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Does 'okay' mean different things in lectures delivered by teachers using English as an academic lingua franca and those using English as an L1?

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This study aims to contribute to the understanding of academic lectures delivered in the context of English as an academic lingua franca through an investigation of one of the most frequently used discourse markers (DMs) – *okay,* in English mediated lectures delivered by native Chinese-speaking teachers, compared with usage in lectures delivered by native English-speaking teachers. The data examined include 6 lectures selected from the Taiwanese Lecture Corpus and 6 from the British Academic Spoken English Corpus, comprising a total of 148,310 words. The categories of *okay* functions in lectures (Looney, Jia, & Kimura, 2017; Othman, 2010; Schleef, 2008) are adapted to analyse the data. These show that several core features of lectures are shared between native Chinese-speaking and native English-speaking teachers in their use of *okay*, while others reflect their local academic culture contextual differences, as well as the influence of Chinese as a first language. The findings contribute to the field of English as an academic lingua franca in spoken discourse, particularly the use of DMs, and the implications for English for academic purposes at university level are discussed.

Keywords: use of *okay*; discourse markers; English mediated lectures; English as an academic lingua franca; non-native English; Taiwan

Introduction

Studies on discourse markers (DMs) are numerous, particularly in the genre of academic lectures, where the use of DMs (*okay, alright, right* and *now*) in the context of English as an L1 is highlighted (Othman, 2010; Schleef, 2008). While English is increasingly used as a medium of instruction in higher education in non-English speaking countries, insufficient attention has been paid to the use of DMs by non-native English teachers while using English as an academic lingua franca. This study addresses this gap by exploring how the DM *okay* is utilized by native Chinese-speaking teachers in English mediated lectures in Taiwan, where English is used as an academic lingua franca (Lau & Lin, 2014), and comparing with the use of *okay* by native English-speaking teachers in the UK. The use of one-word tags, including *okay*, is an ingrained habit of native English teachers in America (Pérez-Llantada, 2005; Swales & Malczewski, 2001) but their use by non-native teachers using English as an academic language in lectures remains unclear. To address this gap, the following questions are addressed:

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1. How frequently do native Chinese-speaking teachers and native English-speaking teachers use *okay* in English mediated lectures? What functions does *okay* achieve? Do teachers prefer certain functions to others?
2. Do the functions of *okay* in English as used by native Chinese-speakers resemble or differ from those used by native English-speakers ?
3. How does the use of *okay* by native Chinese-speaking and native English-speaking teachers reflect and construct two distinct lecture discourses as used by speakers of English as an academic lingua franca and English as an L1?

What are discourse markers?

From the perspective of lexical and syntactic properties, discourse markers (DMs) are "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 37), they "typically connect two segments of discourse but do not contribute to the meaning of either" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 162), for example, syntactic conjunctions (e.g. *and* or *but*), adverbs (e.g. *however* or *still*) and prepositional phrases (e.g. *in fact*). Concerning discourse functions, DMs may signal the speaker's intention to take the next turn in a preceding utterance (Fraser, 1999) or "express the speaker's attitudes to the addressee, negotiate background assumptions, express emotions and contribute to coherence" (Aijmer & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2003, p. 1123). For example, interjections and response forms (e.g. *oh*, *right*, *yeah* and *okay*), utterance introducers (e.g. *well* and *now*) and formulaic clausal forms (e.g. *you know* and *I mean*) are prevalent functions of DMs commonly used in both British and American English (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999, p. 1046).

Previous studies of the discourse marker – Okay

In the context of higher education, various researchers have discussed the use of *okay* in lectures (e.g., Levin & Gray, 1983; Othman, 2010; Swales & Malczewski, 2001), computer-science seminars (Rendle-Short, 2000), various types of academic speech events in MICASE (e.g., discussion sections, dissertation defenses, long lectures and short lectures; Pérez-Llantada, 2005), academic lectures and interactional classes (Schleef, 2009) and supervision meetings with international students in the UK (Bowker, 2012). In academic settings, *okay* is commonly noted in clusters and interactional contexts and frequently co-occurs with conjunctions like *and*, *so, uh/um* and *well* (Swales & Malczewski, 2001). Regarding functions, *okay* predominantly performs as a new-episode flag to show the start of a new topic or attempt to take the floor (Swales & Malczewski, 2001); as a response elicitor or discourse filler to signal the lecture's organization and corroborate the teacher's floor-maintaining position; or as an interpersonal particle to indicate attitudinal language and project a persona (Hunston & Thompson, 2000; Pérez-Llantada, 2005). To achieve this interpersonal function, *okay* may combine with interpersonal metadiscourse elements, evaluative adjectives and adverbial intensifiers (Swales & Burke, 2003), modal verbs (e.g. *may* or *might*), epistemic verbs taking that-clauses as complements (e.g. *think, say* and *know*), or first person plural nominative pronouns (Fortanet, 2004).

In mathematics lectures which consist of pedagogically-directed talks, *okay* is often used by teachers to intra-personally direct their own attention and vocalize thought processes in which non-verbal resources are referred to; at the same time, inter-personally to show their students how to do mathematics (Looney et al., 2017). More importantly, in general the use of *okay* depends on the academic tasks performed and how that content

is mediated, rather than other social factors (such as age or gender) (Schleef, 2008); and teachers may not be conscious of most of these functions while lecturing (Othman, 2010).

While the aforementioned research has focused on lectures conducted by native English speakers, other research has considered how non-native English speakers' use of DMs is influenced by L1 and deviates from that of native English speakers. In the study-abroad context in the US, native Chinese speakers use many of the same DMs as native English speakers but they either do not fully adapt the functions of DMs as used by native English speakers (e.g. *well* and *I mean*) or they employ different functions of DMs from those used by native English speakers (e.g. *yeah* as self-repair), particularly preferring *okay* and *right* as progression checks and transition markers (Liao, 2009). In the context of written academic English, when presenting and lecturing in Chinese, native Chinese speakers frequently use *hao* (an adjective to mark the goodness of a certain object) and *okay* alternately as markers of self-assurance, current-utterance completeness and utterance-internal completeness (Tang, 2010). When using spoken academic English, L1 interference may cause native Chinese-speaking teachers to use a narrower repertoire of English DMs, preferring ones with Chinese equivalents (Lin, 2015). Previous studies highlighting the use of DMs by non-native English speakers either do not focus on the use of *okay* in academic lectures or do not examine academic lectures in the context of English as an academic lingua franca in spoken discourse.

Research method

The data examined totals 148,310 words, and consists of two data sets. One extracted from the Taiwanese Lecture Corpus (TLC) and the other from the British Academic Spoken Corpus (BASE). Each data set comprises six lectures taken from the disciplines of Business or Applied Linguistics. Using the same disciplines for each dataset eliminates the effect of disciplinary bias (see Appendix 1 for details of the data sets). Taxonomies of *okay* functions have been proposed by Levin and Gray (1983), Liao (2009), Looney et al. (2017), Othman (2010) and Schleef (2008), within which there are similarities and overlaps (see Appendix 2); these taxonomies have partly addressed the use of *okay* by native English and non-native English speakers in the context of English as an L1. To accommodate the specific data examined in this study, an analytical framework of *okay* functions was adopted and modified from those taxonomies, as shown in Table 1. WordSmith Tools (Scott, 1998) were utilized to extract all instances of *okay* from two data sets, and then with reference to corresponding audio and video files, each of them was manually categorized to a specific function according to its main discourse function in its context.

Table 1: Functions of *okay* in the lectures examined in this study

Function		Purpose
1. Transition markers (falling tone)	1a. Textual markers 1b. Elaboration 1c. Attention-getter 1d. Pre-closing 1e. Introduction	Hearer-guiding devices to help the audience understand the discourse of lectures
2. Modal question tag (rising tone)		Seeking information or confirmation
3. Progression check question tag (rising tone)		Monitoring students' comprehension
4. Embedded hesitation		Speaker talking to self while deciding how to continue

Findings

Quantitative analysis

A quantitative analysis of the data used in this study shows that 17.14 *okays* per 1,000 words occurred across the 6 lectures extracted from the TLC, but only 4.17 occurrences per 1,000 words in lectures from BASE (Table 2). This indicates that lectures in TLC may be more interactive than those in BASE because a higher frequency of *okay* suggests more interactivity in lectures (Schleef, 2004; Swales & Malczewski, 2001).

The distributions of the functions of *okay* in the examples of lectures from TLC and BASE share similar patterns (Fig. 1). Most prominent are the functions of elaboration, attention-getter and progression check question tag which together comprise 86% of all instances of *okay*. This homogeneity of occurrences showing parallel essential use of *okay* by both native Chinese-speaking teachers (using English as an academic lingua franca) and native English-speaking teachers (using English as an L1) in lectures implies that the norms of academic lecture discourse and the educational communication purposes of lectures may have a stronger impact on the use of *okay* than do cultural and language contexts.

Table 2a: Frequency of *Okay* in TLC

Course code	No. of *Okays*	Per 1,000 words
T1	211	16.56
T2	77	11.25
T3	541	42.66
T4	52	5.68
T5	231	11.00
T6	164	13.66
Total/average	1,276	17.14

Table 2b: Frequency of *Okay* in BASE

Course code	No. of *Okays*	Per 1,000 words
B1	4	0.42
B2	21	2.81
B3	94	5.97
B4	24	1.60
B5	159	9.25
B6	6	0.68
Total/average	308	4.17

Nevertheless, there remain discrepancies in the occurrences of individual functions of *okay* between TLC and BASE. Table 3 shows that native Chinese-speaking teachers employ *okay* as a transition marker more frequently (61% of all occurrences of *okay*) than native English-speaking teacher (39% of all occurrences); while the latter use *okay* as a progression check question tag more regularly (56% of all occurrences of *okay*) than the former (37% of all occurrences of *okay*). Among the five sub-functions of transition markers, *okay* is predominantly used for elaboration (36% versus 8%) and as attention-getter (12% vs 22%) in TLC and BASE, respectively (Table 4). This is in accordance with Lin's (2015) findings that native Chinese-speaking teachers prefer to convey information to students, while native English-speaking teachers tend to engage more in turn-taking and interaction with students.

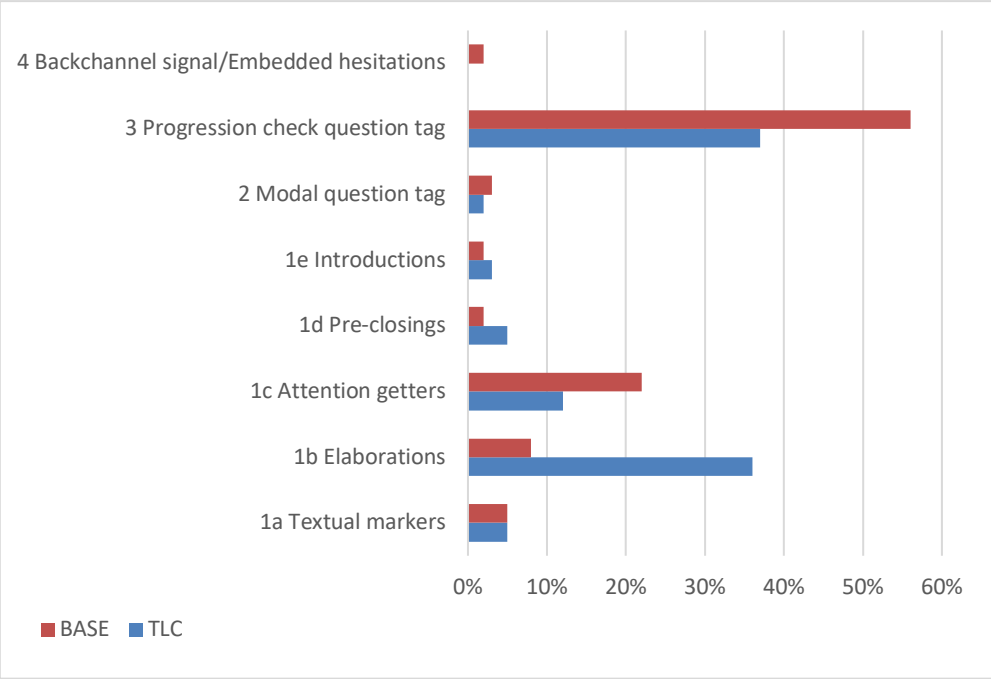

Figure 1: Distribution of individual functions of *Okay* in TLC and BASE

Table 3: Frequencies of individual functions of *okay*

Function of *okay*	TLC Freq.	TLC %	BASE Freq.	BASE %
1. Transition marker (falling tone)	777	61%	121	39%
2. Modal question tag (rising tone)	24	2%	9	3%
3. Progression-check question tag (rising tone)	474	37%	171	56%
4. Embedded hesitation	1	0%	7	2%
Total number of *okays*	1,276	100%	308	100%

Table 4: Frequencies of sub-functions of transition markers – *Okay*

Function of *okay*		TLC Freq.	TLC %	BASE Freq.	BASE %
1. Transition marker (falling tone)	1a. Textual marker	68	5%	15	5%
	1b. Elaboration	463	36%	26	8%
	1c. Attention-getter	148	12%	67	22%
	1d. Pre-closing	65	5%	6	2%
	1e. Introduction	33	3%	7	2%
Total number		777	61%	121	39%

Qualitative analysis

A qualitative analysis reveals the predominant functions of *okay* used by native Chinese-speaking teachers are strikingly like those employed by native English-speaking teachers with some noticeable discrepancies.

Monologic lectures versus interactive lectures

The key part of lecturing involves teachers' fulfilling the role of knowledge provider by disseminating knowledge and information to students. This is particularly noticeable in the TLC dataset. They make an obvious use of *okay* as a transition marker to signpost teachers' discourse management control, e.g. organize the agenda, introduce new topics, close topics, reformulate or expand information. Among these, elaborating information is most prevalent in the TLC sample. This can be seen in Example 1, where, when referring to a diagram to demonstrate why the supply curve is vertical, a native Chinese-speaking teacher carefully initiates almost every step with *okay* in a falling tone to signal upcoming important information (lines 1 and 2). The fourth *okay,* which co-occurs with *so,* finally introduces the conclusion that the supply curve is vertical (line 4). The teacher illuminates the reasoning process to the students. Here, *okay* intra-personally directs the speaker's own attention and inter-personally signals a transition to the students while referring to non-verbal resources, a diagram as illustration to demonstrate how a market supply curve is vertical. This example resembles a conversation in which frequent use of *okay* reduces the long and information-intensive lecture into smaller simple syntax clause strings to boost students' comprehension. Here, *okay* appears to equate to the function of *hao* in Chinese, as an assurance marker, signalling being ready for forthcoming speech. This may partly contribute to the prevailing use of *okay* as elaboration in TLC.

In contrast, the much less frequent use of *okay* as elaboration in BASE implies that native English-speaking teachers play down the role of *knowledge provider*. In Example 2, when referring students to Stern's diagram on their handout, the first person pronoun *I* versus *you* dichotomy obviously maintains the stance of instructor (lines 1 and 2) and the use of *okay* as elaboration signals an explanation of the diagram is about to commence (line 3), but no more *okays* are noted in the following expository process.

The above reveals that native Chinese-speaking teachers tend to utilize *okay* as elaboration more habitually throughout the process of illuminating specific issues, while native English-speaking teachers seldom do, except when beginning a justifying procedure.

Example 1 (T3)

1 T: If they see a high price of their houses. ***Okay*** the suppliers of the
2 houses. ***Okay***, cannot construct a new one in a second. ***Okay***, or at
3 this moment if they already see the price or expect the price will go
4 up very high level. ***Okay so***, it is vertical line the supply curve…

Example 2 (B3)

1 T: I'd like you to look at the diagram from Stern, which is on page five
2 of your hand-out […]
3 ***Okay***. Teaching strat-. It's divi-. He's divided it up he talks about
4 treatment options in language teaching ...

Apart from the one-way conveying of knowledge to students, the recurrent use of *okay* as attention-getter shows that frequent turn-taking occurs in both TLC and BASE. A representative classroom interaction pattern: initiation, response and feedback (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975, 1992) is also observed. Teachers usually initiate an exchange by posing questions, a way of self-elicitation to determine what they think their students do not know but want to know (Bamford, 2005), to elicit students' responses and finally give feedback. Such exchanges repeat more regularly and expand into longer dialogues in the lectures taken from BASE than those from TLC.

In Example 3, although the native Chinese-speaking teacher's question (*How to distinguish one sound from another?*, lines 1-3) shows the intention of engaging the students, in practice, only brief responses are given by students (S11 and S12, lines 4, 8). It appears that neither teacher nor students intend to engage each other continually in further interaction. By the end of S11's response, the question tag *right* (line 4) signals the student is yielding the turn to the teacher for feedback. The teacher also anxiously regains the turn by saying *okay* three times (line 5), and then the same question is rephrased by adding an example to allow the students to understand it better (lines 5-7), instead of prompting S11 for further responses. Similarly, the teacher regains the turn by repeating S12's response and continues to give feedback without encouraging S12 to expand the interaction.

Furthermore, in TLC lectures, turn-taking occurs when there is a break, practice on a computer, and students' presentations but not always a conversation between teacher and students. In Example 4, when instructing the students to practise on the computers (line 1), with a long pause for students' practice (line 2), *okay* signals the teacher's regaining the turn to continue lecturing (line 3).

Example 3 (T5)

1	T:	How do we distinguish one sound from another? It is not easy actually.
2		Why? The major characteristics of the human speech sounds, what do
3		you think is that (a long pause)
4	S11:	Vowel and consonant sounds, right?
5	T:	right! ***Okay! Okay!*** Uh let me ***okay*** tell me what uh one example
6		like top and stop. there is a first sound and the second sound. Are they
7		the same sound top and stop?
8	S12:	the consonant is different.
9	T:	Uh the consonant is different so you can you can hear the different…

Example 4 (T2)

1	T:	Try it again.
2		<pause dur="2:30">
3		***Okay***. So, the next one.

Compared to the lectures in TLC, those in BASE more frequently use *okay* as attention getter which shows that native English-speaking teachers favour more interaction with their students. In Example 5, students S31, S32, S33 respond to the teacher's question (*What do consumers gain from signing a free trade agreement?,* lines 1-3). It appears that when a student has held the floor for a while, giving answers (lines 4-8, 11-14), *okay* signals the teacher's attempt to retake the turn (lines 9, 15). Not only does the teacher watch students' answers and give simultaneous instructions (e.g. seeing S31 go off-track , he/she immediately instructs them to present answers in purely

analytical terms, as demonstrated earlier (lines 9-10), but also encourages students to hold the floor by back-channelling their responses (lines 5, 7). After commenting on S32 and S33, a new exchange begins with the teacher's question (lines 15-17), followed by a response (line 18) and feedback (lines 19). Thus, a multi-party conversation grows steadily.

Although questions are commonly employed to trigger turn-taking between a teacher and students in lectures (Chen, 2018), native Chinese-speaking teachers tend to monopolize the floor and interact with students via teaching tasks, rather than encouraging students' spontaneous responses to their questions while lecturing; native English-speaking teachers, on the other hand, tend to strategically use questions to engage their students in conversation/interaction more often.

Example 5 (B5)

1	T:	How do consumers gain from this in the di-, in terms of the
2		diagram? What can you show has been the gain in welfare to
3		consumers from signing the free trade agreement? Yeah!
4	S31:	Can provide them choice … not very good price.
5	T:	Right!
6	S31:	goods.
7	T:	Right!
8	S31:	his prices. and a wider choice of foreign goods.
9	T:	***Okay!*** so they pay a lower price. […] they've got a wider choice
10		of goods. there's something else *purely analytical terms*.
11	S32:	C-N-D…
12	T:	Sorry
13	S32:	C-N-D…
14	S33:	[unclear]
15	T:	***Okay***! so they pay a lower price for the previous level of imports M-
16		F-T-A er sorry M-M-O. right. but then also what happens because
17		the price falls. what else happens?
18	S32:	Consume more
19	T:	They consume more that's right! And there's the wider choice…

Multi-pragmatic function of okay in monologic instructions versus multi-party conversations

The second outstanding phenomenon reflected in the frequent use of progression-check question tags is that teachers strive to maintain interpersonal relationships with students. It shows teachers attempt to balance instruction and socialization via the use of *okay* as an interactive particle, correlating with first personal plural pronouns, hedges, evaluative adjectives and adverbs to reveal attitudinal language and project a persona.

Example 6 (T1)

1	T:	I hope we can grab this opportunity and beg him to lead kind of
2		the business English corner ***okay?*** So we are going to arrange
3		some time like two hours every week ***okay?*** pick up some news
4		[…] to let discuss and to exchange some ideas related to the to the
5		business news ***okay?*** So we will announce that […] so I hope
6		you can participate in it ***okay?***

In Example 6, when instructing students to attend the Business English Corner, the teacher strategically balances the asymmetrical power relationship with the students by

patiently explaining how this activity starts and works. *Okay* occurs intensively at the end of almost every sentence (lines 2, 3, 5) to ensure students appreciate this is a precious opportunity to practise English, especially for local Chinese students who lack English immersion opportunities. By saying *I hope you can participate in it okay* (lines 5-6), this instruction turns into an invitation or expectation, attempting to diminish the stance of the instructor. Simultaneously, first person plural nominative pronouns (*we*) recur three times (lines 1, 2, 5), accidentally on purpose, to convey solidarity and socialize with the students.

In contrast, native English-speaking teachers pay more attention to affirming interpersonal relationships with individual students, particularly engaging them in longer multi-party conversations during pedagogic communication. In Example 7, the native English-speaking teacher's question of *What are the two reasons that caused the imports rise?* (line 1) develops a multi-party conversation involving responses from S32 (lines 2, 3, 11, 13), S35 (line 8) and S36 (lines 19, 21). More significantly, to decrease the power position of feedback giver, the teacher habitually checks the audience's comprehension using *okay* (lines 14-16, 24, 27), combining with positive assessments – *that's right, you are right* (lines 14, 22), first person plural nominative pronouns (*we*) (lines 5, 6, 14, 15, 24) and repeating students' responses (line 14). In this case, solidarity relations with the students are promoted pragmatically to reduce the face threat of commenting on their responses and instruction. This might accordingly reduce students' tension when responding to a teacher's' questions.

Example 7 (B5)

1	T:	[…] it's for two reasons. What are they?
2	S32	The position of tariffs which creates obviously a lower price and
3		greater consumption
4	T:	Right ***okay*** so that's the movement down the demand curve here.
5		***Okay*** so the lower price, we demand more of something if it's
6		cheaper, we buy more of it. second component of the rise in
7		imports. how about the left-hand side
8	S35	[…unclear]
9	T:	Right ***okay*** specifically what's happening the tariffs taken away. So,
10		competition...
11	S32	will destroy the unproductive er enterprise
12	T:	or the less efficient one
13	S32	or the less efficient
14	T:	the less efficient ones that's right ***okay***? so we move back down the
15		supply curve in the developing country ***okay?*** so we take away the
16		tariff protection ***okay?*** the marginal producers then the one that
17		could only survive under tariff protection now simply go under
18		yeah
19	S36	I have just one question er […]
20	T:	Oh.
21	S36	[…]
22	T:	Yes I mean you're right but y-, you're sort of jumping
23		the gun as it were you're so you're moving ahead in the analysis that
24		is indeed the fear ***okay?*** that we've talked about the infant industry
25		arguments the reasons for protection so maybe you shouldn't be
26		signing just yet […] right I deliberately drew that supply curve quite
27		steeply for precisely the reasons you've given ***okay?*** but there's an…

The examples discussed in this section show that both native Chinese-speaking and native English-speaking teachers attempt to maintain interpersonal relationships with students by frequently checking their comprehension of lecture content. However, examples from lectures in TLC show such interpersonal communication integrated with more monologue instructions, while those in BASE show more multi-party conversation interaction.

Discussion

The findings reveal several essential genre-associated functional resemblances and cross-cultural contextual disparities between TLC and BASE in the use of *okay* which identify two distinct lecture discourses as used by speakers of English as an academic lingua franca and by speakers of L1 English. Although lectures are primarily a monologic discourse event, in TLC and BASE they share a feature of conversational language, that is, a very frequent use of *okay*. The current study shows that both native Chinese and English teachers strive to frame information intensive lectures in a more interactive and easy-to-understand conversation-like style. Nevertheless, differing from the results of Swales and Malczewski (2001) and Schleef (2004), the findings show that the frequent use of *okay* does not necessarily mean a high degree of interaction among teachers and students; instead, how *okay* is used by teachers might reveal other characteristics of their interaction with students.

There are several significant functional behaviours of *okay* shared between the lectures found in TLC and in BASE. First, *okay* as a transition signals organization of the agenda, deduction in reasoning, summary, repetition and clarification of concepts or specific issues to facilitate students' comprehension. Second, apart from informing and instructing, which are the primary communicative goals of lecturing, *okay* signposts a further communicative intention to interact with students by engaging them in educational exchanges to discover answers through mutual reflection and reasoning with the teacher, and accordingly developing an inquisitive and critical approach to learning, and gradually entering the community of higher education. Lastly, as a multi-pragmatic function, *okay* as a response elicitor seeks signals from students that the message has been comprehended, a function particularly relevant to the didactic purposes of lectures; simultaneously, intertwining with other interpersonal features, *okay* reveals teachers' attitudinal stance to mitigate their authority voice and balance the asymmetric power relationship with students. These various uses of *okay* in lectures seem not to be limited to the interjection and response forms as indicated by Biber et al. (1999). They also reflect the core values and purposes of academic lectures, and roles of teachers, and these functions are equally important in the cultural contexts of English as an academic lingua franca and as an L1.

Regarding discrepancies, this study illustrates cultural contextual differences in the use of *okay* between TLC and BASE. Although native Chinese-speaking teachers adopt almost the same functions of *okay* as those used by native English-speaking teachers, they employ them with particular frequencies and for dissimilar academic tasks and lecture content. The lectures in TLC have a much higher overall frequency in the use of *okay* than those in BASE. This might result from native Chinese teachers' limited lexical and linguistic choices in using English. Furthermore, the current study shows that *hao* in Chinese, which has a similar meaning to *okay*, might contribute to the frequent use of *okay* by native Chinese-speaking teachers in the context of English as an academic lingua

franca in spoken discourse. This observation is consistent with Tang's (2010) study in the context of English as an academic lingua franca in written discourse.

Another significant difference in the functional use of *okay* between TLC and BASE lectures probably relates to the influence of Confucianism in Asian university lectures, where teachers are deemed to be the only speaker, the knowledge provider (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). As a result, native Chinese-speaking teachers regularly signpost *okay* as a textual transition marker to facilitate students' comprehension, especially as elaboration, habitually to fulfil expository communicative purposes. However, educational exchanges between teachers and students in TLC are less developed than in BASE as native Chinese-speaking teachers tend to perceive students as passive participants and monopolize the floor instead of prompting students' responses. On the other hand, students seem unaccustomed to retaining the floor during lectures. Thus a monologue lecture is constructed with a higher proportion of one-way dissemination of knowledge, from teacher to students, to fulfil pedagogic communication purposes and maintain interpersonal relationships simultaneously. Although TLC lectures tend to be more monologic, various teaching tasks are applied to engage the students in lectures and boost their comprehension of lecture content, in addition to educational exchanges which require students' spontaneous responses.

In contrast, native English-speaking teachers seem more likely to see their students as interactive and the students themselves appear to be more comfortable and active, responding to teachers' questions and going through logical reasoning jointly. Therefore, educational exchanges between teachers and students in BASE more regularly expand into longer multi-party dialogues than those in TLC. Although native English-speaking teachers use *okay* as a textual transition marker to signal the discourse of lectures, more frequently as a comprehension check question tag to interact with students and maintain interpersonal relationships, they are more like interviewers interacting with individual active students, with more interpersonal involvement, interactivity and informality, compared with their Chinese counterparts, and this is consistent with the findings of Lin (2015).

Conclusion

Adding to existing research on the use of DMs in lectures by native English-speaking teachers in the context of English as an L1 (Othman, 2010; Pérez-Llantada, 2005; Schleef, 2008) and the contrastive study of DMs between two languages (Fortuño, 2006), this study contributes to the understanding of the use of *okay* in English mediated lectures delivered by native Chinese-speaking teachers compared with that of native English-speaking counterparts. Building on the work of Pérez-Llantada (2005) and Schleef (2008), this study shows that the use of *okay* in lectures not only depends on the academic tasks performed and how different content is mediated, but also is greatly influenced by the L1 and local academic institutional cultural context. That is, in the specific context of English as an academic lingua franca, lecture discourse might deviate from the universal norms of academic lectures and is closely influenced by how the local community conceptualizes the role of teachers and their students. This accordingly influences their speech for different local communicative purposes, as well as integrating the core values and communicative purposes shared with those in BASE.

As Othman (2010) indicates, in lectures there is a wider range of DM uses that teachers themselves are unaware of. Therefore, the findings of this study can be integrated into materials of English for academic purposes to make participants, particularly those using English as an academic lingua franca, aware of the discrepancies and variations in

the use of *okay* between distinct cultural and linguistic contexts and backgrounds. Although this study has yielded some interesting findings in the field of academic discourse and the use of DMs, particularly in the context of English as an academic lingua franca, some limitations need pointing out. First, the data examined are rather limited. Hence, the findings in this specific context under investigation should be interpreted with caution. To further verify the findings, larger studies on English mediated lectures in the context of English as an academic lingua franca are necessary. Larger corpus studies covering greater diversity of disciplines and speakers might help to verify whether the findings of this study can be generalized. Second, this study only focuses on the corpus data of academic lectures. To enrich understanding of the use of DMs in the context of English as an academic lingua franca in spoken discourse, the perceptions of teachers and students might be beneficial.

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Appendix 1: Breakdown of Corpora Data

	TLC			**BASE**	
Course code	**Course name**	**No. of words**	**Course code**	**Course name**	**No. of words**
T1	Business Management	12,742	B1	International Marketing	9,619
T2	Photoshop	6,844	B2	Collaborative Learning & Research	7,479
T3	Economics	12,682	B3	Applied Linguistics & Language Teaching	15,753
T4	Vertical integration	9,161	B4	Globalization & Transactional Cooperation	14,997
T5	Psycholinguistics	21,003	B5	Trade Agreements	17,200
T6	Stylistics	12,003	B6	Vocabulary	8,827
	Total no. of words	74,435		Total no. of words	73,875

Appendix 2: Functions of *okay* in lectures covered by previous studies

Functions of *okay*	Levin & Gray (1983); Schleef (2005; 2009)	Liao (2009); Othman (2010)	Looney, et al. (2017)
	Textual marker *Elaboration*	*Transition marker* (falling tone)	*Textual marker*
	Attention-getter		*Introduction*
	Pre-closing		*Pre-closing*
			Bracket a definition
			Change footing
		Modal question tag (rising tone)	
		Progression check question tag (rising tone)	
	Embedded hesitation	*Backchannel signal*	