This study aims to help Chinese graduate students improve the quality of their academic writing through comparative analysis on abstracts of research papers in Chinese and English journals. The Bhatia’s(1993) model, SPSS(Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and the Chisquare test are adopted, and 80 authentic English abstracts are selected for a contrastive analysis. The abstracts are from 20 different fields in theoretical and applied natural sciences, social sciences, medical science, and economy and for each field two English abstracts(Ea) by native speakers, and two of similar theme or topic translated from Chinese to English were chosen (Ta), along with the original Chinese abstracts (Ca). The results show that Chinese writers tend to express more in the introduction section than their own method, result, and conclusion moves and, more than those in the introduction written by foreign writers. The distribution of verb tenses (including model verbs) in the abstracts of Ta and Ea also indicates that Chinese writers are not thoroughly aware of the subtle meaning of tenses and the functions they play although the writers understand some grammatical rules. A factor is that Chinese is meaning-centered rather than formcentered. And in the frequency of passive verbs, more passive verbs were used in Ea than in Ta. One reason is negative transfer and another possible reason may be the different concepts about the doer of an event. The conclusion is carefully prepared course material with sufficiently concrete data can help graduate students to understand the differences between the two languages in academic writing and have a deeper insight into the subtle meaning that the English texts reveal.

Keywords: contrastive analysis, academic abstracts, verb tenses, passive verbs, linguistic features