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A comparative study of China English and Singapore English: the case of grammatical metaphor in academic discourse

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Only a few attempts have been made on comparisons between the indigenized varieties and foreign-speaker varieties of English. Surprisingly, for instance, there has been scarcely any comparative study on Singapore English and China English. This study aims to develop a framework allowing for the investigation of the indigenized varieties and learner varieties of English. Considering the situatedness of linguistic behavior, I propose that data from the same genre may be suitable for contrastive analyses of both varieties. The genre of academic discourse is selected for investigation, with the focus on grammatical metaphor (GM). The notion GM is brought in where the variation is essentially in the grammatical forms. My investigation involves qualitative analysis of GM identified in academic texts, their corresponding distribution between Singapore English and China English corpora, as well as discussion of their stylistic effects and the underlying generic and sociocultural conventions. The study finds relatively less GM in Singapore English texts than their Chinese counterparts within the academic genre. Chinese academic texts tend to exhibit a higher degree of technicality and compactness than the Singaporean counterpart, which could be explained in terms of the interaction between generic and sociocultural conventions.

Keywords: China English; Singapore English; academic discourse; grammatical metaphor

1. Introduction

The trend in the use of the English language is that it is used to a much larger extent as a non-native language than a native language. Its earlier development has been rightfully captured by Kachru's (1985) conceptualization of World Englishes. Inner circle varieties are influential English as a native languages (ENLs) which are norm providing. The outer circle comprises English as second languages (ESLs) which have their own spoken norms but tend to rely on the inner circle for models of formal written English. The expanding circle comprises EFLs (English as a foreign language) which have not developed internal norms and accordingly rely on external norms (Mesthrie and Bhatt 2008, 35). With rapid growth of English learners in the expanding circle and the widening and deepening use of English in the outer circle, curiosity and interest amount whether these landscapes remain the reality, especially the indigenized and learner Englishes.

Either indigenous Englishes or foreign-language Englishes have been extensively described and studied (cf. Kortmann and Schneider 2004, 2008; Mesthrie and Bhatt

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2008; Jenkins 2003). Only very few attempts have been made on comparisons between the indigenized varieties and foreign-speaker varieties of English, except for Davydova's (2012) contrastive analysis of India English and Russia English in spoken mode. Singapore English and China English fall into the well-established dichotomy between "outer circle" and "expanding circle" Englishes. In other words, Singapore English is an indigenous language with a wide range of official uses, spoken in addition to the respective native languages; while China English is used in China where English is traditionally treated as a foreign language. There has been scarcely any comparative study on Singapore English and China English despite the vigorous study on each separately.

The current case study intends as an exploration in response to a broader research question: How can we make systemic comparisons across indigenized and learner varieties of English for robust generalizations? Davydova's (2012) comparative study classifies data into acrolectal, mesolectal, and basilectal forms of English, but this approach faces two problems in generalization. One is that this classification could hardly apply to written texts; the other, major learner varieties of English, such as China English, have not been differentiated into acrolect, mesolect, and basilect. As a result, the current study attempts to develop an alternative framework allowing for the comparative investigation of the indigenized varieties and learner varieties of English, with Singapore English and China English as a case in point.

Singapore English is located in the institutional L2 setting, where the L2 is widely used in a number of domains and institutions. The speakers there acquire the L2 for communicating with speakers of the other languages in the society and for official purposes in various institutions of government and education. The colloquial variety or L-form functions in social contexts that orientate toward friendliness, rapport, and solidarity (Gupta 1994a, 1994b), while the H-form, on the other hand, is used in formal and literary domains, namely, what Bao and Hong (2006) term as "register variation." "China English" is defined by Wang (1991, 3) as "the English used by the Chinese People in China, being based on Standard English and having Chinese characteristics." It is a performance variety of English used usually not in the domestic society but for international communication purposes, especially at the political, economic, cultural, and scientific levels.

Both indigenized varieties and learner varieties of English are themselves "highly variable systems marked by orderly heterogeneity" (Davydova 2012), which raises the question of how to ensure consistent comparison across the two groups. This study intends to bring the notion of genre into the picture as an alternative framework of comparison. Considering the inherent heterogeneity of second language systems and situatedness of linguistic behavior, I propose that data from the same genre may be suitable for comparative studies of both varieties.

The ensuing parts are organized as follows. First, conceptual background is provided for the comparison of Singapore English and China English as an indigenous language and a foreign language, respectively. Then the principal data sources for the study are described, followed by a brief description of grammatical metaphor (GM) as the tool for stylistic investigation. After comparing GM use in these two subcorpora of Singaporean academic English and Chinese academic English, the analysis is then rounded off with theoretical implications entailed by such comparisons across outer and expanding circles of World Englishes.

2.   Theoretical framework

This section provides the conceptual background around genre, which is proposed as an alternative framework allowing for the comparative investigation of the indigenized varieties and learner varieties of English.

There are three research traditions where genre scholarship has been most fully developed. These three approaches are ESP, Australian systemic functional linguistics, and North American New Rhetoric studies. New Rhetoric research entails a body of North American scholarship from a variety of disciplines concerned with L1 teaching, including rhetoric, composition studies, and professional writing (Hyon 1996, 695). Researchers in ESP have been interested in genre as an instance of "situated linguistic behavior in institutionalized, academic, professional, or other social settings" requiring an appropriate response to a specific set of communicative goals (Bhatia 2009, 386). In Australian systemic functional linguistics (henceforth referred to as SFL), Martin and his colleagues, reflecting Halliday's concern for linking form, function, and social context, have defined genres as the social practices with field, tenor, and mode configured together as patterns of meaning (Martin and Rose 2014, 20).

The current study adopts Martin (1999) and Martin and Rose's (2014) model of genre at the stratum of culture, where it could function as a pattern of field, tenor, and mode configuration. More broadly, language in social context is remodeled as an integrated semiotic system, in which "situation" and "culture" have been reconstrued as social semiotic strata – register and genre (Martin and Rose 2014, 16). Stratifying register and genre in this way has allowed us to cut across register variables. Stratification is also distinctive within language itself in SFL. In this stratified model of language, as suggested by Halliday (2004a), lexicogrammar can realize discourse semantics directly or metaphorically. In other words, there is an inter-stratal tension. The kind in which there are two meanings involved, one lexicogrammatical and the other discourse semantic, with grammar realizing semantics indirectly is referred to as GMs, with "variation in the expression of meaning" as metaphor (Halliday [1985] 1994, 320).

SFL stands out with respect to the emphasis it places on interpreting language as organized around three metafunctions – the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. The descriptions of meaning derived from SFL, in turn, informs its genre model.

Generally speaking, differences in social experience will produce differences in access to the genre systems that have evolved in a culture. According to Martin and Rose (2014), ideology differentially shapes our coding orientations through our socialization in daily life and education systems.

Zooming onto the specific theme of GM, there is a substantial interest in how GM fulfills the needs of a given context, situated inside the larger concern of systemic functional linguists with the social construction of language through genre and register. Ravelli (1985) found that GM is very much at the heart of written language, particularly the discourses of scientific and academic reasoning. Halliday (2004b, 87) has postulated two distinct metafunctional environments for GM: one is creating reasoned argument through managing the information flow of the discourse (textual); the other is creating ordered taxonomies of abstract technical constructs (ideational). The importance of ideational GMs, particularly nominalization, has been attached to their role in the organization of knowledge in scientific and technical disciplines.

Moreover, in Halliday's view, all linguistic choices are stylistic. The following is an illustration from him:

(1a) the goal of evolution is to optimize the mutual adaption of species

(1b) species evolve in order to adapt to each other as well as possible

Halliday (2004b, 103) calls the sophisticated, "scientific" variant such as (1a) the "Attic" style and the naïve, everyday variant such as (1b) the "Doric" style. Between the Doric and the Attic variants, the lexical items do not vary; what varies is their grammatical status. Grammatical metaphor is brought in where the variation is essentially in the grammatical forms. Grammatical metaphor is a substitution of one grammatical class, or one grammatical structure, by another. In other words, it is what turns *resist* into *resistance, can* into *possible*, and *so* into *cause* (Halliday 2009, 358).

Recent studies expand the theoretical understandings of GM used in either second or foreign language learning contexts. On the one hand, (Schleppegrell 2004) analyzes the role of GM in technical writing of English as second language learners. Xiong and Liu's (2005) quantitative study explores the ontogenetic status quo of adult second language learner for the acquisition of the ability to use GMs in second language production. A conclusion is drawn that GM deploying capabilities mature with the second language proficiency. On the other hand, Liardét (2013) examines a cross-sectional sampling of Chinese EFL learners' deployment of GM, a key linguistic resource for achieving academic discourse. His study identified the disparity between GM's potential as a semiotic resource to construe academically valued meanings and its unrealized potential in the actual texts written by the Chinese learners of English.

How is GM used in indigenous Englishes in contrast to foreign-language Englishes in academic contexts? This question has not been explored, partly because linguistic researches on world Englishes primarily concerned with presenting the most salient features of the varieties under investigation. Nevertheless, in agreement with You (2008, 234), I consider it beneficial for the World Englishes enterprise to cease to focus exclusively on salient variety characteristics in lexicon, syntax, and discourse and start to examine indigenous Englishes or foreign-language Englishes as they are "used in particular contexts and for particular audiences." In this way we may unveil a wider scope for World Englishes research potential. To achieve this goal, genre and style can be brought in as an alternative framework to explore the subtle variations among different varieties. As an exploration, this study chooses the academic genre to make a comparison between Singapore English and China English, with focus on GM, which constitutes a significant aspect of the stylistic characteristics of the text.

3. Methodology

Grammatical metaphor is used as the apparatus to analyze the style of China English and Singapore English academic texts. This study mainly addresses the following related questions: what is the extent of GM use in Singaporean academic discourses as compared with that of Chinese academic discourses? How does this contribute to stylistic variation within the same genre?

The data source for Singapore English is the international corpus of English (ICE), Singaporean printed academic writing subcorpus. However, there is a problem with the comparable data source for China English. On the first thought, it seems the international corpus of learner English (ICLE) would be a perfect match, but it turns out that the genre controlled in ICLE for written corpus is essay, nontechnical argumentative essay, which is also the case with written English corpus of Chinese learners (WECCL). Thus, a comparable corpus of China English is built for this project. Following the design of the ICE

corpus, ten texts are taken from each of the following subject areas: humanities, social science, natural science, and technologies. Academic writing is produced by specialists for specialists; for example, in the humanities, it includes journal articles by education scholars written for other education scholars. In other words, journal articles written by Chinese scholars in the same subject areas as those of ICE are taken to make up the China English printed academic writing subcorpus.

Based on Halliday (1996) and Liu (2007, 117), GMs are grouped according to their realization forms into four categories: nominalization, verbalization, adjectivization, and prepositionalization. First, a nominal group/phrase may be derived either from an adjective encoding a quality, or from a verb encoding a process, or a prepositional phrase encoding a circumstance, or from a relator encoding the paratactic or hypotactic relations, such as *instability* from *unstable, transformation* from *transform, accompaniment* from *with*, and *condition* from *if*; all these are nominalization. Second, adjectivization refers to the transference from a verb encoding a process, from a conjunction encoding the paratactic or hypotactic relations, or from an adverb encoding a circumstance into an adjective phrase representing a quality, such as *increase* into *increasing, then* into *subsequent, hastily* into *hasty*. Third, Verbalization refers to the semantic transference in which nonprocess is taken as process, which is lexicogrammatically realized by the substitution of a verb phrase for a nonverbal group/phrase, such as *follow* for *then*. Last, prepositionalization refers to the transference in which the paratactic or hypotactic relation congruently encoded by a conjunction is realized metaphorically as a circumstance encoded by a prepositional phrase, such as *when* into *in times of*.

It is also important to note that GMs tend to occur in syndromes, that is, clusters of interrelated transformations. While a cluster of metaphors is clearly functioning in association, "there is no single controlling type and each one could in principle occur alone" (Halliday 2004a, 80). For example,

(2) A good example of a slowly *spreading* crack is often *found* in the windshield of an automobile.
(3) Fire *intensity* has a profound effect on smoke *injection*.

It is evident from these examples that instances of adjectivization, verbalization, and nominalization (e.g., *spreading, found, intensity,* and *injection*) can occur somewhat independently. Therefore, categorization into nominalization, verbalization, adjectivization, and prepositionalization is justifiable, though it should be acknowledged that they are often closely related and the syndromes constitute the syntagmatic dimension of GM.

This categorization forms the criteria for the identification of GM, in which each of the realization forms corresponds to certain types in Halliday's (2004b, 41–42) typology of GMs, as shown in Table 1.

The types of GM, which involve the junction of category meanings, are identified according to the above criteria. Realization forms of nominalization, adjectivization, verbalization, and prepositionalization are manually tagged as <GN>, <GA>, <GV>, and <GP>, respectively, in the texts. Then the two subcorpora of Singaporean academic English and Chinese academic English are processed by Wordsmith 4 for frequency and instances of GM usage. In the analysis of GM instances, the metaphorical realization is analyzed by unpacking it into a congruent agnate form, which is "the most straightforward coding of the meaning selected" (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 658), and comparing its structure to the congruent one in order to reveal different stylistic effects.

Table 1. Criteria of identification of GM.

Realization forms	Corresponding types	Corresponding lexicogrammatical expressions
Nominalization	1. quality →entity	adjective → noun
	2. process →entity	verb →noun
	3. circumstances →entity	preposition →noun
	4. relator →entity	conjunction →noun
	11. [zero] →entity	[zero] →noun
Adjectivization	5. process →quality	verb →adjective
	6. circumstance →quality	adverb/prep. phrase →adjective
	7. relator →quality	conjunction →adjective
	13. head → modifier	noun → adjective
Verbalization	8. circumstance →process	be/go + preposition →verb
	9. relator →process	conjunction →verb
	12. [zero] →process	[zero] →verb
Prepositionalization	10. relator →circumstance	Conjunction→ prep. /-al group

4. Findings and discussion

Based on the coding of the two subcorpora, all four categories of GM realization forms are found in both Singapore and China English within the academic genre. The analysis of GM instances cited from the present data will be grouped under nominalization, adjectivization, verbalization, and prepositionalization, respectively.

4.1. Nominalization

Both Singaporean and Chinese academic texts abound in nominalized expressions. According to Halliday ([1985] 1994, 352), nominalization is "the single most powerful resource for creating grammatical metaphor." The following examples are from both subcorpora, paired with their congruent agnate forms:

(4a) The *proliferation* of short and long courses in management studies has not only made difficult the *choice* of a right course by students, but also *the task of* distinguishing a unique course by administrators and teachers. <ICE-SIN: W2A-002#4:1>

(4b) As short and long courses in management studies *increase rapidly*, it has become difficult for students to *choose* a right course and for administrators and teachers to distinguish a unique course. (Congruent)

(5a) The *addition* of polypropylene fibers to the concrete matrix extends fatigue crack *initiation* and prolongs the fatigue crack *propagation*. <CLE-CHN: W2A-032#7:1>

(5b) When polypropylene fibers *are added* to the concrete matrix, it remains intact longer before fatigue cracks *initiate* and *spread*. (Congruent)

As the above examples show, there have been movements from verbs designating process to nouns designating entity: e.g., *increase rapidly* into *proliferation*, *initiate* into *initiation*, and *spread* to *propagation*. Besides, adding "the task of" is also a way to realize the construal of entity.

Some occurrences of the terms, like *fatigue crack initiation* and *fatigue crack propagation* in Example (3a) from China English subcorpora, have a technical status. They are systemic constructs, created for the long-term requirements of certain theory. In a different fashion, some of the wordings like *the proliferation of short and long courses* and *the task of distinguishing a unique course* are instantial constructs, created for the immediate requirement of the discourse. They are not technical terms. Thus, there seem to be two factors at work toward nominalization, one is managing the information flow of the discourse, and the other is creating ordered taxonomies of abstract technical constructs. In the latter case, such as *fatigue crack initiation* and *fatigue crack propagation*, more information is also attached to the head noun by utilizing premodifiers. In this way, the technicality of the texts is built up, with a hierarchy of taxonomies, and the logic of texts is enhanced by the closely knit information flow of the discourse as well.

4.2. *Adjectivization*

Instances of adjectivization, though not as many as nominalization, are also abundant, for example:

(6a) Using cross-national data, Newton and Norris tested three *competitive* explanations <CLE-CHN: W2A-012#11:1>

(6b) Using cross-national data, Newton and Norris tested three explanations *which compete with each other*. (Congruent)

(7a) The Making of the *One-Party Dominant* System Observers of Singapore's political life have described the political party system in slightly different ways. <ICE-SIN: W2A-013#10:1>

(7b) Those who observe the making of the system *in which One-Party dominates* in Singapore's political life have described the political party system in slightly different ways. (Congruent)

In these examples, the attributive clause "which compete with each other" is transferred to adjective "competitive" functioning as Epithet to "explanations"; similarly "in which One-Party dominates" is transferred to "One-Party Dominant,*"* profiling quality of the "System" as classifying adjective phrase. It is clear that adjectivization makes the texts, such as (4a) and (5a), compact and concise, increasing their lexical density, in contrast to their congruent counterparts like (4b) and (5b).

4.3. *Verbalization*

There are obviously fewer cases of verbalization, and the following are examples noted from the two subcorpora, paired with their congruent agnate forms:

(8a) PSTT may be *preceded* by pregnancy or hydatidiform mole. <ICE-SIN: W2A-030#14:1>

(8b) *Before* PSTT occurs, the patient may be pregnant or pregnant with hydatidiform mole. <Congruent>

(9a) Adjustments made to the denominator would *result in* a score of 33%. <CLE-CHN: W2A-002#49:1>

(9b) *If* we adjusted the denominator, we would obtain a score of 33%. <Congruent>

In the above examples, "before" and "if" functioning as conjunctives are transferred to verb "precede" and verbal group "resulted in." It can be observed that the metaphorical modes of expression in (6a) and (7a) have the effect of being formal and impersonal as compared with their congruent counterparts (6b) and (7b).

4.4. Prepositionalization

Instances of prepositionalization are even fewer, and the following are some examples from the two subcorpora, paired with their congruent agnate forms:

(10a) Ample evidence has proven that H_2O_2 plays an important role in plants *under severe environmental conditions* <CLE-CHN: W2A-021#2:1>

(10b) Ample evidence has proven that H_2O_2 plays an important role in plants *where the environment is severe*. (Congruent)

(11a) Between 15 and 20% require a repeat curettage *because of plateauing hCG, bleeding or subinvolution* <ICE-SIN: W2A-030#38:1>

(11b) Between 15 and 20% request a repeat curettage *either because the patients bleed, or because their hCG levels out or their uterus does not return fully to normal size.* (Congruent)

In these examples, "where" and "because" functioning as conjunctives are transferred to prepositional group "under...conditions" and "because of ... ." It is evident that prepositionalization increases the formality of the texts, (4a) and (5a), for example, in contrast to their congruent counterparts like (4 b) and (5 b).

To sum up, four categories of nominalization, adjectivization, verbalization, and prepositionalization are found in both Singapore and China English within the academic genre, and they have the stylistic effect of rendering the texts more technical, logical, compact, formal, and impersonal. Grammatical metaphor features in both Singapore and China academic texts, more or less in accordance with the generic conventions of academic discourse, with GM at the heart of the discourses of scientific and academic reasoning.

4.5. Extent of using GM

Following Yang (2008), the extent of using GM in texts is indicated by the proportion of total instances of GM over the number of clauses in chosen texts. Five texts of each four subject areas, 20 texts in total, are randomly selected from each subcorpora, respectively, for manual tagging of GM types; and the first 50 clauses of each text, altogether 1000 clauses, are tagged with GM types to ensure comparability. To show the general extent of using GM in Singapore English and China English, this study measures the ratio of the total number of GM instances to the total number of clauses in the texts involved. The results of this measure are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.   The general extent of using GM in Singapore and China English texts.

	Total number of GM instances	Total number of clauses	Ratio of GM instances to clause number
Singapore English	1419	1000	1.42
China English	1654	1000	1.65

Table 3. The extent of using major types of GM in Singapore and China English.

GM categories	Singapore English		China English	
	GM number	GM/clause	GM number	GM/clause
Nominalization	754	0.75	895	0.90
Adjectivization	563	0.56	571	0.57
Verbalization	58	0.06	111	0.11
Prepositionalization	44	0.04	77	0.08
Total	1419	1.42	1654	1.65

As shown in Table 2, the Singapore English texts taken from ICE Singapore have a lower degree of GM than their China English counterparts. This result could be surprising to scholars of second language acquisition. Historically, Singapore is a former British colony. English is a widely used language for multiracial Singaporeans, and is the medium of instruction in Singapore schools from Year 1, whereas English is less widely used in China and is a subject rather than the medium of instruction. As GM deploying capabilities is believed to mature with the second language proficiency (Xiong and Liu 2005), why is the extent of GM use in Singaporean academic discourses lower than that of China academic discourses?

This study further compares the deployment of various GM categories in the texts. The extent of using a GM category is illustrated by the ratio of GM instances in the category to the total number of clauses. The results of the calculation are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3 shows that academic texts of Singapore and China English differ most in the deployment of nominalization. The GM instances in nominalization are used considerably more frequently in China English texts than in Singapore English texts. This suggests that the quantitative differences in nominalization largely account for the varied extents of using GM in China English and Singapore English.

Nominalization, the primary category of GM, is typical of academic English. Articles written for specialists typically display a considerably denser concentration of GM, especially nominalization. This nominalizing, however, also engenders prestige and becomes a language of hierarchy, privileging the expert and limiting access to specialized domain of cultural experience. Nominalizations tend to leave information about the configurational relations unexpressed, as a result of which they contribute to a language that is obscure and elitist, only accessible to the expert. Nominalizations therefore also have ideological consequences.

In general, the SFL studies of scientific or academic English mainly take field and mode (variables of register) into consideration, with their focus on GM used in the written language of science. The other variable of register, tenor, which is the dimension concerned with relationship between interactants, has not been paid enough attention. My discussion will show that differences in the tenor variable could partly explain the variation in the use of nominalization between Singapore English and China English in academic discourse. As for Singapore English, speakers negotiate between the global and the local in relation to constructs such as identity and culture where fluidity and flux of movement rather than constancy of clear boundaries is usual and expected. The degree to which features of the global or the local varieties is focused on depends on the degree to which speakers wish to signal the related values or practices: from formality, authority, and distance to the framing and positioning of community identity (Alsagoff 2010, 341). In agreement with Alsagoff's (2010, 344) model of variation that is fluid, while the

speakers may decide to orientate toward "Standard" or "International" English to indicate formality and authority, they might also indicate a local perspective which is associated with informality, familiarity, equality, membership in a community. Academic writing is produced by specialists for specialists. Here Singapore English is used for official purposes in various institutions of academy and education. As Singapore is a city state with a small population, it is likely that their academic discourse community is a close one. In other words, local discourse community constitutes a large part of their academic readership. Therefore, it is possible and even expected that degrees of informality and equality are acceptable in their academic discourse. Nominalization is associated with formality, authority prestige, and its relatively lower occurrence in Singaporean academic discourse can be explained by the close and somewhat equal relationship between academic writers and readers, and its sociocultural landscape of global and local blending.

China English is still a different story. When Chinese scholars write in English for academic purposes, usually the target is the international readership, as there are very few English academic journals within China. In general, their writing will conform to the convention of English in academic settings. In order to get published internationally in English, which is very hard, Chinese writers need to meet the requirements and/or expectations of the international journal editors, reviewers, and readers, in which Anglo-Saxon academic culture is closely intertwined with the norms of inner circle English. Since English articles written for specialists typically display a considerably denser concentration of GM, especially nominalization, Chinese academic writers have no other choice but follow the suit. As a result, there are more instances of nominalization in China English in contrast to its Singoperean counterparts.

Singapore English, on the contrary, does not reflect exclusively Anglo values, including its values in rhetoric (Wong 2005, 242). It allows for the construction and expression of Singapore's own conceptual and experiential realities: the Singaporean identity. It tends to develop its own local characteristics, even within the confines of the academic genre.

When compared with findings in other studies of various types of GM in English as native language (cf. Yang 2008), Singapore English, China English, and ENL form a cline in the use of GM. Among the three, the extent of using GM is the lowest in Singapore English, and China English tends to come closer to ENL in terms of GM deployment. It is true that both varieties tend to rely on the inner circle for models of formal written English, but they are different in their degree of reliance on the native English norm, as my investigation shows.

Besides the tenor factor, writing is also a cultural object that is heavily influenced by the educational system within which a writer has been socialized (Moreno, 1997). In China, American and British English are still given the highest ratings as Standard English. Standard native-speaker English has the orthodox status in China and serves as a powerful norm, whereas Singaporeans could be more tolerant and even proud of their revelation of identity in language use. Chinese English teachers tend to have little tolerance on Chinese characteristics of students' writings. The somewhat long and predominant exposure to written ENL materials in Chinese English learners' sociocognitive world also plays a part, as GM is preferred in formal, written English instead of colloquial spoken English.

In short, China English, not Singapore English, tends to come closer to ENL in terms of GM deployment and formality. This could be explained in terms of the influence of tenor variable involved in the academic genre, the different educational systems, and the degree of reliance of learner Englishes and indigenized English on the native English norm.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that besides attention to the salient features of these non-native varieties, it is also legitimate to conduct finer-grained studies as they are used in particular contexts and for particular audiences just as we do with standard varieties of English. They function no less in various contexts of social life, including academic study and communication. They involve systemic variation, which deserves systemic investigation, with constraining factors such as genre, which functions as a pattern of field, tenor and mode configuration, taken into consideration. In this project, relatively less frequent nominalization has been found in Singapore English texts than their Chinese counterparts within the academic genre. Chinese academic texts tend to be more formal and technical than Singaporean academic texts. What can be implicated from this study is that varieties of outer and expanding circles are actually quite comparable if we choose a relevant variable such as genre, and their distinction is found to be fluid rather than clear-cut.

In addition to academic genre, learner Englishes and indigenized English can be explored along other genres. In this way we could have a clearer picture on how these varieties exactly vary and how variation is constrained under certain contexts. All these inquiries would offer immense opportunities for the contrastive/comparative study of the institutional and foreign-speaker forms of English.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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