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Certainty Stance Adverbs in Chinese Linguistic Academic Writing: A Corpus-based Study

Natalia M. Dugalich¹  , Hao Han^{1,2} 

¹RUDN University, Moscow, Russian Federation

²Zhengzhou Business University, Gongyi, China

 dugalich-nm@rudn.ru

Abstract. This study delves into the intricate usage of certainty stance adverbs in the academic writings of the Chinese. The object of this study is to conduct a contrastive analysis of certainty stance adverbs between Chinese linguistic MA novices and linguistic experts. The subject of this study is to explore the similarities and differences in the use of these adverbs within the academic discourse of the two groups mentioned. In addressing these disparities, the study seeks to analyze them from the perspective of interlanguage and interpersonal function, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the production of high-quality academic papers by the Chinese. The study employs two key methods: the contrastive analysis method and the corpus-based method. The novelty of the study lies in its contrastive examination of certainty stance adverbs between Chinese linguistic MA novices and experts. Through an in-depth analysis of theoretical frameworks and linguistic data extracted from the MA theses of Chinese linguistic novices and research articles of linguistic experts, the study underscores the importance of considering the similarities and differences in the use of certainty stance adverbs within the realm of second language acquisition and pragmatic studies. This consideration aims to refine learners' syntactical and pragmatic command of certainty stance adverbs to align with expert academic discourse, ultimately fostering effective interpersonal communication in academic writing. The findings of this research offer valuable insights into the specific linguistic challenges encountered by the Chinese, thereby laying a solid groundwork for the development of targeted pedagogical strategies to bolster their academic writing skills.

Keywords: certainty stance adverbs, academic discourse, English L1, corpus-based study

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Наречия с семантикой уверенности в академическом письме китайцев-лингвистов: корпусное исследование

Н.М. Дугалич¹  , Хао Хань^{1,2} 

¹Российский университет дружбы народов, Москва, Российская Федерация

²Чжэнчжоуский университет бизнеса, Гонги, Китай

 dugalich-nm@rudn.ru

Аннотация. Исследование посвящено использованию наречий выражения уверенности в академических трудах китайских ученых, написанных на английском языке. Целью данного исследования является проведение сравнительного анализа употреблений наречий с семантикой уверенности в работах магистрантов-лингвистов и ученых-лингвистов, пишущих на английском языке. Предметом данного исследования является изучение сходств и различий в использовании наречий в академическом дискурсе рассматриваемыми группами. Исследование проводится в аспекте выражения личного мнения и ставит целью выработку рекомендаций для повышения качества научных работ на английском как иностранном. Используются два ключевых метода: метод контрастивного анализа и корпусный метод. Новизна предлагаемого исследования заключается в контрастном изучении наречий с семантикой уверенности в научных работах магистрантов-лингвистов и ученых-лингвистов, пишущих на английском языке. Результаты исследования выявляют сложности, с которыми сталкиваются изучающие английский язык китайцы, тем самым закладывая основу для разработки стратегий, направленных на укрепление их навыков академического письма на английском как иностранном. Результаты исследования могут быть применены в сопоставительных исследованиях и работах по методике обучения иностранному языку.

Ключевые слова: наречия с семантикой уверенности, академический дискурс, английский как иностранный, корпусное исследование

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Introduction

Stance is an important topic in academic discourse studies. Academic discourse aims to create professional knowledge and persuade readers to accept one's own views. One of its important features is argumentation, which relies on three elements: “ (1) the analysis and evaluation of content knowledge, (2) the writer's development of a position, and (3) the presentation of that position in a coherent manner” [1. P. 146]. These three elements are inseparable from the author's position, i.e. stance. Therefore, stance is an important feature of argumentation in academic discourse. In order to enhance the persuasiveness of academic writing, authors need to present the propositional information of relevant professional knowledge

and express their attitudes and evaluations of this information, establish their authorial identity appropriately, interact with potential readers, and persuade readers to accept their views. This requires authors to express their stance appropriately. However, research has found that stance expressions are difficult to master for learners in academic writing [2]. These stance expressions in English are diverse, and stance adverbs, especially certain stance adverbs, are one of the most common ways of expressing stance. Previous studies mainly macroscopically studied stance adverbs as a whole in academic discourse [3–9]. There have been relatively few micro-studies on certainty stance adverbs in the academic English writing of Chinese learners. This paper is going to analyze the usage characteristics of certainty stance adverbs in Chinese learners' academic English writing, examine the difficulties in learners' stance expressions, and provide references for academic English writing and teaching.

Theoretical background

Stance: definition and scope

The concept of stance was defined by D. Biber and E. Finegan [10. P. 1] who explained it as an “overt expression of an author’s or speaker’s attitudes, feelings, judgments, or commitment concerning the message”. D. Biber maintains that stance, as a linguistic manifestation, serves to convey how certain the speaker or writer is towards the veracity of information and also what perspective they take towards it [11]. Stance expressions play an important role in academic writing, conveying the writers’ viewpoints and enabling the reader to better understand the propositional message conveyed in the text.

Lexical and grammatical patterns for expressing stance are examined using a corpus-based approach, with a focus on academic written registers [12]. Stance is manifested linguistically through the use of verbs [13–15]; adverbials [10; 16–18], complement clause constructions [19], and metadiscourse features [15; 20].

In English, adverbs play a significant role in expressing various types of stance [16]. Epistemic stance adverbs are employed to indicate different degrees of certainty (e.g., *obviously*, *really*) and likelihood (e.g., *probably*, *possibly*, *maybe*). Attitude stance adverbs are used to convey the speaker’s attitude towards a proposition (e.g., *fortunately*, *surprisingly*), typically positioned at the beginning or end of a clause. Lastly, style stance adverbs convey the speaker’s manner of speaking (e.g., *sincerely*, *simply*).

Certainty stance adverbs

Stance adverbs are one of the main manifestations of stance expressions and can be divided into three categories: epistemic stance adverbs, attitude stance adverbs, and style stance adverbs. Certainty stance adverbs belong to the

epistemic category, expressing our affirmation of the propositional message and the validity of the propositional content of the text. They not only have semantic meaning but also interpersonal functions, conveying personal commitment and certainty about truth and value judgments [21]. The use of certainty stance adverbs in academic writing indicates the writer's clear and definite attitude, prompts the reader to understand the writer's viewpoint, facilitates the reader's accurate judgment of the propositional message of the academic discourse, and helps construct a harmonious relationship between the writer and the reader so that the reader is clearly aware of the certainty of the information he or she receives. The appropriate use of certainty stance adverbs in academic writing to express stance not only makes explicit the expressed viewpoint but also takes into account the reader's emotion, thus helping the reader to better understand the attitude conveyed in the discourse and thus resonate with the writer.

D. Biber [11] points out the semantic function of certainty stance adverbs in two aspects: true propositional information and personal attitude. In other words, the certainty stance adverbs in academic writing not only express the ideas clearly, and more importantly, reflects the apparent attitude of the writer in expressing his or her opinion. K. Hyland [21] also argues that sometimes one proposition has the dual (propositional and commentary) function. This suggests that when reading academic papers we must be aware that the content stated in academic writing not only conveys propositional information but also has evaluative meaning, as a result of the interactive process between the writer and the reader.

Most studies on certainty stance adverbs are based on genre analysis, exploring its usage characteristics from an interpersonal perspective [4; 5; 9]. The main research findings of them are concluded as follows: the distribution characteristics of certainty stance adverbs vary in different registers, genres, and disciplinary texts. They can express the author's judgments of proposition certainty or possibility, reflecting the function of intensifying or mitigating the tone. In academic discourse, they have interpersonal significance, expressing the author's attitude towards the proposition while also considering the reader's feelings and engaging in interactive negotiations on the topic. Learners face difficulties in stance expression in academic writing, especially in expressing proposition certainty.

Studies on Chinese learners' certainty stance adverbs in academic discourse indicate that learners use certainty stance adverbs less frequently and have insufficient vocabulary richness. They tend to directly express their stance towards the proposition in an authoritative tone [3; 8]. These studies on certainty stance adverbs in China are mainly based on Chinese English learners' argumentative corpus and native speakers' corpus. The method of interlanguage contrastive analysis is used to analyze certainty stance adverbs, and the results show similarities and differences in the characteristics of certainty stance adverbs' usage between learners and native speakers. Zhao Xiaolin [6] pointed out that the main differences are that learners' use of certainty stance adverbs is concentrated

on a few items, lacking diversity; they tend to appear in sentence-initial position and lack flexibility in syntactic position; they use the implicit stance expression of certainty stance adverbs less frequently; and they use relatively simple collocation sequences that indicate logical relationships between propositions. There are relatively few studies on the use of certainty stance adverbs in academic English writing by Chinese learners. Pan Fan [7], based on a corpus of Chinese and foreign mechanical engineering journal articles, found that Chinese authors used certainty stance adverbs less frequently overall and tended to be colloquial in their choice of vocabulary and sentence structure, and have insufficient understanding of the interpersonal significance of academic discourse, which affects the recognition and acceptance of their papers in the international academic community. These studies indicate that appropriately using certainty stance adverbs to express the author's stance is challenging for Chinese learners due to the diversity of form and semantics and the complexity of syntax. Proper stance expression, especially certainty stance adverbs, in academic writing can construct the evaluative and interactive nature of discourse, indicate the author's attitude and position towards the proposition, involve readers in discourse, guide readers to make judgments and think critically, and help achieve the purpose of academic communication. Comparing the features of certainty stance adverbs usage between Chinese learners' academic English writing and English papers published in authoritative international journals in the same field can reveal the stance expression skills that learners have mastered and the difficulties they face. This study examines the usage characteristics and difficulties of certainty stance adverbs in Chinese learners' academic writing by comparing their corpora with the corpus of English papers published in authoritative international journals.

This study seeks answer to the following question: what specific syntactical and pragmatic characteristics do Chinese linguistic MA novices and linguistic experts do exhibit when using high-frequency certainty stance adverbs in their academic writing?

Research methodology

Data sets

The data for this study consists of two electronic corpora of written texts (Table 1). The learner corpus of 50 Chinese students' MA theses (CLMA_C) in applied linguistics is from 36 Chinese universities. The reference corpus of 100 published international journal research articles (ILJA_C) in applied linguistics is from the following six influential international journals, namely, *Applied Linguistics* (SJR:2.72), *TESOL Quarterly* (SJR:1.78), *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics* (SJR:0.49), *English for Specific Purpose* (SJR:1.36), *Journal of Pragmatics* (SJR:0.93), and *Journal of Second Language Writing* (SJR:1.83). The reason why we choose applied linguistics as the target academic discipline is that we can collect enough data on Chinese learners' English writing, which will make the contrastive

study more reliable. The whole papers are used, but they exclude the front page, the Chinese Abstract, the list of tables/figures, the table of contents, and the appendix.

Table 1

Information of ILJA_C and CLMA_C

Corpora	Size	Number of texts
CLMA_C	804.935	50
ILJA_C	802.490	100

Source: authors' study

Method of analysis

To investigate certainty stance adverbs and their interpersonal function, this study conducted quantitative (corpus-based analysis) and qualitative analyses (interlanguage and discourse analysis).

Quantitative analysis in this study together with manual contextual analysis focused on all instances of certainty stance adverbs in both corpora. In order to calculate and analyze these instances, WordSmith 5.0 will be used. WordSmith 5.0 [24] is a software program designed for text analysis in corpus linguistics. It provides tools for analyzing language patterns, concordance, and collocation in a given body of text or corpus. WordSmith 5.0 is used for two different tasks in this study. The first task is to generate concordance lines involving certainty stance adverbs in both corpora. The frequency distribution of certainty stance adverbs can be obtained in this process. The second is to sort concordance lines to determine their functions in the discourses. Then, comparisons are made, in terms of structure and function, in order to find out the features of the learners' usage of certainty stance adverbs.

Log-likelihood and Chi-square Calculator 1.0 is a software tool developed by Liang Maocheng [25]. It is designed to calculate log-likelihood and chi-square statistics for linguistic analysis, particularly in corpus linguistics and language studies. These statistical measures are commonly used to determine the significance of word co-occurrences and associations within a given corpus. In this study, Log-likelihood and Chi-square Calculator 1.0 [25] is used to make comparisons between the occurrences of certainty stance adverbs used by Chinese MA learners and those by international experts. In the following parts, 0.05 is set as the statistically significant p-value. If the p-value is less than 0.05, we can conclude that the results are statistically significant. Instead, if the p-value is larger than 0.05, it will indicate that there is no significant difference between two research data.

A qualitative analysis was performed in order to make explicit the results of the quantitative analysis. The research subjects refer to the category of K. Hyland & J.C. Milton [2], T. McEnery & N.A. Kifle [5], and Xu [22] and identified a total of 17

certainty stance adverbs based on D. Biber, et al.'s [16] semantic classification of the lexical items listed in the academic discourse: “absolutely, actually, admittedly, basically, certainly, clearly, definitely, fundamentally, genuinely, in fact, indeed, inherently naturally obviously, ostensibly, of course, really”. The integration of qualitative and quantitative methods can facilitate more explanatory findings. The quantitative analysis identified the frequency of occurrence of certainty stance adverbs in both corpora. The results of the analysis of the frequency of occurrence of certainty stance adverbs in both corpora were used as the basis for interlanguage and discourse analysis on Chinese EFL writers’ engagement in writer-reader interaction and manifest their interpersonal function.

Analysis and discussion

Frequency features

We examined each subject in both corpora, manually removing the usage of adverbs that did not indicate certainty stance, and obtained frequency information and normalized frequencies for each certainty stance adverbs with the following results.

As is shown in Table 2, learners are able to use these certainty stance adverbs in their academic writing. Although the use of certainty stance adverbs is diverse, the lexical items of them are only dependent on several choices. In terms of overall usage, the standardized frequency of using certainty stance adverbs in learner theses is lower than in international journal articles, and there was a significant difference between the two corpora ($p=.00<.05$). Concerning word frequency, learners and experts differed in the order of high frequency despite the fact that the top 10 most frequent certainty stance adverbs were roughly the same. This suggests that learners basically realize the category of the certainty stance adverbs, while some of them are not yet sufficiently mastered. This finding verifies the studies of K. Hyland & J.C. Milton [2] and Xu Hongliang [22]. Eight of the top ten certainty stance adverbs have differences, among which “clearly” and “really” have significant differences ($0.01<p<0.05$); “actually, obviously, in fact, of course, indeed, certainly” have extremely significant differences ($p< 0.01$). The top five certainty stance adverbs appearing in high frequency in the theses of learners were: “actually, clearly, obviously, in fact, really”, while the top five adverbs appearing in high frequency in the articles of international journals were: “clearly, in fact, actually, indeed, really”. The consistency of four out of the five frequently occurring certainty stance adverbs indicates that learners are able to use them in their writing to express their confidence in propositional content. The test of variance shows that the frequencies of the five certainty stance adverbs appearing at high frequencies in learners’ theses differ from those in international journal articles ($p<0.05$), learners rely more on “actually” to express deterministic stances and use it more frequently than experts ($p<0.05$), but underuse “clearly” and “in fact”. When

expressing a truthfulness stance, learners used “actually” with high frequency (29.07 per 100,000 words) while experts tended to use “in fact” and “clearly” (21.81 and 24.92 per 100,000 words, respectively). The statistics show that learners use “in fact” less than experts ($p < 0.05$); Below, we will analyze the usage characteristics of high-frequency certainty stance adverbs.

Table 2

Frequency statistics of certainty stance adverbs in ILJA_C and CLMA_C

Certainty stance adverbs	CLMA_C		ILJA_C		Chi-square	Significance (p)
	RF	SF	RF	SF		
<i>actually</i>	234	29.07	160	19.94	13.31	0.000*
<i>clearly</i>	156	19.38	200	24.92	-5.33	0.021
<i>obviously</i>	87	10.81	41	5.11	15.68	0.000*
<i>in fact</i>	65	8.08	175	21.81	-49.84	0.000*
<i>really</i>	64	7.95	93	11.59	-5.08	0.024
<i>of course</i>	41	5.09	73	9.10	-8.53	0.004*
<i>indeed</i>	40	4.97	149	18.57	-62.05	0.000*
<i>naturally</i>	38	4.72	41	5.11	-0.06	0.811
<i>basically</i>	21	2.61	16	1.99	0.42	0.517
<i>certainly</i>	19	2.36	42	5.23	-8.00	0.005*
<i>definitely</i>	18	2.24	11	1.37	1.223	0.269
<i>absolutely</i>	11	1.37	2	0.25	4.899	0.027
<i>inherently</i>	10	1.24	13	1.62	-0.180	0.671
<i>fundamentally</i>	4	0.50	13	1.62	-0.789	0.052
<i>admittedly</i>	2	0.25	3	0.37	-0.000	0.997
<i>ostensibly</i>	1	0.12	9	1.12	-4.921	0.027
<i>genuinely</i>	0	0	1	0.13	-0.000	0.999
Total	811	100.75	1042	129.85	-29.286	0.000

Note: “RF” stands for “raw frequency”; “SF” stands for “standardized frequency (per 10, 0000)”; “-” stands for less use; “**” indicates significant discrepancy ($p < 0.01$).

Source: authors’ study

Usage characteristics of high-frequency certainty stance adverbs

This section scrutinizes the utilization of five high-frequency certainty stance adverbs, namely “*actually, really, in fact, clearly, obviously*”, across two corpora. Additionally, this section investigates the challenges faced by learners in using these adverbs.

Actually

The adverb “*actually*” was found to frequently collocate with mental verbs by both learners and experts, with a frequency of approximately 39 % and 73 %, respectively. The usage of mental verbs among learners was found to be limited in diversity. Furthermore, the mental verbs followed by experts were predominantly utilized in the passive voice, including verbs such as “used” and “indicated”.

- 1) ...*the linguistic resources they had known at a receptive level were **actually used** to achieve a goal in a real-life situation (ILJA_C);*
- 2) *In some cases, this heterogeneity has a reason because quite different objects of study are **actually indicated** under the same label of “keyword” (ILJA_C).*

These results align with the findings of D. Biber [16]. The verb collocations utilized by learners predominantly employed the active voice, including verbs such as “reflect” and “indicate”.

- 3) *According to this metaphor, some linguistic expressions **actually reflect** the distinction between setting and participants (CLMA_C);*
- 4) *...this sentence **actually indicates** a specific moving relationship for trajector and landmark (CLMA_C).*

This indicates that the learners have not yet mastered the syntactical usage of “*actually*”. The study also found that learners used “*actually speaking*” as a parenthetical expression, while the experts did not use it at all.

- 5) ***Actually speaking**, many expressions and explanations are complicated... (CLMA_C).*

Moreover, we found that learners tend to use the adverb “*actually*” at the beginning of sentences to emphasize the certainty of facts or propositional information, whereas this usage is less common in the writing of experts. In academic discourse the use of “*actually*” usually shows a contrast with the preceding statement or presupposition. For example:

- 6) *... and the resulting adjustments to form occurred more often in unfamiliar tasks, but feedback was **actually used** more often in familiar tasks, which led to modifications in learner output (ILJA_C);*
- 7) *Thus, though Hispanic markers **actually** come from different backgrounds, they are bound together through the display of knowledge about a “Latino lifestyle” (ILJA_C).*

Both (6) and (7) are taken from ILJA_C, and the use of “*actually*” shows a contrasting semantic relationship at one level of the contextual propositional viewpoint (i.e. “unfamiliar tasks” VS “familiar tasks” in (6); “different backgrounds” VS “are bound together” in (7)).

However, observations of learners’ concordance lines revealed that some learners may not be fully aware of this. For example:

- 8) *So the first purpose is to give a general review of related studies on motivation both at home and abroad. **Actually** various motivation theories have been*

proposed by different researchers and we had better have a clear idea about this content (CLMA_C);

- 9) *A second area of linguistic research has been into language features of blurbs. **Actually**, a large amount of studies have focused on the linguistic choices offered by authors of blurbs (CLMA_C).*

Examples (8) and (9) are selected from the CLMA_C, the observation that the context around “actually” in Chinese English learners’ academic writings does not appear to show contrastive relationships, but rather expresses an emphatic or progressive relationship, may be due to differences in language use and cultural influences. In Chinese language and culture, the use of words like “事实上/实际上 (‘actually’)” may be more commonly employed to emphasize or highlight a point, rather than to indicate contrast. For example:

- 10) *实际上，定量研究方法可以提供大量的数据支持，但它可能无法深入了解个体的细节情况。 (‘Actually, quantitative research methods can provide a lot of data support, but they may not be able to understand the details of individuals in depth’).*

In this example, the author used “实际上” to introduce a fact and point out the strengths and limitations of quantitative research methods. The context here is that the author wants to emphasize the data support advantage of quantitative research methods, but also wants to indicate its limitations in understanding individuals in depth.

Therefore, Chinese English learners may transfer this usage pattern into their English writing, resulting in a different interpretation than expected.

Really

The adverb “*really*” is frequently employed to emphasize factual or value-truth judgments, particularly in relation to controversial propositions. Writers often use “*really*” to express their genuine judgments and to provide support for their opinions within the discourse. Noun phrases collocate with “*really*” for learners accounting for 27 % and experts for 8 %. The nouns phrases used by experts were mostly concrete people or things, such as “a native speaker, a visual ideology, etc.”, while the nouns phrases used by the learners were more Abstract, such as “distinction, long history, etc.” The underlying cause for this phenomenon among Chinese MA students could be attributed to their continued manifestation of learner characteristics, which include a lack of conscious proficiency in utilizing the specialized terminology inherent to their respective academic disciplines, unlike experienced writers. For example:

- 11) *Who should it be who decides whether an undocumented applicant for political asylum is **really a native speaker of the language** he or she claims ? (ILJA_C);*
- 12) *In order to interrogate how racial bodies are socially constructed and how they can be changed, I draw on Stoler ‘s observation that race is not **really a visual ideology** at all (ILJA_C);*

13) *Is there **really such distinction** between the function of ‘demand’ and ‘offer’ to convey interactive meanings?* (CLMA_C);

14) *The metaphor research has a **really long history**, from the traditional theories...* (CLMA_C).

Besides, experts do not use “in really speaking” as a parenthetical expression and the use of *really* is not followed by a prepositional phrase while learners frequently use such, e.g.:

15) *... a day dreamer. (Text 7) Example 32: **In really speaking**, all success...* (CLMA_C);

16) *... there is no such a fixed collocation — **in really speaking** in English. 4.2.5. The...* (CLMA_C);

17) *... across our country know what’s **really at stake**, that we will...* (CLMA_C);

18) *There are some misuses of the simple DM very as well as DMs like almost and **really in the students’ writings**.* (CLMA_C).

In academic English, it is uncommon for “*really*” to be directly followed by a prepositional phrase. “*Really*” is typically used as an adverb to emphasize or confirm the truthfulness or degree of a statement. However, in specific contexts “*really*” can be followed by a prepositional phrase to convey a particular meaning. This usage is relatively rare and not commonly found in formal academic writing. Therefore, in most cases, we would not encounter the use of “*really*” directly followed by a prepositional phrase in academic English.

The above shows that although learners are more familiar with the usage of “*really*” in daily conversation, they still have difficulties in academic discourse compared with experts. Learners should try to avoid features that are not frequently found in experts’ writing when using it to express a certainty stance in academic writing.

Clearly

In terms of collocational features, there are notable distinctions between experts and learners in their usage of the adverb “*clearly*” in academic writing, particularly when stating study results. Firstly, learners frequently employ “*clearly*” in conjunction with the pronoun “it”, a pattern that is infrequently observed among experts. This discrepancy may be attributed to the influence of “semantic consistency” [23. P. 56] influenced by the learners’ L1 background. Conversely, experts tend to precede “*clearly*” with specific nouns such as “the figure” or “the table”, indicating a distinct result derived from a table or figure in an academic paper. This usage is deemed more conducive to academic readership. However, learners often lack awareness of this academic convention, suggesting an incomplete mastery in interpersonal function of “*clearly*” in academic writing. It is possible that learners, in their eagerness to have their own opinions acknowledged when drawing conclusions, exhibit a tendency to forcefully impose their viewpoints on readers. For example:

- 19) *It also shows **clearly** about what kinds of words appear frequently in government documents (CLMA_C);*
- 20) *The **figures clearly** show that the differences between Danish and English lectures are not due to a few haphazard instances in our sets of lectures (ILJA_C);*
- 21) *A **number of tables clearly** lay out parallels under such headings as Variability, Variable processes, and Internal constraints on variable units, before going on to address social constraints particular to Deaf communities, and research methods employed in sociolinguistic research on sign languages (ILJA_C).*

As is evident from the aforementioned discussion, the use of “*clearly*” in conjunction with specific figures or tables serves to indicate a high level of clarity and precision in conveying meanings. This practice facilitates reader-writer interaction and demonstrates the writers’ commitment to the statistical results of the study. By employing this collocational pattern, writers make it easier for readers to engage with the information presented and comprehend the significance of the findings.

Conclusions

The examination of high-frequency certainty stance adverbs, specifically “*actually*”, “*really*”, and “*clearly*”, across the ILJA_C and CLMA_C corpora reveals discernible patterns between learners and experts in academic writing.

The analysis of “*actually*” usage indicates that learners tend to favor active voice verbs, in contrast to experts who predominantly utilize passive voice verbs. The frequent use of “*actually speaking*” as a parenthetical expression by learners, absent in expert writing, suggests a potential transfer of usage patterns from the Chinese language. This highlights the need for learners to refine their syntactical mastery of “*actually*” to align with expert academic discourse.

Regarding to “*really*”, learners often employ it to emphasize factual judgments using more Abstract noun phrases, diverging from the concrete phrases preferred by experts. Learners’ tendency to follow “*really*” with prepositional phrases, less common in academic English, underscores the importance of heightened awareness. Similarly, in the case of “*clearly*”, learners often pair it with the pronoun “*it*”, in contrast to experts who prefer specific nouns like “*the figure*” or “*the table*”. This deviation suggests a potential lack of awareness among learners regarding the academic convention of enhancing clarity and precision through specific figure or table references.

This study highlights the importance of learners understanding syntactical nuances and contextual appropriateness when using high-frequency certainty stance adverbs. Aligning writing styles with expert academic discourse conventions is recommended to improve academic communication effectiveness and overall writing proficiency. Further research and pedagogical interventions can explore these distinctions, offering valuable insights into language learners’ academic writing development. Additionally, this study provides evidence in the interlanguage

of Chinese EFL learners, which is insightful for second language acquisition and comparative linguistics, contributing to relevant theoretical verifications and development.

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Information about the authors:

Natalia M. Dugalich, PhD in Philology, Associate Professor at the Foreign languages department, Faculty of Philology; Head of Foreign languages department, Institute of Medicine, RUDN University (6, Miklukho-Maklaya str., Moscow, Russian Federation, 117198); *Research interests*: polycode text, political cartoon, discourse studies of the Arabic, French and English language; *e-mail*: dugalich-nm@rudn.ru

ORCID: 0000-0003-1863-2754, Researcher ID K-8404-2017; Scopus Author ID: 57194526936.

Hao Han, PhD student at the Foreign languages department, Faculty of Philology, RUDN University (6, Miklukho-Maklaya str., Moscow, Russian Federation, 117198); Lecturer at School of Foreign Languages, Zhengzhou Business University (136, Zijing Road, Gongyi City China, 451200); *Research interests*: discourse studies of the English and Chinese language, academic discourse; *e-mail*: 1042218192@rudn.ru

ORCID: 0009-0004-3832-6660.

Сведения об авторах:

Дугалич Наталья Михайловна, кандидат филологических наук, доцент кафедры иностранных языков филологического факультет, заведующий кафедрой иностранных языков медицинского института, Российский университет дружбы народов (117198, Российская Федерация, г. Москва, ул. Миклухо-Маклая, 6); *сфера научных интересов*: поликодовый текст, политическая карикатура, дискурсивные исследования арабского, французского и английского языка; *e-mail*: dugalich-nm@rudn.ru

ORCID: 0000-0003-1863-2754, Researcher ID K-8404-2017; Scopus Author ID: 57194526936.

Хань Хао, аспирант кафедры иностранных языков филологического факультета, Российский университет дружбы народов (117198, Российская Федерация, г. Москва, ул. Миклухо-Маклая, 6); преподаватель школы иностранных языков, Чжэнчжоуский университет бизнеса (451200, Китай, г. Гонги, Цзыцзин шоссе, 136); *сфера научных интересов*: дискурсивные исследования английского и китайского языков, академический дискурс; *e-mail*: 1042218192@rudn.ru

ORCID: 0009-0004-3832-6660.