A Contrastive Analysis on Abstracts of Research Papers in Chinese and English Journals

This research paper presents a contrastive analysis of English abstracts authored by native English speakers and Chinese scientists, with the aim of identifying and understanding the linguistic variations that exist between the two groups. The study is particularly relevant for Chinese graduate students who are developing their skills in English academic writing. The abstracts, categorized into four main sections—Introduction, Method, Results, and Conclusion—were examined for various linguistic features, including verb tense, passive voice usage, modal verbs, first-person pronouns, and section length. A total of 80 abstracts were selected, with 40 being 'authentic English abstracts' (Ea) written by native speakers and 40 'translated abstracts' (Ta) originally written in Chinese. The study employed Bhatia's model for structuring the data collection, utilizing colors to differentiate between the sections. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS, revealing significant differences in the frequency of moves within each section between Ea and Ta. Notably, Chinese writers were found to use a higher frequency of the present simple tense across all sections, particularly in the Introduction, and a lower frequency of the passive voice compared to native English writers. These findings suggest that Chinese scientists may not be fully attuned to the nuances of tense usage and the functional roles they serve in academic writing. The paper also discusses the potential influence of the writers' first language, Chinese, which is meaning-centered rather than form-centered, on their English writing. This linguistic characteristic could contribute to the observed differences in tense usage and passive voice frequency. The study concludes that there is a need for educational materials that provide concrete data and examples to help Chinese graduate students better understand the linguistic differences in academic writing between English and Chinese. It also suggests that further research is necessary to explore the reasons behind these linguistic preferences and to develop effective teaching strategies.

Keywords: Academic Writing, Linguistic Variations, English Abstracts, Chinese Scientists, Native English Speakers