht (2003) attaches great importance to the stance-marking functions of evidentiality in both British and American conversations. He finds that the cultural differences can affect the way communicators use evidentials. Hu Zhuanglin (1994a) finds that hearsay evidentials are adopted more frequently in news reports, while belief, induction and reliability evidentials outnumber other evidentials in debating discourse. Tang Bin (2007) approaches the discourse features of evidentiality in English news reports of epidemic situation. Yang Linxiu (2009) studies the discourse features of evidentiality in research articles. But the contrastive study on evidentiality between and Chinese academic articles are still in its infancy.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Both quantitative and qualitative methods are employed in this research. The quantitative method is used for analyzing the distribution and frequency of each category of evidentials in English and Chinese MA thesis abstracts. For the description and explanation about the distribution and frequency of evidentials, qualitative method will be employed. The qualitative method will also be used to explain the interpersonal functions of evidentiality served in English and Chinese MA thesis abstracts.

The data-coding of this research is done manually at the preliminary stage to identify all the potential lexical expressions that might be used as different types of evidentials. With the help of Wordsmith 5.0 and Microsoft Office Excel, the data about the frequencies of different types of evidentials are calculated and accordingly the figures and tables are formed. The similarities and differences between the English and Chinese MA thesis abstracts are also analyzed.

The present study is based on a total of 60 MA thesis abstracts written by Chinese and US MA students in the different disciplines from the year 2006 to 2018. The Chinese corpus (CC) is composed of 30 abstracts selected randomly from www.cnki.net while the US corpus is composed of 30 abstracts selected randomly from ProQuest Dissertation Database of Full Text. The abstracts are selected from different fields of discipline, such as agriculture, chemistry, biology, education, language, psychology, sociology and so on. The corpora involve the different fields of discipline both in natural science and social science.

The abstracts which are selected are not confined to some specific discipline. It is because the present study means to acquire an overall analysis for the use of evidentials in the abstracts and is intended to find the discourse features of the MA thesis abstracts reflected by evidentiality. The findings can be used for MA students in different majors to write a well-written abstracts, including both Chinese and American students.

III. THE CLASSIFICATION OF EVIDENTIALITY IN THE PRESENT STUDY

In this paper, evidentiality is taken broadly; it not only concerns with the information source but also reveals the writer or speaker's commitment to the factual status of the information. It takes evidentiality as a semantic notion which includes all possible linguistic forms as long as they can fulfill the evidential functions. Based on the previous classifications of evidentiality and considering the unique generic characteristics of MA thesis abstracts, this research takes the broader view of evidentiality proposed Yang Linxiu's classifications.

Firstly, Yang's dissertation focuses on explicit evidentials and sticks to the rule of "explicitness" in linguistic manifestation. She believes that only the propositions in which evidentials are explicitly used are within the scope of his study. Different from Yang's study, the paper also focus on the implicit evidentials, or called zero-marked evidentials, since they indicate the information is factual and needn't be specifically stated. Hu Zhuanglin (1995) claims that if a statement has been known as universal truth or common sense, and it is easily understood by the listener, the speaker or the writer could employ zero-marked evidential. Ailhenvald (2004:74) also argues that zero-marked forms occur if the speaker does not consider it necessary to indicate the information source. The present study not only attaches importance to the analysis of explicitly-used evidentials, but also the implicitly-used evidentials, or to say, the zero-marked evidentials.

Secondly, Yang classifies the reporting evidentials into self-reporting and other-reporting. In the present study,

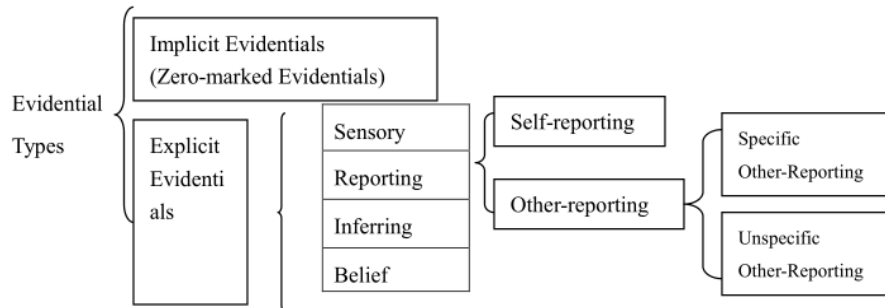


Fig. 1. Classification of evidentiality in the current study.

Evidentials are usually classified into implicit and explicit evidentials ("Fig. 1"). Generally speaking, the propositions with the implicit evidentials mean that there are no evidentials, namely, no grammatical or lexical marker for evidentiality is used in these propositions. The implicit evidentials are also called as zero-marked evidentials in many evidential studies (Tang. 2007; Yang 2009, etc.). Information in the propositions with zero-marked evidentials are usually believed to be true or factual, in which the speakers are sure of the reliability of the information presented and in such situations the readers generally do not doubt the truth value of the information.

It is indicated that the implicit and explicit evidentials are generally used in different academic situations and they play the different interpersonal functions. It is necessary to deeply analyze the frequencies they are employed and the interpersonal functions they perform in MA thesis abstracts.

For the explicit evidentials, they are divided into four types in the present study, that is, sensory, reporting, and inferring and belief.

IV. GENERAL FEATURES OF EVIDENTIALITY IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE MA THESIS ABSTRACTS

In this part, it is needed to adopt the quantitative study. The frequency and distribution of evidentials in 30 English and 30 Chinese MA thesis abstracts will be counted and calculated carefully. With the help of the Wordsmith Tool 5.0, together with the careful identification and calculation,

other-reporting evidentials will be further divided into specific ones and unspecific other-reporting evidentials.

the distribution features of the four types of evidentials are analyzed in our data. To illustrate clearly, in the following study, English Corpus is used to stand for the corpus established from the MA thesis abstracts written by the US MA students and Chinese corpus is used to stand for the corpus established from the MA thesis abstracts by the Chinese MA students. The short form 'Fre' is used to stand for the frequency of evidentials in the both corpora in the following tables or figures.

First, it is necessary to discuss the lexical realizations of the sensory evidentials.

TABLE I. LEXICAL REALIZATIONS OF SENSORY EVIDENTIALS IN BOTH CORPORA

	typical realizations	examples
sensory evidentials	the first-person plural form + different forms of verb "see"	We see/ saw We can see It can be seen As seen in We have seen see+ table/ figure

For the Chinese corpus, the lexical realizations of sensory evidentials are the corresponding Chinese version. ("Table I")

Then, the lexical realizations of reporting evidentials are presented. ("Table II")

TABLE II. LEXICAL REALIZATIONS OF REPORTING EVIDENTIALS IN BOTH CORPORA

reporting evidentials		ways of realizations	typical realizations
self-reporting		noun/pronoun+ v(find,report,reveal)	we, our analysis, our findings, our study, this article, this data, +v(find, indicate, suggest...)
other-reporting	specific	author+time website+ time	author+ year website+year Author+time argues/maintains that according to sb. in sb's view
	unspecific	modal adjuncts	usually,basically, normally, regularly, generally, in general
		structure	It is known, be said to, it is reported The fact+ that clause

Third, it is needed to discuss the lexical realizations of inferring evidentials.

The use of inferring evidentials is a very important way to indicate the source of the information and the choice of the different inferring evidentials presents the degrees of information reliability in academic writings. The potential lexical realizations of inferring evidentials in English and Chinese MA thesis abstracts are shown in "Table III".

TABLE III. LEXICAL REALIZATIONS OF INFERRING EVIDENTIALS IN BOTH CORPORA

	ways of realizations	examples
inferring evidentials	modal verbs	can, may, could, might, must, should, would.....
	modal adjuncts	possibly, evidently, certainly, obviously, apparently, clearly, undoubtedly, perhaps, surely.....
	relational process	seem, appear+ to be/ to do/ that clause
	It structure	It's possible/ clear/ certain/ evident that

Last, the lexical realizations of belief evidentials are presented.

Belief evidentials mean that the information acquired comes from the speaker or writer's own belief. Treating belief evidentials as the source of information may lower down the reliability of the evidence. Belief evidentials bear strong degree of subjectivity, which violates the rule of objectivity of MA thesis abstracts, so it is rarely used in the corpora the present study presented. The potential lexical realizations of belief evidentials in English and Chinese MA thesis abstracts are shown in "Table IV":

TABLE IV. LEXICAL REALIZATIONS OF BELIEF EVIDENTIALS IN BOTH CORPORA

belief evidential	ways of realizations	examples
	I/We+ v. In my/our view/opinion	I/ We think/ believe/ suppose/ suggest/ propose/ argue; In my view/ opinion

In summary, sensory, reporting and inferring, belief evidentials all together are employed to indicate the source of information as well as the writers' attitude to the reliability of the sourced information in the data. The different choice of lexical realization for evidentials indicates different modal values, and correspondingly they achieve their different the interpersonal function of evidentiality. In order to make sure the accuracy of the statistics, there are some problems need to be paid much attention to.

In the first place, since belief evidentials seems to bear the strong sense of subjectivity, some writers may intentionally avoid using *I think*, *I argue*, *we propose*, etc. They choose to adopt the implicit ways of expressing their

opinion, such as, *this paper/ study suggests that...*, which is only their strategy to strengthen the objectivity of their belief. Thus, they choose to adopt the lexical realization of self-reporting evidentials.

For example:

The paper proposes that the sentence internal language in the ESL textbook texts is not representative of language in university textbooks and that further consideration must be given to text selection and inclusion of supplemental texts and activities to account for lexical or grammatical differences. (English Corpus, Text 21)

From the example showed above, it can be seen that to achieve the objectivity of the articles, writers prefer to use the self-reporting evidentials to indirectly express their belief. So belief evidentials and self-reporting evidentials bear a very close connection, and this phenomenon is necessary to be noticed.

In the second place, it is very important to identify the specific meanings of a potential evidential in different contexts and exclude the cases in which it seems to be an evidential, but not in fact.

V. THE OVERALL DISTRIBUTION OF THE EVIDENTIALS IN BOTH CORPORA

The frequency of evidentials in English corpus and Chinese corpus is calculated in this section. The different kinds of evidentials are firstly marked, and then the total numbers of evidentials are counted. Finally, the occurrence of evidential per 1000 words is calculated.

In order to have a reasonable and reliable contrastive study of the evidentiality in the corpora, the frequencies of evidentials of the same type are calculated respectively and compared in the standardized per thousand words. The following tables and figures show us the details.

TABLE V. DISTRIBUTION OF TYPES OF EVIDENTIALS IN THE CORPORA

Types of Evidentials	English Corpus (8878 words)		Chinese Corpus (22568 words)		Ratio ①/②
	Fre.(raw data)	① Fre.in 1,000	Fre.(raw data)	② Fre.(raw data)	
Sensory Evidentials	1	0.11	0	0.00	0
Inferring Evidentials	60	6.76	71	3.15	2.14
Reporting Evidentials	73	8.22	126	5.58	1.47
Belief Evidentials	8	0.90	1	0.044	20.45
Total Number	142	15.99	198	8.77	24.06

From the above "Table V", it can be summarized that the use of evidentials is in low frequency and lack of variety in both corpora. In English MA thesis abstracts, among the 30

articles, only 142 evidentials are adopted. And in Chinese MA thesis abstracts, among the 30 articles, only 193 evidentials are used. The frequency of all evidentials used in per 1,000 is 15.99 in English corpus and 8.77 in Chinese corpus.

Firstly, it is necessary to notice the low frequency of the use of evidentials in both corpora. High occurrence of zero-marked evidentials is one feature of MA thesis abstracts.. There are no evidentials in some sentences. If a clause is modified by no evidential, then it means that the proposition is cast in the zero-marked evidential, or according to Yang Linxiu, implicit evidentials. Such proposition is often regarded as factual. Why so many zero-marked evidentials occur in MA thesis abstracts? The following reasons may account for it. On the one hand, since some of the information in MA thesis abstracts is already known by the readers, the source of information can be left unspecified. Hu Zhuanglin (1995) claims that if a statement has been known as universal truth or common sense, and it is understood by the listener, the speaker could employ zero-marked evidential. On the other hand, the employment of zero-marked evidentials shows the writer's attitude toward the information. In the abstracts, the information is considered to be highly- objective. Thus the expressions of personal attitude, emotion or comments may be avoided to maximize the objectivity.

Secondly, it is summarized that the use of evidentials is lack of variety. Among the four types of evidentials, sensory evidentials and belief evidentials are seldom adopted. In English corpora, sensory evidentials only appear once and none in Chinese corpora. Just as Chafe (1986) finds in his study, the frequency of the occurrence of sensory and belief evidentials in academic written data is very low, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that belief evidentials only appear 8 times in the English corpus and 1 in the Chinese corpus. That's because sensory evidentials always indicate the information acquired is from the first-hand experience and belief evidentials mainly state the information acquired is from the writer's own belief, which violates the concise, factual and objective features of academic abstracts.

Thirdly, in both corpora, the reporting and inferring evidentials are most frequently adopted. In English corpus, among the total 142 evidentials, the reporting evidentials accounts for 51.40% and the inferring evidentials accounts for 42.25%. In Chinese corpus, among the total 193 evidentials, the percentage of reporting evidentials is 65.38% and the inferring evidentials accounts for 36.79%. From these statistics, it is also shown that both of the American MA students and Chinese students MA students make most use of reporting evidentials in their MA thesis abstracts.

The frequencies of the three types of evidentials in both corpora tell us some similarities and differences in the use of evidentiality between the two groups of scholars. In the following, it is necessary to carry out researches on the distribution of the four evidential types in English and Chinese MA thesis abstracts.

The statistics indicates that the Chinese MA students make use of almost 1.5 times as many reporting evidentials as that of the American MA students. Reporting evidentials are further classified into the self-reporting, specific other-reporting and unspecific other-reporting evidentials. The further examination on the use of those subtypes of reporting evidentials is needed. Based on the following tables and figures, the use of reporting evidentials would be discussed ("Table VI"):

TABLE VI. DISTRIBUTION OF SUPPORTING EVIDENTIALS IN THE ENGLISH AND CHINESE CORPUS

Reporting Evidentials	English Corpus (8878 words)		Chinese Corpus (22568 words)		Ratio ①/②
	Fre.(raw data)	① Fre.in 1,000	Fre.(raw data)	② Fre.(raw data)	
Self-reporting Evidentials	65	7.32	112	4.96	1.47
Specific Evidentials	4	0.45	12	0.53	0.85
Unspecific Evidentials	4	0.45	2	0.09	5

First, according to the statistics, it can be seen that Chinese students prefer to use the self-supporting evidentials, the frequency in per 1,000 words is as twice as that in English MA thesis abstracts. They mostly use 'this research concludes' to indicate the source of information. For the different types of realizations, American MA students also prefer to the self-reporting evidentials, and they mostly use 'this thesis shows/presents/ indicates.....' to clearly indicate the source of information. Among all the verbs, *suggest*, *indicate*, *present*, *show*, *reveal*, are most frequently used. Different verbs are chosen by the writer to show his or her evaluation of or commitment towards the information presented. Some verbs are factive, e.g. *find*, *show* and *reveal*, while some are tentative, e.g. *suggest* and *argue*.

Second, compared with self-reporting evidentials, specific other-reporting type is seldom used, since in abstracts, the detailed information is often avoided to show the factual and objective nature. For the specific other-reporting type, it can be seen that (according to+ author) is a typical and conventional way to report the information. The typical nouns are fact, finding, and argument. Similar to verbs, by choosing different nouns, the writer expresses different evaluations.

Third, in Chinese MA thesis abstracts, the adoption of unspecific other-reporting evidentials only accounts for 0.17 per 1,000 words, which is much less than that in corresponding English texts.

It can be seen that in Chinese MA thesis abstracts, to avoid the fussy and unnecessary words, such as 'in summary...' are usually avoided to achieve the concise nature of the abstracts.

Third, the distribution of the inferring evidentials is listed as the following "Table VII".

TABLE VII. DISTRIBUTION OF INFERRING EVIDENTIALS IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE MA THESIS ABSTRACTS

Types of Evidentials	English Corpus (8878 words)		Chinese Corpus (22568 words)		Ratio ① / ②
	Fre.(raw data)	① Fre.in 1,000	Fre.(raw data)	② Fre.(raw data)	
Inferring Evidentials	60	6.76	71	3.15	2.14
Total Number	142	15.99	198	8.77	24.06
Inferring/ Total	42.25%	42.27%	35.86%	35.92%	-----

From the statistics, the use of inferring evidential in both corpora can be summarized as the following:

Firstly, it can be seen that in both corpora, among the four types, the frequency of inferring evidential accounts for the second, which is next to supporting evidential. In English corpus, the adoption of the inferring evidentials is about 42.25% and in Chinese corpus, it's about 35.86%.

Secondly, it is revealed that in English corpus, the adoption of the inferring evidentials is twice as much as that in Chinese corpus.

Thirdly, in Chinese corpus, it is hard to determine the degree of reliability since the Chinese MA students favors "will, can, may....." to indicate their epistemic judgment, which showed that for the evidentiality in Chinese, the types of realizations are really limited.

Fourthly, English corpus, it is found that modal verbs, such as *would, could, will, might*...are the typical inferring evidentials. Then follow relational process, adjectives and modal adjuncts. The study also shows that the writer favors the weaker forms of epistemic judgment, such as may, can, would and seem. The high-value modal forms, such as most, certainly, obviously and so on, are quite rare in the corpus.

Last, the distribution of the belief evidentials is presented.

Belief evidentials are not commonly used in both corpora, it is revealed by the statistics that in English corpus, only 8 belief evidentials are adopted and only 1 belief evidential is adopted in Chinese corpus. Belief evidential refers to the writer's beliefs in and the opinions towards the information. Look at the following example:

I argue that a justifiable theory of secession, containing extensive requirements, can be developed into a right to secede. (English Corpus, Text 19)

The belief evidential is adopted to show that the information is totally from the writer's own view. By doing so, the writers are totally responsible for the truth value of the statements, allowing alternative opinions from others and thus protecting them from negative criticism.

In fact, in belief evidential type, the writer has the choice between objectivity and subjectivity. For example, he can choose to use the more subjective ways *I argue* or the relatively objective forms *It is argued*. The latter can be categorized into other-reporting evidential. The statistics reveals that the writer tries to keep to the objectivity of the

abstracts. Therefore, it is revealed that in MA thesis abstracts, the less use of belief evidentials just shows that the writer tries to avoid taking full commitment and responsibility, and makes the writer more distanced from the information.

To sum up, to state clearly or unclearly about the source of information, and to show the writer's different degree of commitment for the information, the writers may adopt different types of evidentials.

VI. A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF THE ENGLISH CORPUS AND CHINESE CORPUS

From the statistics, it is found that the frequency and distribution of evidential types in English and Chinese journalistic texts are to some extent similar. However, differences are also found between them due to different language and culture. The following are the similarities and differences.

After the careful examination in the contrastive study, the similarities are summarized as follows.

First, the semantics of evidentiality is universal on both the two corpora, which shows the evidentiality is a persuasive linguistic phenomenon in English and Chinese MA thesis abstracts. In both the corpora, the writer adopts various evidential types and also different linguistic forms to show how he acquires the information and the writer's commitment to the factual status of the information.

Second, in both corpora, there is an unbalanced adoption among different evidential types in different sections of the abstracts. On the one hand, the most frequently used evidential are reporting and inferring evidential. Belief evidential and sensory evidential are less common in both corpora. On the other hand, it can be seen that in the Introduction and Methods part of the abstracts, the zero-marked evidential are found with the high occurrence. In the Results and Conclusion section of the abstracts, inferring and self-reporting evidential are frequently employed. Belief and sensory evidentials are only used in the Results and Conclusion part. It reveals the discourse features of MA thesis abstracts. It indicates that the nature and features of MA thesis abstracts will affect the writer's adoption of various evidential types.

Third, the linguistic realizations of the evidentiality bear the similar characteristics in both of the corpora. Verb forms are the most frequent realizations for the reporting evidentials. In inferring, the modal verbs *could, might, would, will*, which shoes the relatively lower degree of the certainty for the information, are mostly used. The modal verbs *should, can, must* are less employed.

Fourth, evidentiality can be considered as a discourse strategy to achieve the interpersonal functions. It can indicate the information and persuade the readers. And evidentiality is taken as an evaluative device to reveal the certainty and reliability of the information. The employment of the different evidentials can help to establish and manipulate the relationships between the writers and readers in academic communication.

In sum, the similarities in evidential use show the universality of semantics of evidentiality in MA thesis abstracts.

After the careful examination in the contrastive study, the differences are summarized as follows.

First, it is noticed that the average length of abstracts in the two corpora differs. The abstracts in the Chinese are relatively longer than abstracts in the English corpus. The average number of the sentences in each abstract is 20.94 and 8.27 in the two corpora. Chinese MA students tend to use more sentences to claim centrality, and to show that they have performed overall and comprehensive research. They may use more words to review previous research and indicate a gap in the previous study. They hope to use the longer, relatively overall information to arouse the readers.

Second, American MA students are more inclined to use evidentials. For the frequency of evidential use, American MA students adopt as twice evidentials as that in Chinese MA thesis abstracts. In many sentences of the Chinese MA thesis abstracts, no evidentials are found.

Third, for the distribution of the different evidential, American MA students are more inclined to adopt various types, while Chinese students only take their priority for the self-reporting evidential, then the inferring. Compared with the American MA students, the Chinese writer has fewer choices in the varieties of evidential realizations. They always show neutral stance towards the reported information.

Fourth, according to the statistics, American MA students prefer to adopt the inferring evidentials while Chinese MA students more frequently adopt the self-reporting evidentials.

Fifth, for the same type of evidential, the choice for the different sub-types is different for American and Chinese MA students. As mentioned above, in the choice of inferring evidential type, the writer tends to choose low value of modality to show degrees of certainty, thus it can lessen the writer's responsibility for the truth and factual condition of the information. However, our examination has shown that the Chinese writer relatively tend to use higher degree of certainty more often than American students. The forms such as, "be sure to" appear more often than *will*, *must* in the English corpus.

This paper have discussed the similarities and differences of the evidentiality in English and Chinese MA thesis abstracts, now the underlying causes need to be explored.

First, whether it is English or Chinese, as a persuasive phenomenon, evidentiality bears its same nature, classification and functions since it belongs to a semantic category in the broader view.

For the differences, the following causes can be found:

First, the mode of thinking differs. The differences in modes of thinking in the cultures of the western world and China may lead to the different distributions in the use of evidentiality. The mode of thinking in western world is generally thought to be Western Rationality (Liar, 2006) and has been greatly influenced and based on deductive thought

pattern characteristic of Aristotelian logic, in which one of the characteristics emphasized is inferring and analyzing. Thus, in academic writing, the westerners are more inclined to prove the validity of a piece of new knowledge in processes of logical reasoning and inferring. So they adopt more inferring evidential to realize the interpersonal function of the academic articles, which indicates that the new information they state is mainly acquired through their reasoning and inferring. Different from the American MA students, the Chinese scholars make more frequent use of self-reporting evidential than inferring evidentials. Chinese mode of thinking in China is regarded to be not so dependent on inferring to reach new information. People are accustomed to induce and conclude from the facts or experiences. It can account for the result that Chinese depend more on self-reporting evidentials than the inferring evidentials.

Second, the understanding of the interpersonal function that evidential in MA thesis abstracts might play is different between the American students and the Chinese students. The use of the inferring evidential in a large number by the American students makes the information more reasonable, logical and consequently persuasive. The frequent use of self-reporting evidentials by the Chinese students makes their propositions more reliable.

Third, the types of realizations for the different evidential types in Chinese are lack of variety. For example, in Chinese, only one word "将" can be understood as *will*, *shall*, *would*, *even could* in English. So it is no wonder the Chinese MA thesis abstracts are lack of variety in the choice of evidential forms.

VII. CONCLUSION

As a linguistic phenomenon which has aroused more and more interest among linguists, the study of evidentiality is still in its infancy and many aspects are waiting to be explored in more detail. The current research complements the previous studies by widening evidential studies to MA thesis abstracts and makes a contrastive study for evidentiality in English and Chinese.

Based on the tool of Wordsmith 5.0 and the careful manual work, data analyses are conducted. It has the following findings.

First, through the observation and data-coding of the corpus, the study presents the classification of evidentiality in MA thesis abstracts. It divides evidentials into implicit and explicit types. Implicit types, or called zero-marked evidential can also achieve its functions, which are also considered in the study. Explicit types are classified into reporting, inferring, sensory and belief evidentials.

Second, the quantitative analyses show that in both the corpora, different evidentials are adopted. However, the distribution and frequencies of different evidential types are unbalanced. Reporting and inferring evidentials are more frequently adopted than belief and sensory evidentials. This result shows the writer mainly acquires knowledge by reporting and inferring and they rarely acquire knowledge by

sensory channel and by belief. It presents the typical way of knowledge construction in research article articles.

Third, in every evidential type, the lexical realizations are not adopted in a balanced way. This is much related to the interpersonal functions of evidentiality. In inferring evidential type, it is found that the evidentials denoting lower degrees of certainty are more often used than the one denoting the higher degrees of certainty. For the reporting evidential, the self-reporting verbal forms, *the study suggest*, *the data shows...* are frequently used, which will make the writer distanced from the information and the writer will take less responsibility.

Fourth, the discourse features of the MA thesis abstracts are analyzed. The choice of the evidentials clearly reflects the objective, highly-reliable and concise features of the abstracts.

Fifth, the similarities and differences of the evidentiality in the two languages are elaborated. The similarities are the following: First, the semantics of evidentiality is universal on both the two corpora. Second, in both corpora, there is an unbalanced adoption among different evidential types in different sections of the abstracts. Third, the linguistic realizations of the evidentiality bear the similar characteristics in both of the corpora. Fourth, evidentiality can be considered as a discourse strategy to achieve the interpersonal functions. And there are also some differences. First, the average length of abstracts in the two corpora differs. Second, American MA students are more inclined to use evidentials. Third, for the distribution of the different evidential, American MA students are more inclined to adopt various types. Fourth, in the same types of evidential, the choice for the different sub-types is different for American and Chinese MA students.

Last, the potential causes are illustrated. First, the mode of thinking differs. Second, the understanding of the interpersonal function that evidential in MA thesis abstracts might play is different. Third, the types of realizations for the different evidential types in Chinese are lack of variety.

Through the contrastive study on evidentiality in English and Chinese MA thesis, this paper shows some theoretical implications as well as practical value.

Theoretically, since evidentials can be found in both English and Chinese data with some similarities, it proves that the semantic meanings of evidentiality between different languages are similar in some aspects. The analysis of factors influencing the choice of evidentials may shed light on the nature and functions of evidentiality. The study also suggests that the evidential analysis can be used as an important and effective means for discourse analysis. It is a supplement to studying evidentiality at discourse and genre level and from the interpersonal perspectives.

Practically, it provides the postgraduates some references about the choice of evidentials in their thesis. It is hoped that the research will shed light on the future research in this regard and also will be helpful to RA writers, readers, students and teachers of English in China.

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