

Metalanguage in Chinese Master Theses: Focus on Engagement Markers

ESSE16 Abstract

“The study of stance and how academic writers convey an attitude to their material and readers has become an important area of teaching research in EAP in recent years” (Hyland & Guinda, 2012). In academic writing, evaluative language is used to convey ideas, negotiate meanings, take a stance and (dis-)agree with others. When engaging in a dialogue with the reader, assessments can be explicitly or implicitly conveyed and consequently influence the reader. This study investigates rhetorical and semantic features of Chinese student writings and aims at analyzing their attitude and engagement with the reader. The findings will be compared to the ones of German student papers. The basis for this comparative corpus analysis is provided by a corpus of 300 Chinese master theses written in English in the disciplines of Linguistics and Literature. The ChemCorpus, including theses written by German students in the same disciplines, is taken as a reference corpus. With this project, I am expanding the research of my master thesis. While I chose a new linguistic topic, the corpus that I have started compiling during my internship in China has been augmented. The student writings are analyzed by using Martin and White’s (2005) Appraisal Theory, a framework within Systemic Functional Linguistics, with a focus on the system of ENGAGEMENT. First results indicate that Chinese L2 students use significantly fewer instances of attitude markers such as *striking*, *disagree* and *preferred* while German students overuse them. Furthermore, both groups underuse engagement markers. A closer look shows that Chinese students rather expand (e.g. attribute, entertain) other studies and ideas whereas Germans use engagement markers more to contract (e.g. disclaim, proclaim) them. As hypothesized, Chinese students use more personal pronouns (*you*, *your*; inclusive *we*, *us*, *our*) to engage with the reader. Striking, however, are the numbers for *must* that are almost twice as high in the Chinese corpus.

Keywords: Chinese Student’s Writings, Appraisal Theory, Attitude, Engagement, Corpus-based Research