This study conducts a contrastive analysis of abstracts in English and Chinese academic journals, aiming to identify and understand the linguistic and structural differences that often occur in abstracts written by native English speakers and Chinese scientists. The primary goal is to assist Chinese graduate students in enhancing their English academic writing skills by shedding light on common discrepancies in abstract composition.

The methodology involved a random selection of abstracts across 20 diverse fields, categorizing them into authentic English abstracts (Ea), translated abstracts (Ta), and original Chinese abstracts (Ca). A total of 80 abstracts were analyzed, segmented into four sections—introduction, method, result, and conclusion—based on Bhatia’s model. The study focused on linguistic aspects such as verb tense, passive voice usage, modal verbs, first-person pronouns, and section length.

Results indicated that Chinese writers tend to be more verbose in the introduction section and often misplaced content meant for the conclusion. A significant difference in verb tense usage between Ea and Ta was observed, with Chinese abstracts showing a less nuanced understanding of tense functions. The study also highlighted a marked preference for the passive voice in Ea compared to Ta, potentially due to negative transfer from Chinese writing habits or differing concepts about event agency.

The conclusion emphasizes the necessity for well-prepared course materials with concrete data to help graduate students grasp the intricacies of academic writing in English. It also suggests that further research is needed to delve deeper into the reasons behind these linguistic preferences and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural and cognitive factors influencing abstract writing in English and Chinese contexts.

Keywords: Academic Writing, Contrastive Analysis, English Abstracts, Chinese Abstracts, Linguistic Features, Structural Differences