

Abstract

The study of interactional metadiscourse has grown from both empirical and theoretical perspectives, including a focus on the functioning of engagement and stance in spoken discourse (e.g. Recski, 2005; Qin & Uccelli, 2019; Hyland & Zou, 2021). Certainty markers (CMs), a widespread type of interactional metadiscourse markers, are often regarded as a signal for confirming the points being made by the speaker. The present study sets out to investigate the distribution and linguistic features of four typical CMs (*actually, in fact, really, indeed*) in two varieties of English (L1 English and English as a lingua franca - ELF) and four salient equivalents L1 Mandarin CMs (*qíshí, shíjìshàng, zhēnde, quèshí*) within academic spoken genres from a contrastive linguistics perspective, including syntactic distributions, semantic patterns, prosodic patterns, and discourse functions. The analysis was based on a collection of 119 scientific talks distributed as follows: the L1 Mandarin corpus consists of 101,427 running words; Likewise, 115,606 running words of L1 English corpus were derived and 107,693 running words were extracted from the English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings Corpus. The eight specific CMs were retrieved and annotated independently by two coders with a computer-assisted software program. A rigorous analysis was conducted taking the metadiscursive function into account, and statistical tests were run to assess deviations between the languages concerned.

Preliminary results indicate the predominant presence and functional diversity of CMs in Anglophone cultures as compared with ELF and Mandarin Chinese. Despite the high similarity in semantic meanings of the eight CMs, they exhibit distinctive characteristics in terms of distribution and individual structure owing to the differences in linguistic and academic norms. English CMs are more frequently used on the left-edge position to exploit a variety of discourse purposes that are more or less remote from their core meaning, whereas Mandarin CMs are rather complex in terms of discourse correlations. For instance, the adverb *quèshí* is commonly found in either the concluding clause or the antecedent clause of a compound sentence. Changing the position of *shíjìshàng* induces subjectivization and lexicalization. As far as CMs are concerned, ELF represents a distinct variety from L1 English. An example is that ELF certainty expressions are used more sparingly than they are in L1 English despite being functionally similar. The findings contribute to disentangling the usage of CMs in spoken performances as a descriptive schema, but also are of potential interest to inform future speech training by adjusting and applying this kind of tactics in academic communication. Future research could be expanded to a more in-depth discussion of comparison and/or contrast within spoken and written registers.

Keywords: certainty markers, cross-linguistic comparison, L1 Mandarin, English, academic corpus

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