# *Metadiscourse in the Abstracts of Research Articles in Musicology: An English-Chinese Comparative Study*

**Yun Liu[a], Jing Chen[b,*]**

*School of International Studies, Hangzhou Normal University, Hangzhou, China*
*[a]liuyun0826@126.com, [b]jeanchan78@163.com*
*[*]Corresponding author*

*Keywords:* Metadiscourse; musicology; English-Chinese comparative study; Abstracts

*Abstract:* Metadiscourse is a kind of linguistic resource used to convey stance, guiding readers to interact with the text and realize its persuasive function. The present study has collected 240 RA abstracts in the field of musicology, with 120 from Chinese-medium journals and 120 from English-medium journals, aiming to discover the similarities and differences between the two cultural groups. The research results yield the following findings: 1) The English sub-corpus displays significantly more use of metadiscourse markers, both in the interactive and interactional dimensions. 2) English-medium authors use more interactional metadiscourse than interactive ones, while the Chinese-medium authors are the other way around. This study has pedagogical implications for the teaching and learning of academic writing of musicology in China.

## 1. Introduction

Metadiscourse, a term defined as "discourse about the discourse" [1], is derived from Halliday's three macro-functions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. As "each text is an integrated expression of these three kinds of meaning" [2], various grammatical and lexical elements, in other words, metadiscourse, can simultaneously perform at least one of these three functions.

Due to its importance, the study of metadiscourse has gained wide attention during the past decades. In academic register, scholars have discovered the metadiscourse features that are distinct in specific cultures [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]. However, these studies mainly focus on one particular genre of academic writing, like discussions [6]. Little existing cross-linguistic literature is concerned about the metadiscourse features in abstracts.

Metadiscourse is prone to carry disciplinary-situated identities. A number of studies have proved the disciplinary features of metadiscourse in specific discipline, such as applied linguistics [5], business management [3] and even architecture [7]. However, the metadiscourse analysis in some disciplines still remains scarce, such as the music discipline. Musicology has struggled to gain its "legitimate" position in academic research. As a matter of fact, scholars or doctoral students in musicology all have the desire to publish research articles in academic journals to promote their findings in music theories and achievements in empirical studies. There are also reputed journals in musicology to spread advanced knowledge from worldwide scholars. From this perspective, it is worthwhile to analyze the academic writings in musicology.

In this corpus-based study, we choose 240 RA abstracts from two heterogenous groups: Chinese and English L1 scholars. Based on Hyland's interpersonal model of metadiscourse [8], this study aims to provide a whole scenario of metadiscourse used by two cultural groups. All categories of metadiscourse in the two corpora are examined to compare the differences between Chinese and English RA abstracts in the discipline of musicology. The following questions will be answered in this research:

(1)What are the similarities and differences in the use of metadiscourse markers in RA abstracts of English- and Chinese-medium journals of musicology, especially in their distributions and functions?

(2)What could possibly be the factors that contribute to the different use of metadiscourse in these two cultural groups?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Description of the Corpora

This study consists of two self-built corpora: Corpus of Chinese Academic Abstracts (Corpus CAA) and Corpus of English Academic Abstracts (Corpus EAA). Each corpus contained 120 RA abstracts accompanying research articles published between 2016 to 2021.

There are 10 journals included in our database (5 are English-medium and 5 are Chinese-medium). The five English music journals are selected according to the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) with high rankings in musicology from Arts & Humanities Citation Index, i.e. *Music Theory Online*; *Journal of the American Musicological Society*; *Music Theory Spectrum*; *Twentieth-Century Music*; *Popular Music*. The five Chinese music journals are all top journals with high impact factors included in the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index, i.e. *Art of Music*; *Musicology in China*; *Chinese Music*; *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music*; *Journal of Wuhan Conservatory of Music*. The two corpora are comparable in nature, with the article equivalent in text genre, mode, discipline, author's L1 language and author's level of expertise, etc.

### 2.2. Analytical framework: Hyland's Interpersonal Model of Metadiscourse

The models of metadiscourse are mostly influenced by Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. In recent years, Hyland's [8] interpersonal model of metadiscourse is predominant in metadiscourse studies. He regards metadiscourse as a coherent set of interpersonal options and proposes that "metadiscourse is the cover term for the self-reflexive expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or) speaker to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community (ibid)". In Hyland's interpersonal model, there are two main functions of metadiscourse: interactive and interactional, within which there are a number of subcategories we have identified below.

The interactive dimension is "the writer's management of the information flow to steer readers through a text" [9]. Under this plane of metadiscourse, it covers five subcategories. They are transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials and code glosses. The interactional dimension can be simplified as "authorial interventions which personally engage with the content and readers" [9]. The subcategories of interactional metadiscourse are hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers. The classification of Chinese metadiscourse markers are annotated in light of the English original version.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Distribution of metadiscourse markers across the two corpora

There are 1024 metadiscourse markers in the English sub-corpus in total, with 460 interactive ones and 564 interactional ones, indicating the English L1 scholars use more interactional metadiscourse than interactive metadiscourse in general. As for the Chinese sub-corpus, there are 610 metadiscourse markers, 393 of them are interactive markers and 217 of them are interactional markers. Contrary to their counterparts, the Chinese scholars prefer to use more interactive metadiscourse than interactional ones. The Chi-square result ($\chi2=239.6$, $p<0.01$) indicates that there are significant differences in the overall distribution of metadiscourse in the two sub-corpora. This feature is similar with Mu et al.'s [5] finding that English sub-corpus employs generally more metadiscourse features. Furthermore, the statistical tests also prove that there are significant differences in the distribution of interactive ($\chi2=34.5$, $p<0.01$) and interactional ($\chi2=256$, $p<0.01$) metadiscourse markers across the two corpora. The English sub-corpus demonstrates a more frequent use of both interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers.

### 3.2. Comparison of metadiscourse markers across the two corpora

### 3.2.1. Interactive metadiscourse

According to our results, in the interactive dimension, there is no significant differences in the use of evidentials and code glosses between the two corpora. Both English and Chinese speakers use fewer evidentials than the other interactive metadiscourse in their abstracts. As for code glosses, even though Anglo-American and Chinese authors use it with the similar standard frequency, we have discovered significant differences in their preferred specific functions. A detailed analysis of transition markers, endophoric markers and frame markers will be given below.

Transition markers can help guide the readers through the text by establishing semantic relations between main clauses. They are usually conjunctions which link up the whole text. Since abstract is a condensed genre; writers need to use appropriate amounts of cohesive devices to make the text moves smoothly in limited space. The transition marker is the most frequently-used subtype in both the two sub-corpora (104 per 10000 words in Corpus EAA and 68 per 10000 words in Corpus CAA).

(1) In their most sophisticated forms, *however*, they provide a visual analysis of the music as it unfolds. (Corpus EAA)

In our data, the two cultural groups used transitions for different purposes. English authors prefer to use transition markers to express contrastive ideas. Their favourite transition resources are but, while, however to elicit the contrary opinions with regard to the previous information. Nevertheless, Chinese music researchers like to use the transitions to add new information and to make one sentence convey as much information as possible.

The second most frequent category is endophoric markers. These are used 51 per 10000 words by English L1 speakers of English and 37 per 10000 words by Chinese L1 speakers of Chinese. In the English sub-corpora, the use of endophoric markers is monotonous: they are only used to refer to the present text, such as *this article*, *this paper*, *this study*, etc. The English L1 speakers will use these phrases to limit the text domain and state the main purpose of their study. This special phenomenon is influenced by the specific genre we are analyzing. In Corpus CAA, 83.3% of the endophoric markers are used on the article level.

(2) Furthermore, *this article* presents a framework for autoethnographic study of hip- hop, signposting bridging points between scholarship and practice. (Corpus EAA)

Frame markers are usually components to mark the text boundaries, "including items used to sequence, to label next stages, to announce discourse goals, and to indicate topic shifts" [10]. The most obvious distinction between the two subgroups is that English speakers prefer to use the function of announcing goals more than Chinese speakers do. Furthermore, the frame markers will be occasionally used to shift topic in Chinese sub-corpus, which are unable to detect in English speakers' writings. Unlike Corpus EAA, the use of sequencers is predominant in Chinese sub-group.

### 3.2.2. Interactional metadiscourse

Among the interactional metadiscourse, hedge is the most used subtype in Corpus EAA (95 per 10000 words) while booster is used most in Corpus CAA (27 per 10000 words). In our data, the English and Chinese sub-corpora do not demonstrate significant differences in the use of boosters; but the L1 speakers of English employ more boosters on average (35 per 10000 words in Corpus EAA while 27 per 10000 in Corpus CAA). Besides, both the two groups favour using emphatics rather than amplifying adverbs. The statistical results show that there are significant differences in the use of hedges, self-mentions and engagement markers between the two cultural groups.

It is found that hedges and boosters are two types of interactional metadiscourse strategies that are commonly used in academic writing [11]. When examining the raw frequency of hedges in the whole corpus, the two cultural groups demonstrate significant differences. Both of the two groups favour using writer-oriented hedges. The English music scholars like using the writer-oriented hedge argue to present their propositions as opinions rather than facts. The combination of self-mentions plus writer-oriented hedges are common in English sub-corpus, for example *I argue*, *I suggest* to make their tone softer so that readers can better accept their ideas. Despite the fact that the writer-oriented hedges are used most by Chinese music scholars, they will make themselves more invisible in text, by using the phrases like *the article attempts to*.

(1) Although discussion of music's 'magic' has been characterized as a vestige of Romanticism, I ***argue*** that it became a cornerstone of ordinary/everyday music discourse circa 1900. (Corpus EAA)

Self-mentions are explicit author presence manifested by first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives. They carry evident authorial identity and positioning in text; so, many students are taught to shun the use of first person to make the article more objective (Hyland, 2005). Compared to the Chinese subgroup, the English subgroup has employed much more self-mentions. It is the second most-used subcategory in Corpus EAA but it is used least by Chinese authors. The standard frequency reveals that the number of self-mentions that English music scholars used are 14 times more than Chinese scholars. However, in Corpus CAA, the first-person pronoun *I* cannot be found.

(2) Ultimately, ***I*** demonstrate that the popular is a floating signifier with the potential to reference mutually opposing ideas. (Corpus EAA)

### 4. Conclusions

This corpus-based comparative study investigates the use of metadiscourse in RA abstracts of English- and Chinese- medium journals in musicology. The statistical results demonstrate that there are significant differences not only in the overall use of metadiscourse between the two sub-corpora but also in its two sub-dimensions. The English L1 use more interactive and interactional metadiscourse than their Chinese counterparts. Besides, the English sub-corpus uses more interactional metadiscourse than interactive metadiscourse while the Chinese sub-corpus is the other way around. The findings reported above shed lights on the teaching of English academic writing for both Chinese and English L1 speakers. As more Chinese music scholars endeavour to publish RAs in international journals, they should be aware of the different rhetorical traditions between

Chinese and English language.

The present study is a good attempt to explore the academic writing in musicology, the field which has rarely attracted the scholarly attention. It reinforces the idea that metadiscourse is linguistically distinctive and conditioned by the broad socio-cultural context, thus contributing to the research in intercultural rhetoric.

## Acknowledgement

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