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A small corpus-based study on argument strategies in English research papers by American and Chinese students: Writing from multiple sources

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This paper draws on a comparative analysis of research papers by Chinese and American university students in the humanities and social sciences to explore the argument strategies employed when synthesizing information from multiple sources. Based on the analytic framework from previous research, the analysis shows that papers written by the two groups are similar in terms of claim-making, argument support and citation; however, they differ in several subtle respects such as the degree of argumentativeness, strength of authority and means of positioning. The paper attempts to explain their respective features by referring to socio-cultural factors, writing strategies and textual variables.

Keywords: argument strategies; academic writing; American and Chinese students

Introduction

Academic writing in English is argumentative in nature and occupies a core position in higher education (Hyland, 2013). The argumentative essay is the most common genre that university students must learn to write, particularly in the arts, humanities and social sciences (Hewings, 2010). However, in many EFL contexts like China, students find it difficult to produce academic arguments in essays or papers (Bacha, 2010). Previous research in contrastive rhetoric has attributed this to L1 interferences, that is, the negative transfer which causes problems in writing in the foreign language (U. Connor, 1987; Kaplan, 1966). However, more recent studies have shown that with appropriate instruction, non-native English-speaking students can overcome these difficulties (Bacha, 2010; Neff-van Aertselaer, 2013).

One commonly used instructional approach is teaching the argumentative patterns, like Toulmin's argument structure (Bacha, 2010; Chandrasegaran, 2008; Neff-van Aertselaer, 2013). Yet, such organizational models may easily lead students to regard argumentation as having a fixed pattern (Yeh, 1998). Another approach is writing from or using multiple sources, which is perhaps one of the most important skills for success at university (Wette, 2010). Its importance is clearly reflected in recent literature, especially in the special issue of *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* dedicated to the topic (Shaw & Pecorari, 2013). Writing is communication with others over the written page or a social interaction (Bazerman, 2010; Hyland, 2005; Vygotsky, 1986) and involves selecting and using source materials as evidence to support arguments and judgments (Bazerman, 2010, p. 4). Thus, argumentative writing requires not only "the elaboration of schemata for the organization of arguments" but also "the maintenance of dialogic interaction with the intended audience" (Neff-van Aertselaer, 2013, p. 199).

However, most of the studies on writing from multiple sources are concerned with the content of teaching including summarizing, synthesizing and paraphrasing, but not the purpose of using the sources, for example, to support claims, to evaluate, or to argue. Therefore, issues such as plagiarism, text borrowing, and patch-writing (Li & Casanave, 2012; Shi, 2012) and assessment of student learning (Plakans & Gebril, 2013; Weigle & Parker, 2012) are major focuses, whereas argumentation based on readings, a skill needed by a large population of Chinese EFL learners, is not adequately addressed. The lack of focus in this area is common in EFL contexts (Bacha, 2010; Neff-van Aertselaer, 2013). The reasons vary but may include the use of inappropriate teaching materials or textbooks, courses not designed for academic writing specific to students' areas of study, and the washback effect on teaching and learning of international examinations like IELTS and TOEFL (Neff-van Aertselaer, 2013) which are believed to reflect students' knowledge of highly conventionalized formal features of academic writing in specific areas.

Given the importance of English academic writing for Chinese university students, it is necessary to first identify their problems or weaknesses and then explore appropriate ways of developing their ability to undertake effective academic argumentation. This can be achieved by comparing their academic writing with similar writing by native-English speaking university students. This paper reports on a comparative study on argument skills employed in writing from multiple sources by Chinese and American undergraduates in the humanities and social sciences. Previous research has shown that due to the disciplinary features, soft disciplines tend to be interpretive and thus more argumentative in nature (Hyland, 2013). This suggests the present study will contribute to a better understanding of student writing practice within a specific discourse community. To identify the argumentation strategies used by the students when writing from different sources, the paper attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the American and Chinese students differ when taking a position on an issue or topic?
2. How do they use different types of arguments to support their position?
3. How do they use source evidence in different ways in their papers?

Method

Research context

The study examines source-based academic writing by students from an American university and a Chinese university. In the American university, all undergraduates attend writing courses in their first year (*Writing 1*, *Writing 2*, and *Writing 50)*. These courses "introduce students to elements of writing in the university context (*Writing 1*), immerse them in study of and practice with writing in contexts inside and outside of the university (*Writing 2*), and provide experience with research processes and practices (*Writing 50*)" (http://www.writing.ucsb.edu/academics). *Writing 50* prepares students for writing longer research papers and developing strong research and synthesis skills.

The Chinese university is mainly a foreign language university where English writing is compulsory for students majoring in English Language and Literature in the School of English Studies. They are required to attend a series of writing courses including *Basic*, *Intermediate*, *Advanced* and *Thesis Writing*. The first two focus on

general English writing (like *Writing 1* in the American university). In *Advanced Writing*, the students study and practice with expectations for writing in academic contexts, which is somewhat similar to *Writing 2*, although unlike American universities, discipline-specific writing is not taught. The *Thesis Writing* course, much like *Writing 50*, introduces the students to research-based writing, related to specific topics in the areas of their interest or choice, from linguistics, translation and culture to literature.

Perhaps, the major differences between the courses in the two universities lie in the extent to which writing is combined with reading and is integrated into specific areas of study or courses. For example, *Writing 2* (US) requires much reading-based writing, while *Basic* and *Intermediate Writing* (China) require almost no reading for the writing tasks, so writing is largely based on students' personal knowledge, experiences or observations in previous learning. It is only in *Advanced Writing* that students are initiated into reading to writing tasks. However, writing courses in the two universities bear certain resemblances in terms of progression from general university writing to more specific academic writing, culminating in a final research paper.

The argument strategies analysed in this paper are taken from the longer research papers by the American students in *Writing 50* and from the Bachelor of Arts (BA) theses written by the Chinese students, since in both writing tasks students are required to do research and complete a paper related to a specific topic. One of the goals set for both groups of students is to incorporate sources into their writing, using them to support their opinions or claims. However, in *Writing 50* (US) there is no limit to the number of sources used, but to write the BA thesis, the Chinese students are expected to use at least 10 sources, which emphasizes adequate materials consulted for the research. The research papers written in the two universities have some similarities and some differences.

Data collection

The American students' papers were obtained from the US university's *Annual Writing 50 Contest* website (http://www.writing.ucsb.edu/50awards/). Writing Program faculty nominate student research papers created in *Writing 50*. The papers cover a broad range of topics. Winners are honoured in the annual Writing Program Awards ceremony and the winning papers are published online. The Chinese students' papers were selected from the school's BA thesis database consisting of theses written by senior students as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for gradation with a BA degree. Each year following the completion of the thesis writing course, the students spend one semester writing up the thesis which is then graded by an advisor.

A small corpus was constructed containing one sub-corpus of 12 Chinese Students' Research Papers (CRPs) written between 2008 and 2013 and one of 11 American Students' Research Papers (ARPs) written between 2011 and 2013 (see the Appendix for individual titles). Following Connor and Moreno's (2005) methodological framework for establishing a common basis of comparison, a special effort was made to sample comparable student papers to achieve maximum equivalence between the two sub-corpora in terms of genre, subject matter, and the relative proficiency level of the student writers. Such an equivalence facilitates meaningful comparisons and reliable conclusions about cross-cultural differences or similarities. So actual selection was based on: (1) a word-count between 5000 and 7000; (2) humanities or social sciences topics; (3) grading of good or excellent (CRPs), or winning papers rated as the 1st, 2nd,

3rd and honour (ARPs). However, it is impossible to achieve perfect equivalence because CRPs and ARPs might differ in quality, topic range and intended audience.

Procedures of analysis

The research questions posed above were addressed by examining the discourse structure of the student papers. This section briefly outlines the analytical categories adopted to identify the devices used by the students to express and support their opinions. Three aspects are addressed: types of opinions expressed by the students; the discourse devices used to support their opinions; and sources used in the papers.

The analysis was conducted manually by the researcher and two other instructors from the writing faculty. First, opinions expressed were identified by analyzing the thesis statements in all the papers in terms of the three types of main claims as identified by Rouet, Favart, Gaonac'h, and Lacroix (1996): 1) Full claim: a statement expressing a clear-cut opinion; 2) Indirect claim: a statement that expresses a moderate, implicit or indirect opinion; 3) No claim: no explicit or inferable opinion expressed in the paper. Then, categories of the claims were classified and calculated to find out how the two groups expressed their opinions.

Second, argumentation strategies were identified based on Toulmin's (1958/2003) claim-argument structure. For example, in a paper about home schooling, a claim may be: "Home schooling in the U.S. was not problematic." Claims can be supported by several categories of arguments. Based on the semantic and syntactic criteria, types of argument support were identified by referring to the four categories listed by Rouet et al. (1996): 1) Documentary support: The claim is made on behalf of a document, or supported by means of one of the documents; 2) Example support: The claim is supported by means of an example; 3) Evaluation: The statement is supported by evaluation or a series of statements involving evaluations; 4) Implicit support: The statement is made without explicit support.

Finally, source use or citations in the text were analyzed and classified in terms of their functions in argument support, using the three categories adopted by Rouet et al. (1996): 1) To use as a source of content: the mention of a piece of information found in a source, without indicating one's own opinion; 2) To support a claim: the mention of a source text as a way to support one's own claim; 3) To reject ideas: to challenge or reject the information found in the source.

About one third of the papers were double-rated by the researcher and the two instructors for assigning the statements to the categories, with an inter-rater agreement of 83%. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and the rest of the papers were analyzed. The number of all the categories was calculated to see if there was any significant difference between the two groups. Then, based on the categories described above, aspects of argumentation strategies in the student papers were analyzed, and any differences or similarities explained by referring to the research questions posed.

Results and analysis of discourse features in the students' papers

How do students express their opinions or positions?

Analysis of the thesis statements shows that students in both groups used different devices to express their opinions, with full claims taking the largest proportion, followed by indirect claims and then no claims, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Proportion of full, indirect, and no claims in student papers

	Full claim		Indirect claim		No claim		Total	
	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%
ARPs (11)	8	72.7%	3	27.3%	0	0.0%	11	100%
CRPs (12)	7	58.4%	4	33.3%	1	8.3%	12	100%

The results indicate that the students in general complied with the nature of academic writing, that is, articulating their own opinion and taking stance (Hyland, 2005). Stance-taking or positioning is often realized by the use of various linguistic resources. Previous studies found that in academic writing personal pronouns frequently occur with epistemic verbs to strengthen or weaken the force of an argument or a claim, or to express doubt or certainty (e.g. Hyland & Milton, 1997) which can be seen in the full claim statements in Extracts 1 and 2:

> Extract 1
> I believe that this (the concept of memes) describes the case of the Bunny Man legend well, for the story of the Bunny Man began with the stories in the newspaper about people who encountered a man dressed in a bunny suit; however, over time, details were changed, added, and omitted, and the legend underwent emotional selection as it was retold. (ARP10)

> Extract 2
> To some extent, I agree with this viewpoint, but I think Hardy's pessimism is not only manifested in Henchard's fate but also in such aspects as the "accidental" events, "abandonments", and environmental factors. (CRP8)

In these extracts, the first-person pronoun "I" is used to directly involve the writer in claim-making. Its strong authorial role often acts as a crucial element in stance-taking (Hyland, 2002; Mur Dueñas, 2007). Meanwhile, the epistemic verbs like *think* and *believe*, which convey the relative degree of doubt or certainty, can make a claim strong or weak (Hyland & Milton, 1997). In Extract 1, the cognitive verb *believe*, with a certain degree of judgment or conjecture, shows the writer's tentativeness in positioning while in Extract 2 the verb *think* is used to convey certainty as discussed by Hyland and Milton (1997). However, despite the difference in strength, the two verbs are both employed to perform the role of opinion holders as defined by Mur Dueñas (2007), and allow writers to present their judgments, evaluation, attitude or position regarding an issue or topic. Also, to further strengthen the stance taken, justification and elaboration are provided in the subsequent clauses of *for* … and *not only …but also*, respectively. The full-claim statements written like this reflect Fox's (1994) view about good analytical writing of argument, which "means making judgments and recommendations and coming to specific, 'reasoned' conclusions…" (xviii). The above analysis illustrates that most students in the two groups conform to the common practices in academic writing of asserting and justifying a stance.

Besides, impersonalized forms such as "it" in the passive voice and in the syntactic structure of "it is possible that/to …" are also used by both groups. In general, they form part of the implicit or indirect claims shown in Table 1. As illustrated in the following

extracts, students from both groups used the impersonalized expressions *it is possible/important/necessary* ….

> Extract 3
> It is very important for us to analyze and learn taboos in Chinese and English. (CRP9)

> Extract 4
> This methodology has been applied and been used to compile the world's best schools into a comprehensive ranking system for many years, but it is possible that there are other factors and methods that could be used to determine the quality of a university with respect to others. (ARP5)

By making claims in an implicit or indirect way, these students allow more space for open discussion, and at the same time may reduce the commitment to the truth of a claim as suggested by Hyland and Milton (1997). It is also possible that student writers use implicit claims, due to the complexity and controversy of the issue or topic, or their inadequate disciplinary knowledge, which make it hard to position themselves appropriately in academic writing (Mu, 2013).

However, despite some similarities in surface features, there is a subtle difference in the statements. The first-person plural forms *we* were used in CRPs (3 out of 12) but none in ARPs, for example:

> Extract 5
> Actually, we think it is very dangerous to adopt these two methods (reward and punishment) because it is not easy to handle them appropriately. (CRP6)

By choosing to use "we", the Chinese student intended to reduce the writer presence in stance-taking, which probably leads to a weak author self-representation in positioning (Hyland, 2002; Mur Dueñas, 2007; Tang & John, 1999). Cases like this are often explained by referring to cultural differences. It is assumed that one of the Chinese rhetorical patterns, reference to collective self, was transferred to L2 writing (Becker, 1995), and a more cautious and indirect way of expressing opinions is often preferred in Chinese writing (Bloch & Chi, 1995). Though previous studies do not specify the marked disparities between English L1 and L2 argument patterns, they do demonstrate that students from different cultures may use the features appropriate to their own culture and rhetoric in their L2 writing (Hyland, 2002; McCool, 2009; Wang, 2008). Also, as mentioned earlier, the students' educational background may also affect their writing practices. For example, it is often believed that there is no real academic writing instruction in the Chinese educational tradition (Wang, 2008).

A further difference lies in the choice of specific epistemic verbs like *argue*. This verb, which represents the role of an arguer or the originator of a claim (Mur Dueñas, 2007), is the most powerful in academic writing, especially when used with the first person singular form "I", as shown in Extract 6 below. In our data it occurs in ARPs (4 out of 11) but is totally absent in CRPs.

> Extract 6
> Language provides us with a small window into a world we may never have known to exist, so I argue that language death should be prevented (ideally), or at least understood. (ARP9)

By using "I argue", the American student seems to be more authoritative in stance-taking. This might be attributed to the features of academic writing in English,

particularly the core concepts of voice, identity and individuality (Hyland, 2002). But for the Chinese students in this study, like other ESL/EFL students, who come from cultures with different writing traditions or values, these concepts or features may be quite alien (McCool, 2009; Wang, 2008). For example, Chinese public writing is traditionally not inclined to conflict and assertiveness, and there used to be a lack of argumentative tradition in Chinese culture (Wang, 2008). Also, a lack of previous instruction may impede them from appropriately projecting themselves in English academic writing (Hyland, 2002; Mu, 2013).

Clearly, though both groups show some common practices in stance or position-taking, they differ in the strength and directness of their claims, resulting in American students being more argumentative and authoritative than their Chinese counterparts.

How do students support their opinions?

The average number of arguments per paper, as shown in Table 2, was similar between ARPs (26.9) and CRPs (25.8) .

Table 2. Argument categories in the student papers

	Evaluation N %	Example N. %	Documentary N. %	Implicit N %	Total N. %
ARPs (11)	103 34.8%	63 21.3%	78 26.4%	52 17.6%	296 100%
CRPs (12)	97 31.3%	91 29.4%	40 12.9%	82 26.5%	310 100%

 * p<0.05 in example, documentary and implicit; p= .78 in evaluation

Both groups adopted different kinds of argument support for their central statement of which the most common was evaluation. Independent sample *t* tests revealed that there is a statistically significant difference between CRPs and ARPS in terms of examples, documents, and implicit supports (p<.05), but not in evaluation supports (p=.78). Extracts 8 and 9 illustrate the use of evaluations in supporting the claim:

> Extract 8
> Despite the fact that we now have images of Bunny men to relate to, the legend itself remains fantastical and unbelievable, especially in an era of science. *With the current technology that we have, many of the "facts" in the Bunny Man legend are easily refutable. As mentioned earlier, Brian Conley easily found that an insane asylum in Fairfax County never existed, nor did a man named Marcus A. Wallster.* (ARP10)

> Extract 9
> Indeed, it is a very progressive and innovative concept to lay stress on the free choices of students. *As English educator Locke says, the hearts of men are different, just like their faces, and they express their personalities all the time to make the world today so colorful. It is extraordinarily innovative to let the students present their personalities in their homework. However, it may give students so many choices that they don't know how to take a first step to do their homework.* (CRP11)

Extract 8 shows the student presented his central statement in the form of a critical evaluation of the legend, using the adjectives *fantastical* and *unbelievable*. In his argument support, he employed a variety of lexical and syntactic resources, including *refutable*, *easily*, *fact*, *despite the fact...*, and provided the cited source as the evidence. Similarly, in Extract 9, the Chinese student used adjectives *progressive, innovative, different, colorful, many*, the verb phrase *lay stress on*, adverbs *indeed, extraordinarily* and *however*, and provided source support. This is consistent with previous research which shows it is essential to adopt a critical or evaluative stance, especially in soft disciplines (Hyland, 2013; Thompson, Morton, & Storch, 2013).

However, there are some variations in the types of support adopted between the two groups. Table 2 shows that CRPs used more examples (29.4%) than ARPs (21.3%). This could be explained by the type of CRPs, most of which analyse or describe literary works and language or cultural phenomena, thus making them seem more informative or descriptive in nature, as illustrated in the following extracts:

> Extract 10
> In English and Chinese cultures, excreta and acts of human excretion are avoided in the polite conversations. *Words such as "piss", "shit", "fart", "ass", "asshole", etc. are usually regarded as dirty or unpleasant and often replaced by some polite and neutralized words. In China, similarly, people use a number of euphemisms for acts of excretion, for example: go to the lavatory, in the toilet, get up in the night to urinate, relieve oneself, etc. Modern Chinese have a lot of expressions for it, for example, ...* (CRP9)

> Extract 11
> Besides the sad emotion, Li Qingzhao also wrote some poems to show her proud and extraordinary personality. *For example, in "Pride of Fisherman," she wrote: ... Also, she wrote in another poem "Partridge in the Sky" to compare herself to sweet osmanthus to distinguish herself form others.* (CRP12)

These students listed specific examples but did not comment or evaluate fully based on related studies. It seems that exemplification, using chunks of texts from the analysed work to demonstrate understanding or interpretation, is one of the preferred ways of argumentation among Chinese students (Garrett, 1991). This may have something to do with their relatively limited language proficiency, as argued in previous research (Mu, 2013; Qin, 2009).

In addition, the Chinese students made more implicit arguments (26.5%). They were probably concentrating more on assertions or bare statements as suggested by Martin (1992) which, by allowing a much smaller dialogic space, reduce the potential for argumentation, and thus are often considered as inappropriate in academic writing (Hyland, 2005), for example:

> Extract12
> In the male dominated society, language itself becomes a kind of irresistible oppression to women. *It makes women silent all the time. Women's subordinate social position and oppression they have suffered in the patriarchal society deprive them of any chance to voice their views. Women have been consistently treated with ambivalence and subordination for a long time.* (CRP2)

In this extract, the student just made a series of fairly assertive statements concerning women's oppression without referring to source material or elaboration. This reflects the students' "monologic view of communicating what they have read" (Channock,

2008, as quoted in Wette, 2017, p. 133), and illustrates a lack of understanding that academic writing requires a dialogic view of engagement with other textual voices, including giving explicit textual support (Hyland, 2005; Thompson et al., 2013).

How do students use source texts?

Use of source texts generally indicates credibility in argumentation, with purposes such as: to present what has been said about a topic or issue; to support one's argument in relation to what others have said; and to criticize another perspective in order to establish one's own position. There are 243 statements which are associated with a source in CRPs and 307 in ARPs (Table 3).

Table 3. Types of explicit source use

	Source content		Support		Criticism		Total	
ARPs	122	39.7%	88	28.7%	97	31.6%	307	100%
CRPs	131	53.9%	45	18.5%	67	27.6%	243	100%

* $p<0.05$ in support and criticism; $p=.833$ in source content

Source use for content accounts for the largest proportion. Independent sample *t* tests revealed that statistically significance is shown in support and criticism ($p<.05$), but not in source content ($p=.833$). It seems that both groups were aware of the need to appeal to disciplinary authority to demonstrate their knowledge or understanding of the issues (Bartholomae & Petrosky, 1986), which is a fairly common practice in student academic writing (Wette, 2017). Students may also cite authorities to establish the importance or relevance of the subject in a field (Swales, 1984) which can be seen in Extracts 14 and 15.

> Extract 14
> *The Golden Notebook* is "set in London in the 1950s, with long recollections of Rhodesia during the World War Two, and tells a story of a woman's breakdown, fragmentation and healing into unity" (Pickering 50). (CRP2)

> Extract 15
> One option is offered by Barbara Gunnell of Scotland, who writes of a government-regulation approach to the "lobbyocracy" that exists both in Brussels and the European Union at large (27). (ARP7)

These writers, through explicit references to authors and cited texts, attempted to show their knowledge and understanding of the source material in the field. This to some extent demonstrates their awareness of the citing practices in academic writing. As discussed in previous research, such knowledge display is indeed an important aspect of undergraduate academic writing (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987, as cited in Wette, 2017).

However, it seems that the American students probably wrote more persuasive papers with more source use in support (28.7%) and criticism (31.6%) than their

counterparts (18.5% and 27.6% respectively). Examples are illustrated in Extracts 16-18.

> Extract 16
> Sources dating back to antiquity illustrate the success of this endeavor, not only for Jews but for non-Jews as well. *Rosenblum (2010b) notes of Greek and Roman sources that the absence of pig marks "Jewish cuisine (and thus Judaism)," and of early Jewish and rabbinic sources that the presence of pig marks "non-Jewish cuisine (and thus Non-Judaism)"* (p. 95). (ARP3)
> Extract 17
> It is often hypothesized that believers suffer from symptomatic feelings of persecution and suspicion. *There are a number of flaws in this theory. In his book on conspiracy theories, Jovan Byford explains that "even though paranoid ideation and conspiratorial beliefs appear to share a number of common features ... a closer comparison reveals a number of crucial differences that are often overlooked" (Byford, 123).* (ARP11)
>
> Extract 18
> … Conley concludes his paper by stating that these sightings must have been the origin of the Bunny Man legend. *However, what Conley leaves unanswered is how these sightings turned into the current story about the Bunny Man who kills people on Halloween, as well as why it has been localized to Clifton Overpass.* (ARP10)

Extract 16 shows the source material used as evidence to support an argument that dietary laws exist to help individual Jews identify with the Jewish people. By drawing on scholars, the student intended to prove that she is not the only one who holds the view. In Extract 17, the student first introduced the existing hypothesis or theory, then pointed out the flaws in it, and finally cited Byford to support his criticism. Similarly, the student in Extract 18 informed readers of the main points of Conley's text, and then presented his criticism by pointing out the weakness or gap in the source, perhaps with the purpose to develop his own ideas or set up his own position.

Somewhat different practices can also be seen in types of citation used. The American students often cited from the original source by paraphrasing and quoting the key ideas or key words (see Extracts 15 and 18), referred to as integral or insertion citations by Hu and Wang (2014), to allow them "rhetorical flexibility" (Hu & Wang, 2014, p. 22) and to give more attention to authors and their contribution to the field.

The Chinese students, like the one in Extract 14, used direct quotations in the parenthetical position at the end of the sentence. This non-integral citation highlights the cited ideas but produces an impersonal tone and marks the cited idea as the viewpoint of a single source (see Hu & Wang, 2014, p. 23). Perhaps those students intended primarily to "demonstrate knowledge by attributing a finding or idea to a particular source" (Wette, 2017, p. 47) which shows the kind of "knowledge telling" (Hirvela & Du, 2013, p. 87) writing in which sources are used largely for content rather than for argument support (Wette, 2017). A more recent study attributed such difficulty of source use to limited knowledge of the field as well as a lack of confidence (Wette, 2017).

Conclusion
In general, the analysis of the papers indicates that the two groups of students complied with the accepted norms of academic writing: taking a position, analysing and evaluating information or content knowledge from sources, and using evidence to support the arguments (Bacha, 2010; Chandrasegaran, 2008; Coffin, 2004). Thus, their texts are similar as far as the surface features in academic writing are concerned.

However, they also differ in many subtle respects. First, the American students' papers were more argumentative in nature and they were more likely to present a stronger author identity in positioning themselves. In contrast, the Chinese students tended to write more descriptive or informative papers, focusing on knowledge display and more implicit positioning in their thesis statements. If the explicit goal of academic writing is to take a position and argue for it, then the American students outperformed the Chinese students. Such differences can be attributed to some socio-cultural factors, specific writing strategies and textual variables.

Finally, limitations of this study must be pointed out. The sample size was small, there was some diversity in writing sample topics and the writing conditions varied, especially the time span and writing requirements. These are all features that could be more tightly controlled in a further study to confirm findings.

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Appendix: Titles of Student Papers

Chinese Research Papers (CRPs)
1. Interference of Mandarin Syntactic Structure in Chinese Students' English Study
2. Analysis of the Subject and Form in *The Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing
3. Acquisition of the Chinese Way of Thinking in English Native Speakers' Chinese Learning
4. An Ecocritical Reading of Donald Barthelme's *Snow White*
5. Psychoanalysis of Portia's Multi-character in *The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare
6. Material Rewards and Spiritual Encouragement in Western Primary Education
7. On Symbolism in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*
8. Analysis of Pessimism in *The Mayor of the Casterbridge* by Thomas Hardy
9. Analysis of Taboos in Chinese and English
10. Conversational Implicature in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*
11. Analysis of Current English Homework in Junior Middle Schools in China
12. Different Female Statuses Between China and America Embodied in Dickinson's and Li Qingzhao's Poems

American Research Papers (ARPs)
1. Cause and Effect of Gender-Based Discrimination Within Video Game Culture
2. Sustaining the Life of Cinema: A Study of Film Archiving Philosophy
3. How is Jewish Identity Manifested Through Food?
4. Perceptions of Genetically Modified Foods
5. Analysis of Undergraduate Grade Distributions
6. Alcohol in Music: Changes over the Past Decade
7. Learning to Practice Ethics: Corporate Lobbyists in the Global Arena
8. Athletic Scholarships and Recruitment: A Reevaluation
9. Language Death: Natural Progression or Inevitable Tragedy
10. Social Selection in The Bunny Man: Research on the Origins of the Legend
11. Suspicious Minds: Pearl Harbor, Conspiracy Theories, and American Culture