



**CORPUS-BASED COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND CHINESE
THESIS TITLES IN LINGUISTICS AND LITERATURE IN MAINLAND
CHINA**

By

WANG ZHIJIE

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

October 2024

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Chairman : Professor Mohd Azidan bin Abdul Jabar, PhD
Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication

Crafting titles is a vital aspect of academic writing. An academic text's title should be self-explanatory and identify the scope, topic, and nature of the study. The structure and information of titles in different academic genres vary, influenced by social, cultural, cognitive, linguistic, and disciplinary elements. Studying Titleology through a comparative approach between different languages is crucial as it reveals how cultural and linguistic factors shape academic norms, filling an unexplored area in understanding cross-linguistic variations. Theses, evaluated by designated examiners, encompass detailed and focused information about research by novice researchers, necessitating that their titles create a favorable initial impression on the supervisors and evaluators. This study aims to identify the similarities and differences in the form and content features of master thesis titles (MTTs), while also investigating the underlying factors of these variations, from both a cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic perspective. In order to achieve the above goals, this research built a corpus of 2000 English and Chinese MTTs in Linguistics and Literature (collected from China

National Knowledge Infrastructure) retrieved from both English major and Chinese major's theses supplied by 39 prestigious universities in the mainland China context. Using a mixed-method of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, including frequency analysis and thematic coding with tools such as WordSmith 7.0, AntConc 4.2.4, and TagAnt 2.0.5, the study examined title length, syntactic structure, non-alphanumeric usage, lexical features, and information attributes of MTTs with an adapted comprehensive model.

The study's findings indicated that MTTs exhibited distinct variations in their form and content features when analyzed across different academic disciplines and languages. This suggests that the way thesis titles were formulated and what they conveyed might significantly differ based on the field of study and the linguistic context in which they were created. These variations could reflect the unique conventions, expectations, and communication practices within each academic discipline and linguistic context, highlighting the importance of considering both disciplinary and linguistic influences in the creation of thesis titles.

To conclude, this study presents empirical research that addresses a previously unexplored area in the study of academic titles. It introduces a modified composite framework for academic titles, offering a tool for subsequent researchers in this field. It also aids novice researchers in enhancing the quality of their crafting MTTs, supports supervisors and examiners in assessing postgraduate theses, and provides valuable insights for researchers in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Chinese for Specific Purposes (CSP) to design impactful thesis title guidelines.

Keywords: Academic Writing, Cross-disciplinary Comparison, Cross-linguistic Comparison, Thesis Titles.

SDG: GOAL 4: Quality Education



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KAJIAN PERBANDINGAN BERASASKAN KORPUS TAJUK TESIS
BAHASA INGGERIS DAN CINA DALAM LINGUISTIK DAN
KESUSASTERAAN DI TANAH BESAR CHINA**

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Penulisan tajuk merupakan aspek penting dalam penulisan akademik. Tajuk sebuah artikel ilmiah hendaklah mengandungi maklumat mencukupi yang menjelaskan skop, topik serta sifat kajian. Terdapat perbezaan antara struktur dengan maklumat tajuk mengikut genre penulisan akademik yang dipengaruhi oleh elemen sosial, budaya, kognitif, linguistik, dan disiplin. Kajian mengenai penulisan tajuk menggunakan kaedah perbandingan bahasa adalah penting untuk menerangkan bagaimana faktor budaya dan linguistik membentuk norma akademik sekali gus merapatkan jurang dalam memahami variasi merentas bahasa. Tesis lazimnya dinilai oleh penilai yang dilantik. Tesis perlu mengandungi maklumat terperinci dan berfokus mengenai penyelidikan untuk memberikan persepsi awal yang positif kepada para penilai. Justeru, kajian ini bertujuan mengenal pasti ciri-ciri persamaan dan perbezaan dalam bentuk dan kandungan tajuk tesis sarjana (TTS), di samping mengkaji faktor-faktor perbezaan tersebut dari perspektif merentas bidang dan linguistik. Bagi mencapai matlamat di atas, kajian ini membangunkan korpus yang mengandungi 2000 tajuk tesis

sarjana Bahasa Inggeris dan Bahasa Cina (dikumpulkan daripada Infrastruktur Pengetahuan Kebangsaan China) dalam bidang Linguistik dan Kesusasteraan di bawah pengkhususan Bahasa Inggeris dan Bahasa Cina daripada 39 universiti berprestij di China. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kajian yang menggabungkan pendekatan kualitatif dan kuantitatif, termasuk analisis kekerapan dan pengekodan tematik menggunakan alat seperti WordSmith 7.0, AntConc 4.2.4, dan TagAnt 2.0.5. Kajian ini meneliti panjang, struktur sintaksis, penggunaan aksara bukan alfanumerik, ciri-ciri leksikal, dan ciri maklumat TTS dikaji menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif dan kualitatif menggunakan model yang diadaptasi secara menyeluruh.

Kajian mendapati wujudnya variasi dalam bentuk dan ciri-ciri kandungan TTS merentasi bidang akademik dan bahasa. Hal ini menunjukkan terdapatnya perbezaan yang signifikan dalam cara mengarang tajuk tesis dan aspek yang disampaikan dalam tajuk tesis mengikut bidang pengajian dan konteks linguistik. Variasi ini juga menunjukkan perbezaan konvensyen, jangkaan, dan amalan komunikasi bagi setiap disiplin akademik dan konteks linguistik selain menekankan betapa pentingnya usaha mempertimbangkan pengaruh aspek bidang kajian dan linguistik dalam penulisan tajuk tesis.

Kesimpulannya, tesis ini membentangkan sebuah kajian empirikal mengenai suatu aspek yang belum diterokai dalam mengarang tajuk penulisan ilmiah. Kajian ini memperkenalkan sebuah rangka kerja gabungan mengenai tajuk penulisan akademik yang dapat membantu kajian akan datang mengenai aspek ini. Kajian ini juga dapat membantu penyelidik novis meningkatkan kualiti TTS serta membantu para penyelia dan penilai dalam penilaian tesis pascasiswazah. Tesis ini juga memberikan input yang

berguna kepada pengajar bidang Bahasa Inggeris untuk Tujuan Spesifik (ITS) dan Bahasa Cina untuk Tujuan Spesifik (CTS) serta penggubal silibus dalam merangka garis panduan untuk menulis tajuk tesis berimpak tinggi.

Kata kunci: Penulisan Ilmiah, Perbandingan Merentas Bahasa, Perbandingan Merentas Bidang, Tajuk Tesis,

SDG: MATLAMAT 4: Pendidikan Berkualiti



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With endless love and gratitude,

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA	American Psychological Association
AT	Academic Title
CAP	Chinese for Academic Purposes
CCMMTT	Corpus of Chinese Major's Master Thesis Titles
CEMMTT	Corpus of English Major's Master Thesis Titles
CNKI	China National Knowledge Infrastructure
CSP	Chinese for Specific Purposes
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EGAP	English Language Teaching
ELT	English Language Teaching
EOP	English for Occupational Purposes
ESAP	English for Specific Academic Purposes
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
ESPJ	Journal of English for Specific Purposes
GA	Genre Analysis
JEAP	Journal of English for Academic Purposes
L2	Second Language
Ling	Linguistics
Lit	Literature
MTT	Master Thesis Title
NNS	Non-native Speaker
SFL	Systemic Functional Linguistics
SLA	Second Language Acquisition

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents general ideas of the topics that this thesis intends to investigate. The background of the study, a statement of the problem, research objectives and research questions, the significance of the study, scope and limitations of the study, the definitions of key terms, and a summary of the chapter will be in order in the introduction section of this research.

1.2 Background of the Study

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which originated in the early 1960s, was a response to the growth of English as a commercial language worldwide, as well as the globalization of world markets. ESP is a branch of Applied Linguistics that focuses on Second Language Acquisition, specifically English as a foreign language, with an emphasis on meeting students' academic, professional, social, and cultural needs. ESP aims to facilitate communication and the learning process for those studying in English and improve communication in the workplace. Another objective of ESP is to promote social and psychological integration of students into the target professional or academic community, where communication is predominantly in English (Paltridge et al., 2012). Scholars in the field of ESP have endeavoured to pinpoint its key areas, such as needs analysis, genre, corpus studies, and specialized language skills and lexis,

as indicated by Belcher (2009) and Basturkmen (2021). More recently, the themes have been expanded by including intercultural rhetoric, English as a Lingua Franca, and critical perspectives (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013; Hyland & Shaw, 2016). Research in the field's flagship journals, *Journal of English for Specific Purposes* (ESPJ) and *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* (JEAP), shows a preference for the analysis of written texts (Gollin-Kies, 2014; Swales & Leeder, 2012).

ESP, with its emphasis on language teaching, has mostly adopted a genre perspective in research, as this provides teachers with text descriptions that can be used to create syllabuses and study materials. Swales (1990, p.58) defined genre as “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes”, drawing attention to the importance of the discourse community. The idea of community emphasizes that we use language to communicate with specific social groups who have their own norms, categorization, conventions and methods (Hull & Bartholomae, 1986). Community is essential for effective communication, as we need these shared mental structures to understand each other's language (Hyland, 2009). The importance of studying community and genre highlights the idea that writing is not solely the act of solitary individuals putting words on a page. It is, in fact, always a social activity that is impacted by cultural and institutional surroundings (Vandenberg et al., 2006). In the 1980s, “writing researchers showed increasing interest in the social aspects of written communication”, shifting perspectives from “things cognitive to things social” (Nystrand, 1989, p.66-67). But what heightened researchers' awareness of social aspects of writing could be attributed to a number of “forces,” one of which was “the problem of genre” (Nystrand, 1989, p.66). Researchers noted the many genres that constituted the diverse range of writing

demands in colleges and universities, and the demands placed on writers to accommodate to the modes of discourse characteristic of the new field they were entering. A social perspective on composition theory perceives writing as an interactive process between writers and readers where “text is not just the result of composing but also the medium of communication” (Nystrand, 1989, p.75).

The ability to write effectively is a crucial skill in academia, whether one is a student, teacher, researcher or administrator. Writing acts as a gatekeeper that effective writing leads to success and poor writing leads to failure in academia. Writing is the primary mode of transmitting knowledge, and there are several genres involved in this process, including research articles, theses or dissertations, proceedings, textbooks, course handouts, assignments, grant proposals and various online platforms. Learning to write effectively in these genres is a significant challenge for those pursuing a successful academic career. Research has also shown that academic writing involves interaction between writer and reader and is seen as a “persuasive endeavour” through which academics “acknowledge, construct, and negotiate social relations” (Hyland, 2005, p.173). Collaboration and participation of readers play a vital role in achieving interaction in academic writing, such as the genres of research papers, dissertations, and assignments. To achieve successful academic writing, it is necessary to have an understanding of readers’ requirements and perspectives, and to reflect this understanding in the writing style (Yasuda, 2011). Researchers can use genre as a means of analysing texts to identify recurring patterns in structure and form, revealing how language functions within specific fields. By studying the specific genres that students will need in their respective areas of study, researchers can assist them in comprehending the rationale behind language choices and support them in utilizing them effectively.

In Mainland China, thesis is an essential component of most Master's programs, and it is frequently seen as a daunting challenge by postgraduates. Students face great challenge of reporting original research at length, which requires them to understand and adhere to the expectations and norms of their academic community. Research on postgraduate writing, specifically on the master thesis that can be positioned between student-produced course papers and published research articles in the academic writing taxonomy (Samraj, 2008), indicates that students frequently face challenges in composing this type of writing. According to Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006), students often encounter challenges in two levels. The first level involves understanding and fulfilling the requirements of the thesis genre, as students may struggle with structuring and organizing a persuasive argument over an extended piece of writing with coherence and uniformity (Cooley & Lewkowicz, 1997; Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Chen et al., 2016). Another level of difficulty faced by non-native speaker (NNS) students, compared to their native speaker peers, is related to the selection of appropriate and formal vocabulary at the paragraph and sentence level. Therefore, to develop effective teaching materials for master students, research has focused on identifying and addressing these challenges faced by learners when writing (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Samraj, 2008; Basturkmen, 2009; Shahsavari & Kourepaz, 2020; Chien & Li, 2022; Afful et al., 2022). Although these studies have indicated disciplinary differences in writing among graduate students, further research is necessary to better understand the writing of postgraduates and develop targeted teaching materials.

The role of titles in research work is vital as they introduce the topic, research aims, methods, results, or any other elements that the author wants to highlight. Titles of

research articles (RA) can be considered as an independent academic genre or a subgenre (Pípalová, 2017). According to Swales' (1990) and Bhatia's (1993, p. 13) definitions of genre, titles are a type of communication that is constructed, targeted, and shared by a professional or academic community with a "socially recognized purpose". Nevertheless, different writing genres have distinct conventions and review processes that are influenced by social, cultural, cognitive, and disciplinary factors (Jalilifar, 2010). Thus, titles in various genres serve different purposes and exhibit different characteristics. For example, book titles must be attractive and engaging to prospective readers and buyers, theses/dissertation titles must make a good impression on examiners who evaluate the research content, journal article titles must provide accurate information and serve as a guide to interested expert readers, and proceeding paper titles must be attention-grabbing to attract a large, expert audience (Busch-Lauer, 2000). These distinct contextual expectations may require different communicative strategies or linguistic expressions of functionally equivalent communicative products. According to Rath (2011), guidelines for composing academic titles (ATs) of research papers and theses may differ depending on the discipline and language used. There are only a few style manuals that offer guidance in this area, and these manuals should be updated to incorporate recent research on writing. This would ensure that members of the discourse communities have access to up-to-date guidelines.

Early research on titles during the 1970s was mostly focused on literary texts, with little attention paid to other areas. However, there has been an increase in scholarly attention towards the titles of academic publications. Swales and Feak (1994) proposed that a proper research article title should fulfil four requirements in order to achieve its

intended purpose, which included indicating the research scope, introducing the topic, being self-explanatory, and in some cases, indicating the nature of the study. The rise of the study of titles in academic publications was not an isolated, independent, self-growing phenomenon. On the contrary, it was strongly influenced by genre-based textual analysis in the field of ESP, ever since John Swales published his milestone monograph *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Setting* (Moattarian & Alibabae, 2015; Morales et al., 2020). Swales (1990) highlighted the importance of titles in academic genres and pointed out that they have not been fully addressed and are worthy of further exploration. Related research has been examined at the academic title's language (Shahidipour & Alibabae, 2017; Soler, 2011; Busch-Lauer, 2000), cultural (Xie, 2020; Slougui, 2018; Kim, 2015) and format level (Hartley, 2007; Gesuato, 2008; Cheng et al., 2012; Morales et al., 2020), etc. Irrespective of different findings in various aspects, these studies lead themselves to being a strong statement of how crucial a role titles play in the whole academic writings.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Over the past 25 years, there has been an increasing global interest in postgraduate thesis writing, as evidenced by a range of studies (Dudley-Evans, 1999; Johns & Swales, 2002; Bitchener et al., 2010; Casanave, 2014; Peng, 2018) that have followed the influential work of Swales (1990) on research article introductions. This has resulted in a surge of research on various aspects of thesis writing, including its macro-structure (Thompson, 2001; Johns & Swales, 2002; Paltridge, 2002; Bunton, 2014; Hyland, 2008; Jalali, 2017; Paltridge & Starfield, 2019), title (Busch-Lauer, 2000; Afful & Akoto, 2010; Jalilifar, 2010; Morales et al., 2020), acknowledgements

(Hyland, 2003; Afful, 2016; Nguyen, 2017), abstract (Ren & Li, 2011; Afful & Nartey, 2014; Xie, 2020; Pratiwi & Kurniawan, 2021), and other parts of the thesis such as the introduction (Bunton, 2014; Samraj, 2008; Kawase, 2015; Ebadi et al., 2019), literature review (Flowerdew & Forest, 2009; Hsiao, 2019; Rawdhan et al., 2020; You & Li, 2021), methods (Nyika, 2014; Cotos et al., 2017; Tulu et al., 2019), analysis and discussion (Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Lee & Casal, 2014; Khodabandeh & Kasir, 2019), and conclusion (Bunton, 2005; Basturkmen, 2009; Zhou & Jiang, 2023). The significance of titles in academic discourse research has traditionally been overlooked, possibly due to the absence of automated internet searches until about 25 years ago (Heßler & Ziegler, 2023). Jamali and Nikzad (2011) argued that the manual nature of these evaluations contributed to their time-consuming process. However, the title plays an increasingly important role in knowledge construction by encouraging readers to notice, and perhaps subsequently read and cite (Hyland & Zou, 2022). Despite the attention that has been given to full thesis as a genre, studies on thesis titles are relatively few. But novice researchers may produce ineffective titles due to the constraints imposed by disciplinary and generic norms, which are often not explicitly taught in academic writing courses. Anthony (2001) indicated that little indication of appropriate writing styles for various fields was not provided, contributing to the challenges faced by researchers in title construction.

First of all, various studies have examined the titles of academic writings across different disciplines, languages, and genres. Much of the research in this area has focused on scientific papers, including research articles (Jiang & Hyland, 2023; Hyland & Zou, 2022; Diao, 2021; Xie, 2020; Li & Xu, 2019; Shahidipour &

Alibabae, 2017; Sahragard & Meihami, 2016; Nagano, 2015; Méndez et al., 2014; Salager-Meyer & Ariza, 2013; Hartley, 2007; Haggan, 2004; Anthony, 2001); review articles (Morales et al., 2020; Salager-Meyer et al., 2017; Soler, 2007), conference proceedings (Afful & Ankomah, 2020; Afful, 2017; Yakhontova, 2002), and short communications or posters (Cianflone, 2013). Inexperienced writers face difficulties in crafting titles because various disciplines and genres have distinct conventions for title creation (Nagano, 2015), and individual journals establish their own criteria for title writing. According to Dudley-Evans (1984), the instruction of thesis title writing should rely on patterns derived from the analysis of approved, authentic texts. Certain academic writing guidebooks (Swales & Feak, 2004; Smith & Felix, 2019; Paltridge & Starfield, 2019) do not address title writing, potentially due to the differing standards and requirements for thesis titles across universities and the absence of a standardized approach for instructors and students. However, thesis and dissertation titles have also drawn researchers' attention (Gesuato, 2008; Afful & Akoto, 2010; Jalilifar, 2010; Jiang, 2013; Slougui, 2018; Morales et al., 2020; Hao, 2024). For instance, Gesuato (2008) conducted a cross-generic study that examined the titles of journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and dissertations in Linguistics. Jalilifar (2010) focused on analysing the features of thesis titles in Applied Linguistics and compared the differences between the titles of theses and research articles. Slougui (2018) explored the cross-cultural differences in dissertation titles between EFL and UK-based contexts. The findings suggest there are notable differences in terms of the linguistic features and rhetorical functions employed. Based on the existing studies, it is evident that there are conventions and norms in academic writing that impact the construction of titles.

Previous research has mainly investigated the form and content attributes of academic titles. Typically, the form features are classified into three categories, namely title length, syntactic structure, and the use of punctuation marks. On the other hand, content attributes mainly refer to the types of prominent information conveyed in titles: lexical features and semantic information. Taking the syntactic structure of ATs for example, Soler (2007) described four types of titles: nominal group, full sentence, compound, and question in a study of 260 titles in an education journal. Hartley (2007) provided a list of 13 diverse formats for journal article titles. These formats varied from titles that declared the general subject, stated findings, or indicated a controlling question, to those that offered descriptions or options. Cheng et al. (2012) examined the syntactic structures and functions of research article titles in *Applied Linguistics* and identified 5 types: compound, nominal, full-sentence, V-ing phrase, and prepositional phrase. Research on content-related titles has primarily focused on examining the different types of information conveyed in titles using various taxonomies. One of the early scholars in this area was Anthony (2001), who proposed a set of categories included Name-Description, Description-Name, Topic-Description, Topic-Scope, and Topic-Method, which were used to describe the content of compound titles. Building on Anthony's taxonomy, Cheng et al. (2012) developed a more detailed classification consisting of eleven types of information. Sahragard and Meihami (2016) established a framework by adding definitions to each feature of the prototype of Goodman et al. (2001), identifying five elements conveyed by titles: topic only, method/design, dataset, result and conclusion. According to the existing literature, it seems that different scholars hold distinct ideas and approaches on the analysis of ATs from different disciplines, languages and genres, and there are few studies concern with master thesis titles (MTTs). The present study, drawing on earlier

models, aims to develop an extensive and holistic model of analysing the MTTs' form and content features, and to provide insight into the various choices that postgraduates can make when creating their thesis titles.

Secondly, research on ATs across disciplines has been conducted for several decades and has yielded useful findings. Researchers such as Hartley (2007) and Haggan (2004) found that colons are more frequently used in Soft Sciences compared to Hard Sciences. Hyland and Zou (2022) supported this finding, revealing that over 65% of titles in Linguistics, Education, and History journals consist of colons while less than 25% of titles in Mathematics, Biology, and Engineering include colons. Nagano (2015) and Milojević (2017) suggested that title length varies by discipline, with titles in Natural and Life Sciences being longer than those in Social Sciences. The interdisciplinary investigations have provided insights into the connections among diverse aspects and patterns in titles. The titles of academic works indicate the strategies employed by researchers in their fields of study and their ability to connect with their intended audience. However, there are still some limitations in the existing literature. Firstly, some fields have received more attention than others, the titles in Medical Sciences and Applied Linguistics have been studied more extensively (Goodmann et al., 2001; Wang & Bai, 2007; Cheng et al., 2012; Moattarian & Alibabae, 2015; Slougui, 2018; Afful & Ankomah, 2020; Morales et al., 2020; Moslehi & Kafipour, 2022). In contrast, research on other language-related disciplines such as Literature has been relatively few (Xiang & Li, 2020; Liu & Xiang, 2016; Cook & Plourde, 2016; Haggan, 2004). Secondly, within the same category, attention has not been evenly distributed among different subfields. For example, while the titles of Applied Linguistics in journals or theses have been frequently examined, Linguistics titles

especially in master theses, have not received much attention. Additionally, comparative studies often focus on comparing the titles of Hard Sciences with Soft Sciences, but rarely compare Humanities and Social Sciences directly (Yitzhaki, 1994). Despite that Social Sciences and Humanities both study the human aspects of the world and can be categorized in Soft Sciences, differences in title characteristics may still be present in these two closely related fields, hence, the MTTs in the fields of Linguistics and Literature require further investigation.

Thirdly, there are also some studies conducted on the ATs from the cross-linguistic aspect. Buxton and Meadows (1977) conducted the earliest known study on research article titles in multiple languages, examining hundreds of titles from English, French, and German periodicals. Busch-Lauer (2000) compared titles in Linguistics and Medical research articles and conference papers in German and English. Soler (2007; 2011) reported that research paper titles in Social Sciences written in English were shorter than those in Spanish. Sun (2011) compared the titles of journal articles in English and Chinese by examining the similarities and differences between the two languages. It indicated that there were notable differences in terms of the length, clarity, and information density of the titles. Due to English being a foreign language for Chinese students and scholars, they may lack the expertise to create effective titles, resulting in overly literal translations of Chinese titles into English versions (Xie, 2020). Examining Chinese academic titles offers essential insights into the linguistic and cultural nuances shaping academic writing in China. Cultural factors, such as a preference for indirect expression and distinct approaches to clarity and conciseness, often influence title structure. Recognizing these norms helps clarify how cultural factors impact title formation, potentially creating misunderstandings in international

contexts. Analysing these titles can enhance clarity, accessibility, and the global reach of Chinese research by aligning culturally-influenced titles with international standards. This adjustment fosters more effective cross-cultural academic communication, allowing Chinese researchers to better engage a broader, diverse audience. However, limited studies specifically address the distinctions between English and Chinese thesis titles, highlighting a gap this research aims to fill.

Finally, the existing literature predominantly focuses on the superficial analysis of form and content features in ATs across various disciplines, genres, and languages, without delving into the nuanced variations that exist within these categories. Analysing the reasons for variations in the form and content features of ATs across disciplines, genres, and languages is essential for understanding how cultural, linguistic, and disciplinary factors influence academic writing. This analysis can enhance academic communication, and aid in developing better guidelines for writing academic titles. This research aims to fill this notable gap by conducting a comprehensive exploration into the subtleties and complexities of title construction, thereby enriching the domain of title studies with deeper insights and understanding.

1.4 Research Objectives

This research seeks to discover the form and content features of MTTs, and to investigate the underlying factors contributing to the diverse form and content features of MTTs from a cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic perspective. The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the similarities and differences of form and content features between Linguistics and Literature MTTs.
2. To examine the similarities and differences of form and content features between English and Chinese MTTs.
3. To explore the reasons of the varied MTTs' form and content features from the cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic perspective.

1.5 Research Questions

To align with the objectives of this study, the subsequent questions are formulated:

1. What are the similarities and differences of form and content features between Linguistics and Literature MTTs?
2. What are the similarities and differences of form and content features between English and Chinese MTTs?
3. Why are there varied form and content features in MTTs from the cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic perspective?

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The corpus of the study comprises two sets of data in the mainland China context, derived from the thesis titles formulated by students on Master Programmes in the disciplines of Linguistics and Literature. One set consists of 1000 English titles (500 each in Linguistics and Literature) retrieved from the English major's Master theses; the other set also includes 1000 Chinese titles (500 each in Linguistics and Literature) from the Chinese major's Master theses. All of the Master theses in the corpora are collected from Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) supplied by 39 prestigious universities between 2013 and 2022, and the universities are selected according to the Subject Rankings of the Fourth Round of National Assessment

released by China's Ministry of Education in 2017. Therefore, the thesis titles of this study can be considered representativeness of mainland China context and reflecting recommended practices.

There are also some limitations of this research. Firstly, the present study analyses two corpora with 2000 English and Chinese titles in Linguistics and Literature. More disciplines and diverse languages with larger corpora taken from more universities with a wide range of rankings can enrich this study, bringing more confidence in the generalizability of results. Secondly, this cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic research compares MTTs in Linguistics and Literature from five aspects: length, syntactic structures, non-alphanumeric features, lexical features and semantic information. The study examines MTTs from an overall perspective without examining the detailed differences, such as which words are frequently used to express Methods or Results in the titles. Furthermore, this study does not perform any temporal comparisons of the trends of MTTs in Linguistics and Literature, to see if there are significant changes in the titular practices over different time periods.

1.7 Significance of the Study

Crafting an effective thesis or dissertation title can prove to be a daunting task for many student writers. As Swales (1990) noted, the process of formulating a concise title can require a significant amount of time, effort, and discussion. Composing a thesis title can prove difficult for students and there is little literature that offers guidelines (Jalilifar, 2010). This challenge can be especially pronounced for NNS novice researchers, who may struggle to meet the demands of writing at an advanced

academic level, and may be unaware of the level of preparation required to write a thesis or dissertation (Paltridge, 1997). The goal of this empirical research is to examine MTTs in Linguistics and Literature using a cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic approach with an adapted comprehensive model. It also aims to validate previous research findings and serve as a useful addition to the literature. This study will be particularly useful for novice researchers and educators who are unfamiliar with writing thesis titles.

From a theoretical perspective, on one hand, this study can fill up the methodological gap in AT studies, since the conventions and norms of the ATs in different genres, disciplines and languages vary greatly. On the other hand, this corpus-based research on MTTs can help to identify the current trends in the fields of Linguistics and Literature. For example, the thesis titles produced in recent years may reveal changes in the topics of study or shifts in the methodology or approach to research. This can help researchers in the corresponding field to stay up-to-date with the latest research and to identify areas for further inquiry.

Secondly, this study has practical applications for thesis advisors, supervisors, as well as members of the examining committee, who could use the findings to inform their guidance and assessment of theses (Morales et al., 2020; Jiang & Hyland, 2023). In more general terms, this would allow them to support their teaching and evaluation practices with discipline-based evidence. Through analysing the form and content characteristics of thesis titles in Linguistics and Literature, course teachers and supervisors can assist novice researchers in navigating the various aspects of MTTs, such as title length, syntactic features, punctuation usage, lexical features and semantic

attributes. By providing guidance on these elements, postgraduates can improve the quality of titles in their future research works, and effectively defend their theses and gain acceptance within their academic community (Jalilifar et al., 2010; Cheng et al., 2012; Slougui, 2018; Morales et al., 2020).

Finally, from the perspective of language teaching, analysing MTTs can inform the design of ESP and CSP courses in Linguistics and Literature. Through this study, researchers and teachers can gain a greater understanding of the potential variations in MTTs' conventions, strengths, and weaknesses among different disciplines and languages. It helps to revise ESP /CSP syllabi and materials to include useful guidance on writing effective thesis titles for the specific disciplines (Jalilifar et al., 2016; Afful & Ankomah, 2020; Moslehi & Kafipour, 2022). It is also beneficial to the authors of thesis writing manuals, as they manage to heighten teachers' and students' awareness of the most appropriate title formation styles by developing more comprehensive guides.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

Linguistics: According to Widdowson (1996, p.3), “linguistics is the name given to the discipline which studies human language”. It is concerned with the development of theories and models that describe how language works, and it encompasses a wide range of subfields, such as syntax, phonology, semantics, and pragmatics, etc.

Applied Linguistics: According to Cook (2003, p.5), Applied Linguistics is “the academic discipline concerned with the relation of knowledge about language to

decision making in the real world”. It involves the development and implementation of language teaching programs, language assessment and evaluation, the study of language use in real-world contexts, translation and interpretation.

Literature: According to Miller (2003), Literature lies in its ability to construct a fictional world using language. It is typically considered a branch of the Humanities, and its primary focus is on the analysis and interpretation of literary texts. Literary analysis often involves close reading and interpretation of texts, as well as critical evaluation of literary works within their broader cultural and social contexts.

Master Thesis: According to Bui (2013), a Master thesis is a substantial academic research paper that is written as a requirement for the completion of a Master degree program. It is a formal document that presents the author’s original research and findings on a particular topic, along with a critical analysis of existing literature on the subject. The purpose of a Master thesis is to demonstrate the student’s ability to conduct independent research and to contribute new knowledge to their field of study. The length and format of a Master thesis can vary depending on the academic institution and the field of study.

Comparative Study: In this thesis, comparative study refers to a systematic examination and analysis of similarities and differences between two or more languages or language varieties. It can encompass various linguistic levels, including phonetics, morphology, syntax and semantics, etc. Comparative studies can be valuable for linguistic research, language teaching, and cultural understanding.

1.9 Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, the author presented background information to familiarize the readers with the essential concepts such as ESP, genre, discourse community, academic writing. The chapter also identified the research gaps related to thesis titles in the problem statement, discussed research objectives, research questions, and the significance of the study. Additionally, the author defined key terms and the scope of the research. Chapter 2 will delve into the relevant literature on academic titles and explore issues related to the current study.

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