An Investigation of Authority Construction through the Use of Reporting Clauses in Discussion Sections of Chinese Students’ MA Dissertations in Singapore and China

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Abstract

In academic writing, authority construction could be realized by writers’ ability to demonstrate their familiarity with academic conventions valued by the discourse community and their ability to incorporate their own stance in writings (Tang, 2009). However, related literature (e.g., Bloch, 2010; Pecorari, 2008) reveals that novice writers, especially non-native writers, do not do well in authority construction in their writings.

Recent studies (e.g., Hyland, 1999a; John, 2012; Tang & John, 1999; G. Thompson & Ye, 1991) on authority construction in academic writing have been conducted from the perspectives of the use of reporting verbs, reporting structure of integral or non-integral forms, and first person pronouns. However, only a few studies have been conducted on reporting clauses, treating them as integrated units in constructing authority, as in Charles (2006), which categorized reporting clauses into self-sourced and other-sourced ones to examine their effects in authority construction. Self-sourced clauses are used to report writers’ own work and other-sourced ones are mainly used to cite other researchers’ work.

To continue this line of research on authority construction through reporting clauses, a mixed-method approach of quantitative and qualitative textual analysis and discourse-based interview was employed in this study. Specifically, quantitative and qualitative textual analysis were carried out on 20 discussion sections in masters of arts (MA) dissertations in order to examine and compare the features of authority construction by one group of Chinese students who received MA education in
Singapore (hereafter SC group) and another group of Chinese students who received their MA education in China (hereafter CC group). Interviews were also carried out with five informants out of the writers of the MA dissertations analyzed to explore the motivation of students’ authority construction through reporting clauses and their perceptions on factors that may have influenced their authority construction in dissertation writing.

The findings from textual analysis and interviews indicated that there were both similarities and differences in the use of reporting clauses between the SC and CC groups. Low writer visibility is the only similarity between the two groups, as indicated by the small number in the use of emphasized averral in self sourced reporting clauses. There are also differences in the specific use of self-sourced and other-sourced reporting clauses. Specifically, SC group employed significantly more other-sourced reporting clauses, which suggests that students in SC group more frequently positioned their own studies in the academic dialogue and thus showed their greater familiarity with this academic convention. A detailed examination of the reporting clauses indicates that students in SC group use reporting verbs more appropriately, as evidenced by the fact that the evaluative potential portrayed by reporting clauses conforms to the stance inferred from the context. As for self-sourced reporting clauses, the difference lies in SC group’s significantly more frequent use of clauses with rhetorical functions of guiding readers through the text and comparing writers’ finding with previous literature. This difference also indicates that SC group
was more familiar with academic conventions. The textual analysis has shown that SC group appeared to perform better in authority construction through reporting clauses.

Students’ perceptions towards those reporting behavior, obtained from interviews also showed that MA students in SC group performed better in authority construction, since students in SC group knew explicitly or implicitly about the necessity and importance of authority construction in academic writing whereas students in CC group were less conscious about such knowledge.

Through the interview analysis, this study also explored the factors that could have influenced students’ performance in authority construction in academic writing, which mainly included explicit and implicit knowledge from university/department, teachers, supervisors, and students’ reading habit.

The result of this study contributes to a more detailed understanding of Chinese students’ (SC and CC groups) authority construction through reporting clauses, both the linguistic features and the self-reported factors that may have influenced their choices. It is hoped that this work will serve to improve the pedagogy of academic writing for Chinese foreign language learner
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter begins with the background and context of this study. Specifically, a case is first made about the importance of further research on dissertation writing, authority construction among student writers and among Chinese writers. Then, the research context of dissertations requirements in Singapore and China and functions of discussion sections in dissertations are introduced. This is followed by an outline of research objectives, research questions, and significance of this study. This chapter ends with an overview of the dissertation.

1.2 Research Background

1.2.1 Importance of Research on Dissertation Writing

Dissertation writing is an important and formidable task for masters of arts (MA) students. It is important because the work of writing a dissertation is the first and utmost important academic task for many graduate students (Dong, 1998) and also one of the most important practicing steps for student writers to be recognized as members of a particular academic community (e.g., Bitchener, 2010; Charles, 2006). It can be difficult not only because of the daunting size but also the high standard expected (Dong, 1998). Many MA students who are non-native speakers of English (hereafter, NNS) are also required to write a dissertation in English, among whom include those who are pursuing their MA degrees abroad in Anglo-American universities and those who are learning English language related majors in their home
country. Given the importance of dissertation writing and difficulties MA students, especially NNS novice writers, may encounter in the process of their MA dissertation writing (e.g., Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Bloch, 2003; Flowerdew, 2000; Hyland, 1999a), more attention should be given from the academic community.

However, much less research has been done on students’ dissertation, compared with research articles (RA) (Bunton, 2005), with even less research on dissertation texts written by MA students (Mauch & Birth, 1998, cited in Paltridge, 2002). Students’ dissertations have been somewhat neglected for several reasons. Firstly, normally it is difficult to have access to thesis/dissertation in university libraries and more difficult outside universities. The second reason is that thesis/dissertation is much more difficult to handle in analysis, with relatively longer length and scale (Lano, Riley, & Crookes, 1994; Lewkowicz, 2012), especially when there is no electronic-version or optical recognizable version. What’s more, there are different expectations from different disciplines, different supervisors in terms of the output of a dissertation/thesis (Dudley-Evans, 1993) in different periods of time (Goodchild & Miller, 1997).

Despite the above mentioned obstacles that researchers may encounter in doing research on students’ dissertations, there is much need for researchers to devote some endeavor to examination of real students’ dissertation texts to examine their performance in dissertation writing (Mauch & Birth, 1998, cited in Paltridge, 2002). On the one hand, MA students are promising would-be members in the academic community in different countries and it is through dissertation writing that novice
writers receive training for their future research (Hanania & Akhtar, 1985); On the other hand, there are non-native speakers learning English and writing dissertation in English, who may often feel it difficult to write in a language other than their native language, let alone writing academic paper in that language. Research on their dissertation writing will make the tutors and supervisors know more about the difficulties students may encounter in their dissertation writing so that they could provide more pertinent help, and consequently MA students will have the capability to contribute their own parts in the academic community faster and more efficiently.

1.2.2 Authority Construction among Students

Among the difficulties students encountered in their academic writing, especially dissertation writing, authority construction is one that has received much attention from researchers and teachers (e.g., Hyland, 2002b, 2005b; Ivanič, 1998; Starfield, 2002; C. Thompson, 2005). It has generally been recognized that the ability to construct authority is crucial for the success of student writers (Cadman, 1997; Clark & Ivanič, 1997; Starfield, 2002). Much work has been done on the construction of authority in student assignment writings (e.g., Hyland, 2002b; Ivanič, 1998; Tang, 2009). However, research on authority construction in dissertation writing is receiving less scrutiny.

Enlightened by Tang (2009), in this study, the meaning of authority is two-fold. Firstly, to construct their authority in the writing, student writers should firstly understand the academic conventions of positioning the study among previous researches and have the ability to demonstrate their familiarity with a particular topic
in the academic community, which is regarded as being essential in academic writing (e.g., Lillis, 1997; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007). In other words, students should firstly be aware that they are obliged to position their work in the academic dialogue, namely, dialogic awareness. The notion of dialogism in academic writing originates from Bakhtin (1981), who argues that all language produced by all speakers is a heteroglossic process which is constructed against the background of other arguments and claims on the same topic.

Having this dialogic awareness is the first and basic step to be authoritative, which could demonstrate the writers’ familiarity with the academic conventions which is valued by the academic community. However, dialogic awareness alone is not enough in constructing the writers’ authority in the writing. The second step in authority construction lies in their ability to assert their voice within the academic conversation and to incorporate their stance and evaluation in their writings. In other words, the student writer should be able to ‘manage this dynamic process of engaging with the real and projected utterances of others’ (Tang, 2009, p.172) and present him/herself as a writer who could take responsibility for their own argument (Ivanič, 1998), research acts and discourse acts.

In examining authority in MA dissertations, reporting clauses, which include both self-sourced and other-sourced clauses, are of salience. As the name suggests, self sourced reporting clauses refer to those clauses that are employed to report the writers’ own work or argument and other-sourced ones refer to those which are used to report others’ work or argument. The examination of other-sourced reporting clauses
could reveal whether MA writers have the dialogic awareness and whether they are able to incorporate their stance and evaluation in the reporting. Self-sourced reporting clauses could reflect how MA writers take responsibility for their own argument and discourse and research acts, which is also an important constituent of authority. In a nutshell, both other-sourced reporting clauses mostly employed in the context of citation and self-sourced ones in introducing writers’ own work enable writers to incorporate their own comment, through which students could portray their authority towards others’ work as well as their own work (Charles, 2006).

1.2.3 Authority Construction among Chinese Writers

Among the second language learners of English, Chinese students are regarded as a group who like to play a neutral role in writing due to cultural issues, which is not valued by the Anglophone society. Specifically, Chinese people value harmony (Bloch & Chi, 1995; Taylor & Chen, 1991), which means criticism and being authoritative is not valued by the culture; knowledge acquired through reciting and imitation is normal and acceptable in Chinese culture, which makes it hard for Chinese learners to voice their own stance (Shi, 2003). They are stereotyped as a group who do not like to voice their stance and evaluation in writing and they do not like to employ citations because of cultural issues (e.g., Bloch & Chi, 1995; Taylor & Chen, 1991). In other words, it seems that they could not or would not construct authority through demonstrating their familiarity with the topic and engaging with the arguments, be they others or theirs. However, the groups of postgraduate students majoring in English language are educated following the Anglophone way and we have reasons to believe that they
should do better in authority construction in their writing. To test the viability and generalizability of the stereotype on Chinese students, we will examine the dissertations written by MA students who received their MA education in China and in Singapore, to see whether the construction of authority through reporting clauses differs between Chinese MA students who are from similar backgrounds, but received MA education in different countries. That is, besides the examination of authority construction among Chinese postgraduates in Singapore and China, we also attempt to investigate whether there is difference between the two groups, since both groups share similar cultural background, but the group in Singapore has oversea exposure, which, we think, might have some influence on their authority construction in their writings and we would like to investigate whether there is indeed such difference and if there is difference between the two groups of students, we would like to explore the factors that may account for it.

Since authority portrayed by reporting clauses might differ in different sections in dissertation, we decided to focus on one of the sections in dissertations, the discussion section. This research will focus on the discussion section not only because many researchers (e.g., Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Martín, 2002; Salager-Meyer, 1992) appeal that attention should also be extended to discussion sections that are relatively long and predominantly informative, but also because the discussion section is a section that integrates the writers’ immediate research findings with interpretations and previous research (Bitchener, 2010). In other words, in writing the discussion section, students should not only present their own claim but also position their own
research results and claim vis-à-vis previous research, in which the awareness of
authority is of utmost importance.

To sum up, this study will investigate 1) whether Chinese students receiving
MA education on English linguistics in mainland China and those in Singapore, who
are brought up in similar cultural backgrounds and educated in different academic
cultural background, would show differences in their portraying of authority in
discussion sections of dissertation writing through textual analysis; and 2) if there is
difference, how and why they display such preferences in employing particular
reporting patterns. However, the textual analysis itself cannot provide the reasons and
motivations as to the differences in the Chinese students’ portraying of authority,
which is also important in understanding the complexity of students’ writing (Hyland,
2009; Lillis, 2009). Therefore, interviews will also be carried with some of those
dissertation writers to explore their own motivation and reasons for their choice of
reporting clauses.

Since the analysis of reporting clauses is based on Chinese students’ MA
dissertation in China and Singapore, the context of MA education, specifically, the
requirement of MA education in China and Singapore will next be reviewed. The basic
focus of this study will be discussion sections of MA dissertation, thus, functions and
linguistic resources employed in discussion section will also be made clear in the
following two sections.
1.2.4 Context of the Study

In China, most of the MA candidates majoring in English language learning, namely, students doing postgraduate studies in foreign linguistics and applied linguistics, English language education, English literature, etc. are required to obtain 26-32 credits, varying among universities and different lengths of programs (Students could graduate in two or three years), plus complete an MA dissertation, which is compulsory in order to get a degree. Among the total 26-32 credits, 16-22 credits are devoted to academic modules (both required and elective) and 10 credits are for political studies and second foreign language.

The situation is different in the chosen university in Singapore. To fulfill the requirements of the MA degree, the candidates could choose to select 9 courses (18 credits) and write an MA dissertation with the word limit of 15,000 words. Or they could choose to select one more course (20 credits) and write a CI (Critical Inquiry, a small scale paper with no more than 5,000 words). In other words, not all MA candidates need to write a dissertation, and only those students with a minimum CGPA (Cumulative Grade Point Average) of 3.5 (or B grade average) are eligible to choose the dissertation route. Of course, even if the candidates have met the basic CGPA requirements, they could make their own choice based on their own interest and future career and life plan.

As can be seen from the comparison, the number of academic modules required in universities of Singapore and China is similar; the difference in the requirements of credits lies in political studies and second foreign language-related
Another prominent difference is that not all MA students in Singapore are required to write a dissertation, whereas the situation is different in China.

1.2.5 Functions of Discussion Chapters/Sections

Functions of discussion chapters/sections in dissertation/thesis in the field of applied linguistics have been discussed by a number of researchers (e.g., Bitchener, 2010; Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). According to Bitchener (2010), the function of discussion section includes:

1. An overview of the aims of the research that refers to the research questions or hypothesis;
2. A summary of the theoretical and research contexts of the study;
3. A summary of the methodological approach for investigating the research questions or hypotheses;
4. A discussion of the contribution you believe your results or findings have made to the research questions or hypotheses and therefore to existing theory, research and practice (their importance and significance);
5. This discussion will often include an interpretation of your results, a comparison with other research, an explanation of why the results occurred as they did and an evaluation of their contribution to the field of knowledge.

(Bitchener, 2010, p. 179)

Rudestam and Newton (2001) also point out discussion chapter is a chapter that integrates the results of their study with existing theory and literature, which typically realize the function of:

1. An overview of the significant findings of the study;
2. A consideration of the findings in the light of existing research studies;
3. Implications of the study for current theory (except in purely applied studies);
4. A careful examination of findings that fail to support or only partly support the hypotheses outlined in the study;
5. Implications of the study for professional practice or applied settings (optional)

(Rudestam and Newton, 2001, p. 121)
The function of discussion section in MA dissertations has also been investigated by Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006). Interviews with supervisors indicate that most supervisors share similar perspectives in the functions of discussion sections: ‘to summarize and discuss the results; to make links between the results and the literature; to interpret the results and to reconsider key concepts’ (p. 9).

As can be seen from the above, even though there is minor difference among the research and suggestions concerning specific and concrete functions of discussion sections in MA dissertations, the basic functions, which are covered by most of the research, are:

1. An overview and summary of the research findings;
2. An interpretation of the findings;
3. A comparison of the findings with other research;
4. An explanation of why the results occurred as they did and an evaluation of their contribution to the field of knowledge

In a nutshell, discussion section should serve as a bridge section between the writer’s own research and the discourse community, based on his/her own research results. The view has also been validated by Hyland (1999a) that the research results and claims should be evaluated in the background of previous research and thus to demonstrate their contribution to the field.

1.3 Objective and Significance of the Study

1.3.1 Research objectives

Given the stereotyped claim that Chinese students are relatively weak in constructing authority in academic writing (e.g., Bloch & Chi, 1995; Taylor & Chen, 1991), the overarching objective of this study is to investigate construction of
authority through comparing reporting clauses in discussion sections of Chinese MA dissertations between student groups that did MA studies in China and in Singapore in the field of applied linguistics. This study employs a mixed method research approach (Dörnyei, 2007), including both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the text and subsequent interviews based on the results of the textual analysis.

Two corpora are firstly constructed: one is the discussion sections of MA dissertations written by Chinese students doing MA studies in Singapore in the field of applied linguistics between the year of 2008 and 2011 (hereafter SC); the other is the discussion sections of MA dissertations written by Chinese students doing MA linguistics studies in China between the year of 2008 and 2011 (hereafter CC). The two corpora will be examined to explore whether their construction of authority through reporting clauses falls into the stereotyped view that Chinese students are relatively weak and whether there is any difference between the two groups.

After the quantitative and qualitative analysis based on the two corpora, interviews were carried out with five of the MA dissertation writers in the corpora, two from SC and three from CC, and the interview questions are formed based on the similarity and differences found in textual analysis of SC and CC corpora. The primary purpose of the interviews is to explore what factors have influenced those MA writers’ construction of authority, or in Ivanič’s (1998) term, discoursal self, which is portrayed by the authority construction through use of reporting causes.

In short, this study employs a mixed method research approach, including a quantitative and qualitative textual analysis of two corpora and subsequent interviews
involving five writers in the two corpora. The employment of this mixed method research approach is to provide a more comprehensive view of the features and motivations of authority construction through reporting clauses, and factors that may have influenced their choice of those features. The specific research questions are:

1. How do the Chinese MA students construct authority through reporting clauses in discussion sections of dissertation writing in the chosen universities in Singapore and China?
2. Is there any difference between the two groups of MA students in their construction of authority?
3. What factors may have influenced their construction of discoursal self with authority?

1.3.2 Significance of the Research

The significance of this study lies in the following four aspects. Firstly, Chinese second language learners are stereotyped as a group who are weak in constructing authority in academic writing because of Chinese culture (e.g., Bloch & Chi, 1995; Li, 2008; Taylor & Chen, 1991; Yeh, 2010). This study, involving the dissertation analysis and interviews with English-language-related major Chinese MA students in China and Singapore, seeks to test the generalizability of this stereotype.

Secondly, previous research on authority mainly focuses on verb forms, like choices of tenses and voices (e.g., Hanania & Akhtar, 1985; Salager-Meyer, 1992). Reporting clauses have been examined by Charles (2006), but her research only focuses on those reporting clauses followed by that, which has neglected many other
reporting clauses which can also carry writers’ stance. What’s more, her analysis is based on the whole dissertation, which in effect neglects the potential differences among different sections in dissertations. This study focuses on discussion sections, and incorporates all the clauses that could play the function of reporting, which will fill the gap in reporting clauses related literature.

Thirdly, studies on authority construction are normally based on textual analysis (e.g., Hyland, 2005c; Tang, 2009), which may result in biased or incomplete research findings. This study adopts a mixed method research approach which incorporates both textual analysis and interview data, so as to fill this gap and provide a more holistic, objective and comprehensive view of the authority construction in MA students’ dissertation writing.

Last but not least, previous contrastive studies mostly focus on the influence of different cultures on academic writing. Few studies (e.g., Gardezi & Nesi, 2009) have examined writings of students who are from similar cultural background but have pursued MA degrees in different settings. In other words, few studies have investigated the factors beyond culture on students’ academic writing.

In a nutshell, this study will be a significant endeavor in promoting our understanding of authority construction through reporting clauses by Chinese MA students, and help the academic writing instruction to Chinese MA students majoring in English language, who are major constituents of future contributors in the academic field of linguistics and second language learning and education. In other words, the objective of this study is not to make a simple judgment of any group being good or
bad. Rather, what we want to do is to investigate the features of authority construction by the two groups, explore the reasons of the differences and provide pedagogical implication for further teaching on academic writing, at least to Chinese postgraduate students.

1.4 Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation falls into six chapters, including the present chapter, which has sought to summarize the background and context of this study, as well as the objective and significance of this study. The second chapter, Literature Review, provides a detailed review of related literature to this study, including literature on importance and related research on the importance of authority construction, novice writers’ problems in constructing authority in second language writing and specifically, studies on Chinese writer’s authority construction features, all of which set the stage for the present study. The third chapter describes the research design and methodology, starting from the research design and its rationale, the construction of the two corpora, to the coding scheme of this study, and finally to the interview questions. The fourth chapter of this dissertation summarizes the findings from the textual analysis as well as the interview data to answer the research questions set in section 1.3. Chapter 5 Discussion interprets the research findings in light of previous research findings, and provides further explanations. The last chapter, Chapter 6 Conclusion, concludes the dissertation, providing pedagogical implications, limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter provides a review of the literature about authority construction. Firstly, an overview of the importance of authority construction in academic writing is given, followed by a review of related literature on authority construction through self-sourced and other-sourced reporting clauses. Literature concerning novice writers’ problems in constructing authority through reporting clauses is then reviewed. Since the focus of this study is Chinese MA students’ dissertation writing, studies on Chinese students’ performance in reporting clauses are then reviewed. This chapter ends with a chapter summary of the related literature, identifying the achievements and gaps in the literature.

2.2 Authority Construction in Academic Writing: Its Importance and Linguistic Realizations

As indicated in the previous chapter, authority in this study refers to the writers’ familiarity with academic conventions and their ability to assert their voice within the academic conversation and to incorporate their stance and evaluation in their writings. This section provides the theoretical underpinning of authority construction from the above two perspectives.

As argued by Bakhtin (1981), all language is dialogic in its nature and there is no monologic utterance, which is guaranteed by the fact that there is always something pre-existing that is relative to the current utterance and that ‘there is a constant
interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others’ (p. 426). One of the typical examples is the utterances in academic writing, which is monologic on the surface, because it is not like any daily conversation and there is no explicit external interaction among/between people, and no ‘spatial communication acts’ (p. 426) exist in academic writing. However, in Bakhtin’s (1981) notion, academic writings are also dialogic by nature because their actual meanings are ‘understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgments’ (p. 281); In other words, there are ‘temporal communication acts’ (Lotman, 1977, p. 9, cited in Bakhtin, 1981, p. 427) in utterances of academic writings between an earlier and later self and between the author and the antecedents who have contributed in the area in the discourse community, whether they are in alignment with or contradict each other.

Based on Bakhtinian notion of dialogism, as Tang (2009) points out, academic writings are dialogic process for the writers to interact with ‘the real and projected utterances of others’ (p.172) and their own utterances. Hyland (2002a) also establishes that writers should ‘provide an appropriate context of persuasion, demonstrating how the current work builds on and reworks past utterances to establish intertextual links to the wider discipline’ (p.115), which indicates it is only through associating their own work with substantial literature in the field that writers could support their argument and establish the novelty of their work (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995).
Bloch (2010) has also emphasized the importance of reviewing previous related literature concisely through citing the famous ‘metaphor popularized by Isaac Newton “I can see further because I stand on these shoulders of giants”’ (p. 222). Thus, writers should have the dialogic awareness that they are part of the academic dialogue in the community. However, the ability to show dialogic awareness is far from enough. What writers also should do is to contribute their part in the dialogue of the discourse community. To be more specific, writers should not only act as someone who simply recounts what others and they themselves have done/argued and stand neutral within the big conversation of the discourse community (Hyland, 2002b). What they should also do is to maintain the opinions they hold and play their role in responding to or objecting to different opinions held by others in the community so as to show that they not only know the literature and understand the conventions of the academic community (Bloch, 2003), but also have the ability to persuade the readers to accept their viewpoints (Casanave, 2003; Charles, 2006; Hyland, 2001, 2005b; Myers, 1990).

This notion of maintaining their own opinions in the discourse community has been discussed by many researchers under different terms, like stance (Biber & Finegan, 1989; Charles, 2006; Hyland, 1999b, 2000; Swales, 1990), evaluation (Hunston, 1989; Hunston & Thompson, 2001), and authority (Hyland, 2002b; Ivanič, 1998; Koutsantoni, 2006; Starfield, 2002; Tang, 2009). As mentioned in the previous chapter, in this study, we follow the term authority, since we suggest that the overall indication of this word could incorporate both the writers’ familiarity with academic conventions and their ability to insert their evaluation and stance in the argument. All
the above-mentioned research reveals that writers should have the ability to be actively involved in the construction of authority in academic writings.

The importance of construction of authority in academic writing has been examined by many researchers (Hunston & Thompson, 2001; Swales & Najjar, 1987). For example, Swales and Najjar (1987) demonstrate the crucial role positive and negative evaluations play in occupying a niche that is worth researching in their work on introduction sections in academic papers. A series of genre analysis on different sections of research articles (e.g., Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Swales, 1990) have also testified to the importance of authority construction in positioning the writers’ own writing in the academic conversation.

Authority in academic writing has been analyzed from a range of perspectives, for example, from the perspective of the contribution of single words, like adverbials (Conrad & Biber, 2000) and nouns (Charles, 2003); and from the perspective of linguistic phenomena of hedging (e.g., Hyland, 1994, 1996, 1998), hedging and boosting (Hu & Cao, 2011) and modality (Salager-Meyer, 1992; Simpson, 1990; P. Thompson, 2001). Besides the above-mentioned aspects of researching authority in the field of academic writing, the construction of authority is also crucial through reporting, because the writer could incorporate their authority in the reporting clauses (G. Thompson, 1996) through both other-sourced and self-sourced reporting clauses (Charles, 2006). Through choosing different reporting verbs and reporting structures, the writer could flexibly ‘commit’ or ‘detach’ (G. Thompson & Ye, 1991, p. 365) him/herself from the reported clauses to varying degrees.
All in all, authority construction is very important in academic writing. Reporting clauses are one of the most important ways that authority construction could be realized. Based on the categorization of reporting clauses into self-sourced and other-sourced ones from Charles (2006), the related research on other-sourced reporting (in section 2.3) and self-sourced reporting (in section 2.4) is reviewed as follows.

2.3 Research on Other-sourced Reporting

Other-sourced reporting, which is mostly associated with citations (Charles, 2006), is important in academic writing. The employment of citations, attributing authoritative sources to support the writer’s own point of view (Smalzer, 1996, cited in Swain, 2009), can demonstrate the writer’s knowledge and acknowledge previous contributions in a specific research field (Swain, 2009). The other-sourced reporting clauses, in the form of citation, could bolster the writer’s stance towards the viewpoints referenced in the writing and consequently help to position the writers with respect to other theory or viewpoints proposed in the academic community (White, 2003). Research concerning other-sourced reporting has investigated its role in authority construction from various perspectives, such as tense and voice of reporting verbs (e.g., Hanania & Akhtar, 1985; Malcolm, 1987; Oster, 1981; Salager-Meyer, 1992; Shaw, 1992; Swales, 1990; Wingard, 1981), the choice of reporting verbs (e.g., Hyland, 1999a; Neff et al., 2003; Thomas & Hawes, 1994; G. Thompson & Ye, 1991; P. Thompson, 2001; Williams, 1996), reporting patterns of integral and non-integral
citation (Swales, 1990; G. Thompson & Ye, 1991), and preference of the reporting structure (John, 2012), etc.

Much attention has been given to modal verbs and tense and voice of lexical verbs. For example, through investigating form of auxiliary verb, lexical verb, and modal verb, including verb tense and active and passive form, across departments and different sections of the 20 master theses, Hanania & Akhtar (1985) have investigated the relationship of verb forms and their respective rhetorical functions. Their research has given a preliminary elaboration of the trend and characteristic of reporting of scientific research, where the percentage of the use of verbs from the perspectives of voice, tense, aspect, and modality has been compared among different sections of Master of Science theses across the disciplines of biology, chemistry, and physics. A similar research was also done on verb tense and modality distribution in medical English abstracts by Salager-Meyer (1992). The focus of her research is on the relationship between the rhetorical function of the abstract move and the use of verb tenses and modality. Both the above two research efforts have covered the verb use in relation to rhetorical purposes. However, their focus is not specifically the reporting verbs, and neither of the research has investigated the stance incorporated in those verbs.

Attention has also been given to reporting verbs, the appropriation of which is important in both establishing writers’ own proposition and positioning those propositions in the dialogue of the academic community (Bloch, 2010). The related research (e.g., Hyland, 1999a, 2002a; Thomas & Hawes, 1994; G. Thompson & Ye,
1991) has concentrated on the evaluative function of reporting verbs, which, according to G. Thompson and Ye (1991), is one of the explicit signals of the presence of evaluation.

G. Thompson & Ye’s (1991) study has investigated the evaluative functions of reporting verbs in introduction section of research articles, and substantially classified reporting clauses based on their denotative and evaluative potentials. In denotation analysis, reporting verbs are categorized into textual, mental and research verbs:

Textual: verbs referring to processes in which verbal expression is an obligatory component; for example, state, write, term, challenge, underline, point out, name, deny.

Mental: verbs referring primarily to mental processes (which are, of course, expressed in the author’s text); for example, believe, think, focus on, consider, prefer.

Research: verbs referring primarily to the mental or physical processes that are part of research work (and to the author’s descriptions of those processes); for example, measure, calculate, quantify, obtain, find.

(G. Thompson & Ye, 1991, p. 369-370)

In analyzing evaluative potential of reporting verbs, G. Thompson and Ye (1991) have exhaustively made the categorization from the perspectives of author’s stance, writer’s stance, and writer’s interpretation (in their research, writer refers to the person who writes the paper and author refers to the people who are cited in their paper), which is very useful in providing a detailed picture of the evaluative traces carried by the reporting verbs. However, complexity of their categorization results in considerable overlap among the categories, which makes the analysis difficult to follow. For example, because of the ambiguity and overlap of some of the categories, it is difficult of assign some of the verbs into the respective categories.
Thomas and Hawes (1994) have made a much simpler analytical framework, which categorized reporting verbs into real-world verbs, discourse verbs and cognition verbs, and examined their respective roles/rhetorical functions in medical journal articles, which has pedagogical implication for EAP learners, but with no further explanation of the stance/evaluation the reporting verbs carry towards the reported structure.

Following G. Thompson and Ye (1991) and Thomas and Hawes (1994), Hyland (1999a) developed a simplified framework of analyzing reporting verbs:

![Diagram of reporting verbs categories](image)

**Figure 2.1: Categories of reporting verbs (Hyland, 1999a, p. 350)**

In his categorization, the denotative potential of reporting verbs is classified based on the type of activity conducted, namely, research acts, cognition acts and discourse acts. This categorization of reporting verbs is similar to research acts, mental acts and textual acts in G. Thompson and Ye’s (1991) respectively. From evaluative perspective, reporting verbs are categorized into factive (the writer agrees or accepts the reported information, e.g. *acknowledge, point out, establish*), counter-factive (the
writer disagrees with the reported information, e.g. *fail, overlook, ignore*), and non-factive (the writer gives no clear signal as to his/her own view).

Besides the previous-mentioned research concerning reporting verbs, there is also some research on other-sourced reporting clauses, which are mostly associated with citations. Swales (1990) categorized citation patterns into *integral* and *non-integral citation*. In *integral citations*, the name of the cited author is within the sentence, which functions to foreground the researcher. As the name suggests, non-integral citations place the author’s name normally in parentheses, emphasizing the reported research rather than the researcher. In other words, the choice of integral citation is to place greater emphasis on the reported author, whereas the non-integral citation is to emphasize the reported message (Hyland, 2002a). Examples of integral and non-integral citation are shown in Figure 2.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integral</th>
<th>Non-integral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brie (1988) showed that the moon is made of cheese.</td>
<td>Previous research has shown that the moon is made of cheese (Brie, 1988).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The moon’s cheesy composition was established by Brie (1988).</td>
<td>It has been shown that the moon is made of cheese (Brie, 1988).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brie’s theory (1988) claims that the moon is made of cheese.</td>
<td>The moon is probably made of cheese (Brie, 1988).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to Brie (1988), the moon is made of cheese.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.2: Integral and Non-integral Citations (adapted from Swales, 1990, p. 149)

Thomas & Hawes (1994) also noticed that there are other reporting statements in addition to those with reporting verbs, such as adjuncts of reporting or citation reference numbers, even though they gave no further illustration and exploration.

In employing different reporting patterns (integral or non-integral citation), writers could expand or contract the dialogic space of the reported clauses (White,
2003). G. Thompson and Ye (1991) exemplified different evaluative spaces through employing different forms of reporting structures. In non-integral citation reporting structures, where authors can only be identified from the parenthesis and without any traces of reporting words, evaluation is conveyed explicitly, which indicates that the writer agrees with the proposition or in other words, the proposition is presented to agree or support the writers’ proposition. But in integral citations, where there are reporting verbs or prepositional phrase (e.g. according to), the choice of different reporting verbs and prepositional phrase could open up different evaluative space.

When examining citation practice, Ye (2010) found that both corpora in his study, research articles written by Taiwan Chinese writers and non-Chinese writers use significantly more non-integral citations than integral ones, which indicates that non-integral citations are more often employed in research articles. This postulation is confirmed by Hyland (1999a), who found that all disciplines except philosophy employ more non-integral citation structure than integral ones.

Besides the categorization of citation into integral and non-integral ones, John (2012) has listed common reporting structure and emphasized the revelation of writer identity and visibility through the reporting structure with as, like in the following sentence

As Hervey and Higgins (1992) suggest, claquing can also cultivate a sense of exoticism.

Even though a neutral verb suggest has been used, the employment of as in the reporting clause indicates writer’s alignment with the reported proposition.
The above review of literature suggests that other-sourced reporting clauses could reveal writers’ authority in academic writing through different structural resources, for example, reporting verbs, reporting patterns of integral and non-integral citation, and different reporting structure. However, previous research on other-sourced reporting clauses only focus on some smaller units, such as reporting verbs or reporting patterns of integral or non-integral citations (Hyland, 2002a), which only provides a partial picture of what roles reporting clauses could play in authority construction in academic writing. This present research aims to fill this gap to investigate the authority construction through the use of other-sourced reporting clauses, including the frequency number of reporting clauses, specific use of reporting verbs, reporting patterns of integral and non-integral citations. In the next section, literature concerning self-sourced reporting will be reviewed.

2.4 Research on Self-sourced Reporting

Unlike other-sourced reporting clauses, which are normally associated with citations, self-sourced reporting clauses, as the name suggests, are employed to report the writer’s own work. Self-sourced reporting clauses, the reporting of the writer’s own work, could more explicitly reveal the writers’ authority in the writing by hiding or emphasizing their responsibility for what they did or argued (Charles, 2006).

Given the important functions of self-sourced reporting clauses in constructing writers’ authority, the research on self-sourced reporting clauses has mainly been carried out from the perspectives of source type and the use of first person pronouns, the relevant research of which will be discussed in the following sections.
2.4.1 Research on Source Type

As the name suggests, source type refers to the type of source writers attribute their proposition to when reporting. Specifically, when introducing their own work, writers could choose to situate themselves in a continuum of taking full responsibility, hiding by attributing a proposition to another entity (e.g. the table/figure/paper), and making no attribution (e.g. it was shown) (Hunston & Thompson, 2001). Through flexibly positioning themselves in this continuum, the writers could construct their authoritativeness towards their propositions differently.

In self-sourced reporting clauses, source type in reporting clauses has aroused some research interest. Hood (2010) has indicated the importance of analyzing sources in projection, which opens ‘space for analysis of variations in the contribution that sources make in the process of legitimating the writer’s study’ (p. 182).

Charles (2006) has carried out a cross-disciplinary study investigating the stance construction in finite reporting clauses with that-clause between social and natural science native MA students from the perspective of self-source type and found that writers of different disciplines show different degree of writer visibility based on the epistemology and ideology different disciplines value. Her study is one that is comprehensive in examining source of self-sourced reporting, which are categorized into human-sourced, and non-human sourced. As indicated by Charles (2006), the choice of source of self-reporting in self-sourced reports could indicate what is regarded as appropriate source by the writers to convince the readers. In self-sourced reporting, when writers employ non-human subjects as source type, they are trying to
hide the fact that they are the ‘source of the proposition by attributing it to a feature of their work’ (p. 500), in which writer visibility is relatively low, and in her data, non-human sourced type is a prominent feature in the field of materials science, in which knowledge is accumulated through experiment. When human subjects (except the use of one) are used as head of reporting, the writer emphasizes his/her responsibility for a particular proposition.

As indicated by the previous review, in self-sourced reporting clauses, the importance of source type in authority construction has already been highlighted, but the number of research on source type in self-sourced reporting clauses is relatively small and this present study will investigate the source type in self-sourced reporting clauses in Chinese students’ MA dissertations.

2.4.2 Research on First Person Pronouns

Among the research on self-sourced reporting, clauses with human subject, specifically, the (present) writer, singular and plural first person pronouns, were under more detailed scrutiny, with a focus on the use of first person pronouns.

Charles (2006), after the investigation of source type in self-sourced reporting clauses, also explored the degree of responsibility and visibility of the writer through using different human subject. She found that degree of responsibility and visibility of the writer decreases gradually with the employment of I, the present/the/this author, we (exclusive we, inclusive we, the discipline as a whole). In her research, writers in the field of social science employ more visible pronouns than those in the field of materials science.
Similarly, a lot of research reveals that when emphasizing their responsibility and showing their visibility in the proposition, writers could choose from using singular or plural first person pronoun, or the present writer, which constitutes another continuum of degree of visibility from strong to weak. When employing the singular first pronoun, I, the writer portrays him/herself as someone who aligns firmly with their utterances, and this rhetorical choice will make them ‘most vulnerable to criticism’ (Hyland, 2002b), because the use of I makes the writers fully exposed to be judged by readers, which makes this choice difficult to make for many students due to lack of confidence. However, the use of I could also help to construct authority in the writing and make writers more visible in the text (Harwood, 2005a; Hyland, 2002b). Plural first person pronoun, we, could be further divided into inclusive and exclusive pronoun. Exclusive we refers solely to the people who are involved in the research (Harwood, 2005c) and who are responsible for the research (Hood, 2010), in which readers are not included. The use of exclusive we could also help to construct authority and writer visibility in writing, but under a disguise of we, the degree of visibility weakens. Inclusive we, as the name suggests, refers to both the reader and the writer (Harwood, 2005c; Kuo, 1999), which is regarded as a strategy to engage the readers and make the readers ‘feel involved’ (Harwood, 2005c, p. 346), and for writers, the use of inclusive we could help to construct a lower writer visibility and dialogism between writer and readers (Harwood, 2005b) and is regarded as a less powerful role that first person pronouns can play (Tang & John, 1999).
Research on personal pronouns (e.g., Harwood, 2005b; Hyland, 2001, 2002b; Kuo, 1999; Tang & John, 1999; Vassileva, 1998) has disclosed several functions they could play in academic writing, such as stating one’s opinions (e.g. based on this research, I would argue ...), describing the methodology (e.g. we distributed the questionnaires to... and analyzed ...), and discourse guide (e.g. First I will present ... and then ...). In other words, when different reporting verbs (as illustrated in section 2.3: mental verbs, research verbs and textual verbs) in G. Thompson and Ye’s (1991) taxonomy are employed, writer’s visibility and responsibility differ, with rhetorical functions of stating one’s opinions revealing more writers’ authority and discourse guide least authority from writers.

Much contrastive research has been done on the extensive variations of authority and visibility through the use of first person pronouns, between expert and novice writers (e.g., Hyland, 2002b), between native and non-native writers (e.g., Martínez, 2005), and across disciplines (e.g., Harwood, 2005a; Harwood, 2005b; Hyland, 2001, 2002b; Kuo, 1999).

Ivanič (1998) argues that the authority portrayed by first person pronouns ‘is not a straightforward measure’ (p. 307). She points out that when no personal pronoun is used, the writer is constructing a self who is not at all responsible for the writing; when using I associated with discourse acts, there is still room for the writing to be ‘objective and factual’ (p. 307); when cognitive verbs are used with first person pronoun, the writer is acknowledging ‘responsibility and property rights’ (p. 307). She also suggests that people who claim responsibility in knowledge-making are taking a
stance different from those who don’t, and they are ‘positioning themselves as having property rights, as contributors to the field’ (p. 308). Ivanič’s (1998) study has provided us a rather comprehensive framework of variations of authority and visibility through the use of first person pronouns with different reporting verbs.

Based on Ivanič’s (1998) study, Tang & John (1999) have established a comprehensive first personal pronoun functional taxonomy in writers’ authorial presence (Figure 2.3). After examining students’ writing as well as published academic papers and books, they find that the writer could demonstrate most powerful authorial presence when the pronoun acts as originator, and when there is no I in the context, least powerful authorial presence is presented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No T</th>
<th>T as representative</th>
<th>T as guide</th>
<th>T as architect</th>
<th>T as recounter of research process</th>
<th>T as opinion-holder</th>
<th>T as originator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Least powerful authorial presence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most powerful authorial presence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.3: Tang and John’s first person functional taxonomy (1999, p. S29)

When examining writers’ authority and visibility in writing, Hyland (2002b) discussed self-sourced reporting under the discourse rhetorical functions of stating results/claims. Similarly to the above mentioned research, he found that stating results/claims is the most assertive function of self-mentioning, and thus the most face-threatening use in self reporting. He found research article (RA) writers would like to announce their presence in claiming knowledge by foregrounding their contribution and unique role in their interpretation of the research results, where they can portray their authority.
Harwood’s (2005b) research on inclusive and exclusive pronouns in academic writing, using a multidisciplinary corpus constituted by journal articles, found that the frequency in the use of inclusive and exclusive pronouns differs in hard and soft discipline, through which discipline variations were constructed. And Harwood (Harwood, 2005a), using a qualitative approach which examines the use of first person pronouns across discipline, also demonstrates that even those so-called hard science discipline, which claims to be author-evacuated, also employs first person pronoun to promote their research.

The above review of literature indicates that most research attention has been given to the use of first person pronoun among the research in self-sourced reporting, from the perspectives of visibility of writers when employing different human subject and functions of personal pronouns in different contexts. Besides, contrastive studies have also been carried out to find the difference between novice writers and competent writers. In spite of the great efforts that has been made in this research field, there is still a gap to be filled in non-first-person-pronoun source type, such as the employment of non-human subjects, and use of reporting verbs in self-sourced reporting clauses, like what Charles (2006) did in her examination of self-sourced reporting clauses. However, Charles (2006) only focused on reporting clauses with *that*-clauses, which could provide only a partial explanation of writers’ authority construction. This study fills this gap in self-sourced reporting clauses.
2.5 Novice Writers’ Problems in Constructing Authority in Reporting

Given the importance of authority construction in academic writing, it is crucial for student writers to be authoritative, through employing both self-sourced and other-sourced reporting strategies, so as to be recognized as members of their academic community (Bloch, 2003; Flowerdew, 1999, 2000). Borrowing the term ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ from Lave and Wenger (1991), Flowerdew (2000) accentuated the necessity for non-native speakers to be participants in their academic community. To become a legitimate participant in the academic community, writers should firstly follow the convention of positioning their writing in the big academic conversation of the discourse community. What’s more, they will have to establish a strong voice or authority, in their writing so as to persuade the readers to accept their own ideas in the context of previously existing voices of others, which demonstrate that they have played their part in the academic conversation and eventually will be recognized by the academic community (Bloch, 2003; Flowerdew, 2000). However, a lot of research has indicated that L2 learners of English have experienced difficulties to varying degrees. This section will review the literature on problems encountered by novice writers in authority construction through reporting and reasons that may account for the problems.

As indicated in Section 2.3, the authority construction in other-sourced reporting is normally realized by citation, which helps to demonstrate writers’ scholarship and membership in a research community and situate their own research in the discourse community dialogue and promote their own research (Mansourizadeh &
Ahmad, 2011). The difficulties many novice writers encounter in other-sourced reporting mainly lie in their problems in selecting appropriate reporting verbs.

Research has indicated that it can be difficult for non-native speakers to choose from a large number of reporting verbs, some of which are of similar meanings translated into their native languages, to express their attitudes towards particular claims through the choice of reporting verbs, since they could not figure out the nuanced difference between words of similar meanings (Bloch, 2010). The use of reporting verbs has been examined by some scholars (e.g., Bloch, 2010; McEnery & Kifle, 2002), who found that sometimes students could make grammatically correct, but rhetorically incorrect choice of reporting verbs, which indicates that the students lack the ability to weave the reported claim with their own perspectives. Bruce (1989) also notes some NNS writers cite others’ work without interpretation, which indicates that they have the dialogic awareness that they should position their work in the conversation of the discourse community, but they do not do well in the association of their work and other precedents’ work.

Various studies (Bloch, 2010; John, 2012; Pecorari, 2008) have found that L2 students seem to be more concerned about the diversity and variety of reporting verbs in the writings, therefore, they choose to substitute one reporting verb with another so that their writings do not appear repetitive, without thinking much about the potential problem that their random substitution of reporting verbs will affect their own stance towards a particular claim. G. Thompson and Ye (1991) also noted that the evaluation reflected in the reporting verbs chosen by NNS writers may sometimes contradict the
view the writers want to convey, which can be inferred from the context in some NNS students’ writing, and this originates from their difficulty ‘in finding a form of expression which balances the need to convey her own purposes with the conventional requirement’ (p.366).

Many consequent problems might arise from students’ random choice of reporting verbs. For example, they could not precisely express their intended stance towards a particular claim (Pecorari, 2008), and may make readers confused in the process of reading.

The reason for students’ unawareness of different rhetorical functions portrayed by different reporting verbs, which makes students’ writing lack authority, has been discussed by some researchers (e.g., Beaugrande, 2001; Hyland, 1999a). One of the reasons is that there is sometimes a difference between the explanation of a particular verb in a dictionary and the way it is commonly used in academic writing (Beaugrande, 2001). Bloch (2003) points out that it might be difficult for NNS learners to grasp the knowledge of the evaluative meanings of reporting verbs that could be portrayed through different linguistic resources if they do not receive specific training and therefore it is essential to introduce the notion of evaluation and how it could be realized in L2 academic writing instruction. Meyers (1996) has also emphasized the importance of teachers’ role of explicit teaching in students’ understanding of the importance carried by reporting verbs. Teachers’ role in helping students understand the relationship of reporting verbs and their rhetorical functions in the reporting clauses is obvious (Swales & Feak, 1994). However, students are not
explicitly taught how their authority and voice can be constructed through the linguistic choices (Hyland, 1999a).

As for self-sourced reporting, especially when the question of whether or not students should use first person pronoun in their academic writing is raised, many novice writers feel confused. Even though abundant research has been done on pronoun use and researchers (e.g., Hyland, 2002b) encourage students to explicitly take responsibility for their own arguments and make themselves visible in the writing, there exists contradictory guidance in academic literacy education as to where writers should stand when reviewing literature. Some (e.g., Arnaudet & Barrett, 1984; Gong & Dragga, 1995; Lester & Lester, 2010; Swetnam, 2004; Wen, 2004) suggest that self-reporting should be impersonal, which means the writers should be invisible in reporting their arguments and findings so as to promote the objectivity and impersonality of the research. Some (e.g., Harwood, 2005a; Harwood, 2005b; Hyland, 2002b; Swales & Feak, 1994) encourage the writers to voice their authority through emphasizing their responsibility for a proposition. Still some others suggest that the use of personal pronouns should depend on an overall consideration of the conventions of particular discipline, institution as well as supervisors’ attitude (Bitchener, 2010).

In this section, I have reviewed related literature concerning the problems encountered by novice writers in constructing authority through both self-sourced and other-sourced reporting clauses. This review indicates that students, as peripheral legitimate participants in academic writing, need attention from researchers and appropriate guidance from academic mentors in their process of learning to become
members of the academic community, and this is also one of the research purposes for this study. In the next section, research on Chinese writers’ academic writing will be reviewed.

2.6 Studies on Chinese Writers’ Academic Writing

Research indicates that Chinese students’ problems in authority construction in academic writing are mainly due to their lack of dialogic awareness and their avoidance of using first person pronouns. Specifically, they tend to use fewer citations in academic writing (Bloch & Chi, 1995; Taylor & Chen, 1991; Yeh, 2010) and try not to use first person pronouns (Hyland, 2002b).

Research on the number of citations has suggested that Chinese writers tend to use fewer citations than their English-speaking counterparts, because Chinese people do not like to criticize the weaknesses of others’ research because of reasons like culture, proficiency issues, and access to related resources.

Examining 31 physical scientists’ research articles introduction, Taylor and Chen (1991) found that Chinese writers, when writing both in English and in Chinese, used markedly fewer citations than American writers writing in English. Besides face issues, another reason for the sharp difference is more practical, that is, for Chinese scientists, the access to research resources is limited. Similar result has also been obtained by Bloch and Chi (1995) after analyzing 120 research articles in the field of physical science and social sciences. Investigating citation practices of 40 research articles written by Chinese and non-Chinese writers, Yeh’s (2010) study also found that Taiwan Chinese use fewer citations, compared with non-Chinese writers.
After comparing native English speakers and Chinese students’ summary writing task and opinion essays, Shi (2004) found that Chinese students tended to use source text without acknowledging the source of both copied and slightly modified sentences, which partly accounts for the fact that many Chinese students use fewer citations in their writing, and because of this they are treated as a group who tend not to cite others’ work. Based on the findings, Shi (2004) suggested that the reasons might be Chinese students’ lower language proficiency and limited explicit knowledge of conventions of citations. He also suggested L2 students with Asian background should be taught explicitly about the technique of summarizing source text and referencing with various textual devices.

Chinese writers’ employment of first person pronouns is also examined by researchers, through comparing with non-Chinese writers. Through examining Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students’ theses, Hyland (2002b) found they try to avoid using first person pronouns in their writings, especially in high-risk rhetorical functions such as in elaborating their own argument, and expressing self-benefits, and they use self-mention pronouns relatively more in low-degree personal exposure statements such as when stating a goal/procedure or explaining a procedure, and stating results/claims. He also explored the reasons behind this phenomenon through interviews, which indicates that students’ conscious avoidance of using self-mention pronouns might be accounted for by a number of factors such as ‘recommendations from style manuals, uncertainties about disciplinary conventions, culturally shaped epistemologies, culture-specific views of authority, conflicting teacher advice, or
personal preference’ (p.1107), among which Hyland (2002b) emphasized that the reluctance students showed in constructing an authoritative self is a culturally and socially co-constructed product.

Based on the above mentioned research on Chinese students’ problems of lacking authority in academic writing (e.g., Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hyland, 2002b; Shi, 2004), several scholars (e.g., Shi, 2004) have attributed this problem to Chinese students’ English language proficiency and Chinese learning culture, which is deeply influenced by Confucius. Chinese students have been taught as early as in kindergarten and primary schools that new knowledge is acquired through memorizing, imitating, and constant and repetitive practicing (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Intensively influenced by this culture, the process of acquiring a language has been mainly associated with recitation and repetition (Shi, 2009), without much personal opinion or critical stance (Ouyang, 2003).

Based on the findings concerning the influence of culture on students’ academic writing, the essential role culture plays in students’ writing could be well established. Previous contrastive studies focus on influence of cultures on students’ performance. However, Hyland (2005b) has reminded researchers that culture does play its role in influencing writers’ writing practice, but culture should not be the only reason to account for the difference in writing practice; attributing everything to culture may run the risk of stereotyping. Besides the cultural issues, the problems of reporting in Chinese students’ writing may also arise from the way academic writing is taught (Bloch, 2010). To test the viability and generalizability of the stereotyped view
on the influence of cultural issues on Chinese students’ writing and to add empirical support on features of academic writing by Chinese students, this study will compare MA dissertation writings by Chinese students who share similar cultural background and but receive their MA education in different countries, namely, Singapore and China.

2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed related literature on the importance of authority construction in academic writing as well as related research on self-sourced and other-sourced reporting, which indicates that the importance of reporting clauses in helping writers to construct authority is well established. Literature concerning novice writers, especially non-native novice writers’ problem in constructing authority through reporting is also reviewed, potential reasons for those problems are also reviewed, which suggests that authority construction through reporting is indeed problematic for many novice writers and worth further investigating. Finally, review of the literature of Chinese novice writers’ performance in constructing authority through reporting clauses shows that research in this area is still limited and most research has attributed Chinese writers’ lack of authority in writing to cultural influence, which is insufficient and partial. Chinese novice writers, who are promising future members of the academic community, are aspiring to publish in international journals and contribute their part in the academic conversation (Tang, 2012). Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the authority construction of Chinese MA students and factors that may facilitate or hinder novice Chinese writers’ authority
construction in academic writing in order to improve the pedagogy for Chinese students in the field of academic writing. To realize the research purpose, this study will adopt a mixed method research approach, including a quantitative and qualitative textual analysis of reporting clauses in discussion sections of MA dissertations, followed by discourse-based interviews, which will be described in detail in the next chapter.
Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces and discusses the research design employed in this study. To answer the research questions established in Section 1.3, this study has employed a mixed method approach through the integration of quantitative and qualitative textual analysis and interviews. A rationale of this methodological approach is firstly introduced. Since the textual analysis in this study is based on two corpora of Discussion Sections of Chinese students doing MA studies in China and Singapore, the specific procedure of constructing the two corpora as well as some brief information concerning the two corpora is then elaborated. With the focus of this study being an exploration of the reporting clauses in the two corpora, the theoretical background of the materialization of reporting clauses in this study, and the specific coding schemes are presented subsequently. Next, the specific procedure of discourse-based interview data collection and coding is outlined. Finally, a brief summary of the preceding sections is provided.

3.2 Rationale of the Methodological Approach in this Study

This study has employed a mixed method approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative textual analysis and interviews. The first two research questions, the current situation of authority construction through reporting clauses in discussion sections of Chinese students’ MA dissertations and the difference between Chinese MA students receiving MA education in China and Singapore, are answered through
the quantitative and qualitative textual analysis, which could help to find out the linguistic patterns of reporting clauses used by the writers. Interviews are employed to answer the third research question about the factors that may have influenced their construction of discoursal self through reporting clauses.

As argued by many researchers (e.g., Creswell, 1994, 1999; Dörnyei, 2007; Patton, 2002), research which employs single method could only render partial perspective of the phenomena to be examined and is likely to be incomplete and even leads to errors. Therefore, the employment of mixed research methods is crucial in validating research results and compensating for the inherent weakness of individual research methods.

In conducting textual analysis, it is quite possible that researchers will have their own bias added in the analysis. Researchers (e.g., Dubois, 1988; Harwood, 2009; Hyland, 2005a, 2009; Ivanič, 1998; Li & Casanave, 2012; Lillis, 2009; Petrić, 2012) have pointed out the importance of interview in textual analysis from the perspective of eliciting the rhetorical intentions behind particular textual features which may be invisible in the texts themselves. Hyland (2009) argues that in textual analysis, when there is no communication with the writers, the interpretation of the text will be like a ‘black box’ rather than ‘product of analysis’ (Hyland, 2009, p. 41). Ivanič (2001, cited in Lillis, 2009) also maintains that figuring out students’ motivation in a particular language choice through listening to them could help researchers get to know more about different aspects of language and know more about the complexity of their writing.
In this study, I have employed Goswami and Herrington’s (1993, cited in Lillis, 2009) notion of *discourse-based interview* and try to balance the weight of both textual analysis, from which specific feature and pattern can be identified, and interview, from which the motivation of the preference of the particular feature and pattern in the writer’s own perspective can be traced out, and thus the information elicited from the interview could provide significant insights for researchers (e.g., Pecorari, 2006; Shi, 2004).

Given the importance of the writers’ own perception towards their own text, this study adopts a mixed method of textual analysis and discourse-based interviews. In the following sections, the concrete methodological approach employed in this study is presented, beginning with the construction of the corpora in this study.

### 3.3 Corpora

The two corpora under scrutiny, namely, the discussion sections of MA dissertations in Singapore and in China, were collected separately, with the corpus of Singapore collected first. Each corpus consists of Discussion Sections of 10 dissertations in the field of applied linguistics (10 from China and 10 from Singapore). The corpus of Discussion Sections of Chinese students’ MA dissertations done in Singapore (SC) has a total number of 28,966 words, while the number of words in the corpus of Discussion Sections of Chinese students’ dissertations done in China (CC) is 22,516.

Before talking about the concrete procedure of collecting corpus data, I briefly mention the backgrounds of the students who are the major informants for the
Singaporean corpus (SC) in this study, namely, students who enrolled in PGDELT (Postgraduate Diploma in English Language Teaching) program. Then, the detailed procedure of collecting the data in both SC and CC corpus is reviewed.

3.3.1 PGDELT Program

PGDELT is a program sponsored by Singapore and Chinese Ministries of Education. The students enrolled in this program are mostly English teachers at tertiary level in China. After one year’s study of courses on English language teaching, some of them will come back to Singapore to continue the study and pursue an MA degree.

Most students enrolled in PGDELT program are under the age of 35 and they normally have teaching experience in China for several years, and few of them have visited countries other than Singapore for more than one month, which means the cultural and educational background of PGDELT students are similar to the group of students who did their MA studies in Chinese universities.

3.3.2 Collection of Singaporean Corpus (SC)

The reason for collecting the Singaporean corpus (SC) first is that there is a limited number of dissertations written by Chinese students doing MA in Singapore, due to both the above-mentioned reason that not all students doing MA degrees in Singapore need to write a dissertation to fulfill the requirements of MA study, and the fact that there is a limited number of students doing MA studies that meet the requirement of the present study.
To make the two corpora (SC and CC) comparable, as far as possible, the writers of the two corpora should have similar living and learning experience before the SC writers came to Singapore for their MA studies. After exploration, I found that PGDELT students who come back to Singapore to continue with their MA studies would be the major constituents of the writers of my SC corpus. Thus, all the MA dissertations of Chinese students doing MA in Singapore are written by this group of students, collected from one of the universities in Singapore.

The concrete procedure of selecting SC corpus is as follows: firstly, this study only focuses on dissertations written in the past four years, namely, between the years of 2008 and 2011. The reasons of concentrating on recent years’ MA dissertations are two-fold. Firstly, the importance attached to different sections in a dissertation might change over years for various reasons (Bazerman, 1984). Secondly, the research interests or trends in the linguistics field might change and this may lead to unpredictable variations and may decrease the comparability of the data. After discussion and further confirmation with some teachers and juniors, the list of dissertations written by Chinese students doing MA studies in Singapore in the recent four years was decided, and all the dissertations are downloaded from the university library. Altogether 15 dissertations fall into this category and are downloaded for further categorization.

Since the focus of this study is the reporting clauses in Discussion Section of MA dissertations, initially the plan was only to analyze those dissertations with clear-cut Discussion Sections, so as to avoid any unexpected ambiguity in the data.
analysis (e.g., Hanania & Akhtar, 1985). After browsing the tables of contents of those 15 dissertations, only 7 of them have clear-cut discussion sections. However, seven is taken to be too small a corpus to make a reasonable comparison. Thus, another 3 dissertations with ‘data analysis and discussion chapter’, ‘findings and discussion chapter’ and ‘discussion and conclusion chapter’ were randomly selected from the remaining 8 dissertations.

To maintain the homogeneity of the corpus data, I separated the data analysis section from the discussion section manually. To ensure the maximum objectivity and homogeneity of the selected data, criteria of separating data analysis parts from the discussion sections are based on functions and moves of Discussion Chapter, as reviewed in section 1.2.5. Thus presentation of results and provision of evidence (statistics, examples, tables, or figures) are excluded from the corpus, whereas evaluation and commenting on results or findings, the major move of discussion sections are kept in the corpus. Chapter overview is kept in the corpus, with sentences concerning results deleted. After my own manual separation, I asked one of my classmates, who also did research on academic writing, to reexamine the separation and I finally made decisions on the extraction of discussion section from the original ‘data analysis and discussion chapter’ and ‘findings and discussion chapter’. After our manual separation of the discussion sections, I compare the average number of words in the three manually separated discussion sections with those clear-cut discussion sections and the calculation reveals that the number is 2,907 and 2,892 respectively, which is comparable. The year of submitting the dissertation, shortened title of the
dissertation (shortened from full titles in order to protect the writers’ identity), and the number of words in Discussion Chapter of the SC corpus is shown in Table 3.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Submitting year</th>
<th>Shortened title</th>
<th>words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Verbal reporting in second language writing</td>
<td>3115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Cultural representations in textbooks</td>
<td>1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Scaffolding strategies in interactions with children</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Interlingual perspective on recontextualization</td>
<td>2079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Students’ perception and attitude towards plagiarism</td>
<td>4563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>EFL learners’ listening comprehension difficulties</td>
<td>3885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Metacognitive awareness of reading strategies</td>
<td>1769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Hedging and boosting in academic articles</td>
<td>3950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Analysis of classroom interaction in secondary schools</td>
<td>2875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Metacognitive awareness and strategy in listening</td>
<td>2797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>28966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average word length</td>
<td></td>
<td>2897</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Components of SC Corpus

As can be seen from Table 3.1, the length of the discussion section in SC corpus ranges from 1,769 to 4,563, varying from dissertation to dissertation, and make a 28,966 words SC corpus.

3.3.3 Collection of Chinese Corpus (CC)

After the collection of Discussion Sections in MA dissertations of Chinese students doing MA in Singapore (SC corpus), the collection of Discussion Sections of Chinese students doing MA in China (CC corpus) underwent similar procedures to those of SC corpus collection, with some more consideration given to the comparability of the two groups of students.

Firstly, since the SC corpus was collected from one of the distinct universities in Singapore, the original plan of collecting CC corpus in China was to collect MA dissertations from the most reputable foreign language universities or colleges. However, in the process of data collection, I found that many of the MA dissertations
from those universities in recent four years are not accessible, neither from China Master’s Theses Full-text Database in China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) nor from their university libraries. The other factor that was taken into account was the access to some of the writers of the dissertations, since interviews would be carried out to some of the writers of the dissertations after the textual analysis.

Taking all the above-mentioned factors -- comparability of the reputation of universities, access to MA dissertations and MA students -- into consideration, two universities in China were finally chosen for the data collection of the present study. One is a foreign language university located in Eastern China, the other is a comprehensive university located in central China (In order to protect the participants in this study, the name of the participants and their universities will not be revealed). Both of the two universities are Chinese national key universities under the administration of the Ministry of Education of China. Moreover, both of the two universities passed the evaluation process of Project 211 in China (100 key universities for the 21st century). Furthermore, the foreign language university is among the best ones in foreign language education in China and the comprehensive university is also among the 985 project in China (around 35 key universities in China). In other words, both of the universities selected are among the best universities in China, whose students should be comparable to those of the university selected in Singapore.

After deciding on the two universities, most of the MA dissertations in the field of applied linguistics written by MA students from the two universities during the year
2008 and 2011 were downloaded from China Master’s Theses Full-text Database in China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), which is the most comprehensive, highest quality database of dissertations and theses in China. Altogether 166 dissertations have been downloaded, among which there were 47 dissertations with clear-cut Discussion sections.

Based on the topic of dissertations in SC corpus, 10 Discussion Sections with broadly corresponding topics are selected from the 47 dissertations with clear-cut Discussion Sections to ensure the comparability of the two corpora. Specific field of research, key words as well as research methods were considered in the process of dissertation selection. The year of submitting the dissertation, shortened title of the dissertation (shortened from full title to protect the writers’ identity), and number of words in Discussion Chapter of the CC corpus are shown in Table 3.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Submitting year</th>
<th>Shortened title</th>
<th>words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Interlingual errors in college English writing</td>
<td>2251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Culture elements in test papers</td>
<td>1689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Involvement load hypothesis</td>
<td>1454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Model testing of autonomous learning</td>
<td>2212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Writing beliefs and strategies in writing</td>
<td>4744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Factors affecting listening proficiency</td>
<td>662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Speaking strategies on oral proficiency</td>
<td>3179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Contrastive study of hedging</td>
<td>1140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Interactive English language teaching</td>
<td>1841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Metacognitive learning strategies and its impact</td>
<td>3344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Average word length</td>
<td>2252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Components of CC corpus

As Table 3.2 shows, the total number of the discussion section in CC corpus is 22,516 words, with words of the dissertation section ranging from 662 to 4744. It may
not always be the case that longer discussion sections will make better discussions on the data obtained in the study, and the length of the discussion section may be influenced by many factors. However, on the surface, the discussion sections in SC corpus are relatively longer.

Besides the above mentioned criteria to make the two corpora comparable, there is still a factor, teaching experience, which is a potential factor that may influence the comparability of the two corpora. As mentioned earlier in section 3.2.1, all the students doing MA in Singapore have several years of teaching experience in China and were teachers in China. The interview data revealed that most of the postgraduates majoring in English language in China also have several years’ teaching experience, most of whom have been teachers in tertiary levels (the reason is normally teachers at tertiary level are required to obtain an MA degree), and for those who do not have official/formal teaching experience, they have taught part-time during their MA studies. Thus, the factor of teaching experience will not be a big factor that would influence the comparability between the two groups.

3.4 The Operationalization of Authority Construction through Reporting Clauses

3.4.1 Materialization of Reporting Clauses in this Study

In traditional grammar, reporting clauses are employed to indicate that someone’s words or thoughts are reported (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, Leech, & Svartvik, 1995) and normally reporting clauses are found to be representation of mental activity and verbal activity, realized by direct and indirect speech (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002; Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990; Quirk, et al., 1995). Thus, the
categorization of reporting clauses in traditional grammar can be seen as a classification in casual conversation and in normal written English, whereas in academic writing, the situation is much more complicated, as is seen later.

The linguistic phenomenon of reporting someone’s words or thoughts is defined as projection in systemic functional grammar (SFG), and the reporting clauses and reported clauses are named as projecting clauses and projected clauses respectively. In SFG, projection is clarified as:

[t]hrough projection one clause is set up as the representation of the linguistic “content” of another -- either the content of a ‘verbal’ clause of saying or the content of a ‘mental’ clause of sensing. (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 443)

And the projecting and projected clauses are defined as:

[w]hile the projecting clause represents an ordinary phenomenon of experience, the projected clause (…) represents a second-order phenomenon, something that is itself a representation. (…) a “metaphenomenon”. (Halliday, 1994, p. 252)

The discussion of projection in SFG has shifted from traditional grammatical classification to more functional semantic one. In traditional grammar the reporting behavior is treated as mental and verbal processes (Leech & Svartvik, 2002; Quirk, et al., 1995), as in

_Li and Yu (2008) said that the role of extrinsic motivation is very complex._
_Wen (1999) believes that intercultural communication competence is constituted of intercultural ability and communication ability._

Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) further incorporate another type of projection, which is referred to as pre-projected fact. Here fact has nothing to do with its literal, everyday meaning, truth, but means ‘ideas without a thinker’ (G. Thompson, 2004, p. 213). In this added type of projection, ‘the projected clause is not being projected by a verbal or mental process with Sayer or Senser, or by a verbal or mental process noun in a metaphorical nominal group, but comes as it were ready packaged in projected
form\(^1\) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 470). A fact may be projected impersonally, either by a relational process (‘it is the case that …’) or by an impersonal mental or verbal process, as in:

- It is/may be/is not (the case) that …
- It has been shown/can be proved (to be the case) that …
- It seems/appears/is thought (to be the case) that …
- It is said/rumored (to be the case) that …

Similarly, in some sentences there is no mental or verbal process, like in the following sentence:

*Leeuven (2008) developed a typology of changes in recontextualisation.*

Grammatically, there is no Senser or Sayer in the above sentence, only an actor who did the material process *develop*. However, to analyze it from a semantic perspective, an implied projection can be identified:

*Leeuven (2008) (reported that he) developed a typology of changes in recontextualisation.*

In this case, Leeuven played the role of not only the actor in the material process, but also a reporter of the action.

Besides the above listed projection which identified direct projecting sources, there are also some other projection types, like implied projection realized by non-integral citation:

\(^1\) Besides the above-mention categories of projection, Hood (2010) further incorporates sentences other than mental and verbal process into the phenomenon of projection. Firstly, scare quotes without any source. The following sentence is an example in which the implication is retrievable intertextually, from a shared culture:

*The many stories and ‘radical’ fragments within this work can be envisaged as a series of sites to which the reader is exposed.*

In the above example, even though grammatically no source can be retrieved, but from a semantic perspective, the quotes can be projected to the context, to the shared culture. These projective sentences are excluded from my coding scheme because no similar data exist in my analysis.
Mastery goal orientation is defined as a focus on mastery, learning, challenge, or curiosity (Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992)


According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), visual display can construe evaluative stance.

There is also another projection type proposed by Hood (Hood, 2010) which takes the form of nominalising the verbal and mental processes into nouns, naming speech acts and thought processes (p. 134). Such terms sometimes ‘imply the connection to propositions stated elsewhere in the text, and perhaps to whole sections of a text’ (p. 134). For example:

Similar finding have been made by many researchers (e.g. Hyland, 1999; Swales, 1990).

This view is supported by several other studies (e.g. Goh, 1999; Vandergrift, 2002)

The above more functional semantic categorization of projecting clauses in SFG, I suggest, can be very useful for the discussion of reporting clauses in academic writing, especially in this study, since this categorization could facilitate incorporating all reporting clauses, be it self-sourced or other sourced, in the analysis. Thus, this study adopts this categorization and incorporates all the above mentioned clauses into the data to be coded, and the naming of those clauses will still follow the traditional term ‘reporting clauses’.

In Charles’s (2006) study, the reporting clauses she investigated are only those finite reporting clauses with that-clause complementation, which has left out a lot of reporting clauses in constructing the writers’ stance. In this study, all the reporting clauses that have been discussed earlier will be incorporated as the data, including
self-sourced reporting as well as other-sourced reporting, namely, reporting the
writer’s work and other authors’ work.

In this study, I will follow the terms of ‘writer’ and ‘author’ in G. Thompson
and Ye (1991) to refer to the person who writes the dissertation and the person who is
cited in the dissertations by the writers respectively.

3.4.2 Taxonomy of Reporting Clauses in this Study

As indicated in the previous chapters, the focus of this study is to compare the
construction of authority in MA students’ dissertation writing through investigation of
reporting clauses. The way of using reporting clauses could reveal students’ authority
construction. The employment of other-sourced reporting clauses could indicate that
the students are familiar with the particular topic and are willing to position
themselves in the discipline dialogue (Tang, 2009, p. 184). However, ‘merely being
aware of the conversation taking place within a discipline is not sufficient to construct
textual authority. A writer has to demonstrate an ability to assert his/her own voice
within that conversation’ (p. 184), and this ability can be examined through the
specific use of reporting verbs. The employment of self-sourced reporting clauses
could show students’ awareness that they are presenting themselves as a writer (Ivanič,
1998) through the employment of emphasized averral, and they are familiar with the
conventions of academic writing. Thus, I will now elaborate on the coding scheme of
reporting clauses and reporting verbs as follows.
3.4.2.1 Coding Scheme of Reporting Clauses

In the coding of reporting clauses, this study has mostly adopted Charles’s (2006) coding scheme. Because this study is not a cross-discipline study, and to better fit the purpose of the present study, which is to examine the authority construction in Chinese students’ MA dissertation writing, the coding of the text firstly classifies other-sourced reporting clauses separately from self-sourced ones, and the further coding can be seen in Figure 3.1, and is elaborated as follows.

Figure 3.1 Coding Scheme of Reporting Clauses

Enlightened by Charles’s (2006) study, self-sourced reporting clauses in this study are coded into three major categories (Hunston & Thompson, 2001), *emphasized averral* (e.g. *I think, the present writer argues*), *hidden averral*, and *averral without attribution* (e.g. *it can be predicted that*). *Hidden averral* can be further classified into *hidden averral with general attribution* (e.g. *one can argue that*) and *hidden averral with internal attribution* (e.g. *chapter 3 reports*).

Averral, according to Tadoro (1993, p. 101, cited in Groom, 2000, p. 15), is the ‘default condition’ of a particular written text, in which the writer him/herself is
identified as the opinion holder. In other words, if the writer avers a statement, s/he will take full responsibility for it (White, 1998, cited in Groom, 2000).

In emphasized averral, the writers emphasize and foreground their own role in a particular statement, attribute the statement to themselves and take full responsibility for the argument/statement/action. For example, based on the above findings, I/the present writer argue that..... In the above example, the writer foregrounds him/herself and claims the full responsibility for the proposition s/he will continue to talk about.

In hidden averral, the writer disguises his/her responsibility for a statement through attributing it somewhere else, internally or generally. In hidden averral with internal attribution, the writer will foreground and attribute the responsibility to their own work, like the chapter, tables, or figures in the dissertation. For example, this dissertation will cover...In this kind of statement, it is easy for readers to infer that the writer is responsible for the statements, which is not directly stated in the dissertation. As for hidden averral with general attribution, the writer attributes the responsibility of a statement to people in general. For example, one can predict ...as if the statement is so obvious that anyone could make the statements, but readers can infer that it is still the writer of the dissertation who should take responsibility of the statements.

In averral without attribution, a statement is averred without being assigned to a particular source, as in it can be argued that .... No obvious source is attributed, but the reader can still infer that the writer of the dissertation should take responsibility of the statements.
Other-sourced reporting in academic writing is associated with citation to a great extent (Charles, 2006), with exceptions as in non-research sourced reporting or research with general reference, especially when the writer did not specify the research or researchers s/he points to. Thus, other-sourced reporting clauses are classified into two broad categories, adapted from Charles’ (2006) categorizations: non-research sourced and research sourced. And research sourced reporting clauses are further divided into three categories based on the form of citation, namely, integral citation, non-integral citation and general reference.

Swales’ (1990) categorization of reporting patterns of integral and non-integral citations have already been illustrated in section 2.2.1. As for general reference, as the name suggests, it refers to the reporting clauses that attribute the statements to a particular group of people or research (e.g., many have argued that …).

Based on the above categorization of reporting clauses in figure 3.1, when coding the other-sourced reporting clauses, I firstly look for parenthesis, which mostly incorporates the integral and non-integral citations. During the annotation, we also carefully examine the sentences around citations, since there are reporting clauses following citations where the subject is the same quoted author, but with no explicit sign of parenthesis to indicate the writer/ the source, for example,

**Wu and Liu (2004)** once conducted a study on the meta-cognition in English writing through the investigation of 308 learners, finding that meta-cognition is an important variable which can influence the achievements of writing.

When coding the above example, it is easy to annotate the first half of the clause as other-sourced reporting, through searching the parenthesis. The subject(s) of
the latter half clause, *finding that meta-cognition*... can be inferred to be the same as the previous one, namely, *Wu and Liu (2004)*. Thus, the latter clause is also counted as a separate reporting clause in coding.

As indicated in literature review, the use of reporting clauses only indicates that the student writers have dialogic awareness, which is far from enough to be a member of the community, and they also need to construct their own authority in the reporting clauses, which can be realized by the specific use of reporting *verbs* (Hood, 2010; Hyland, 1999a, 2002a; Thomas & Hawes, 1994; G. Thompson & Ye, 1991). And the coding the reporting verbs in self-sourced and other-sourced reporting clauses is elaborated in the next section.

### 3.4.2.2 Coding Scheme of Reporting Verbs

As shown in the literature review, studies on reporting verbs, especially G. Thompson and Ye (1991), Hyland (1999a), Hyland (2002a), and Thomas and Hawes (1994), have provided us with substantial analytic framework for exploring the authority constructed by the writer. Since the focus of this study is to explore the authority constructed by the writer in their employment of reporting clauses, in this study, we will adopt a simplified analytic framework based on those researchers’ contributions, the coding schemes of which differ when coding reporting verbs in self-sourced and other-sourced reporting clauses. In other-sourced reporting clauses, reporting verbs are coded from the perspective of evaluative potential, because we want to find out the writer’s stance towards those cited author’s research, rather than from the perspective of denotative potential (e.g., research acts, cognition acts, and
discourse acts), which deals with processes the writer went through in the research. As for self-sourced reporting clauses, we adopt the denotative potential of reporting verbs, because we want to figure out how writers position themselves as a writer, a researcher and an opinion-holder. The detailed coding scheme is elaborated as follows.

For reporting verbs in other-sourced reporting clauses, we will follow G. Thompson and Ye’s (1991) categorization of reporting verbs under the heading of evaluative potential from the perspective of writer’s stance. The specific categorization is cited as follows:

Factive: the writer portrays the author as presenting true information or a correct opinion; for example, acknowledge, bring out, demonstrate, identify, improve, notice, prove, recognize, substantiate, throw light on.

Counter-factive: the writer portrays the author as presenting false information or an incorrect opinion; for example, betray (ignorance), confuse, disregard, ignore, misuse, claim.

Non-factive: the writer gives no clear signal as to her attitude towards the author’s information/opinion; for example, advance, believe, examine, generalize, propose, retain, urge, utilize.

(Adapted from G. Thompson and Ye, 1991, p. 372)

The above coding scheme is adapted from G. Thompson and Ye’s (1991) categorization. The major change in the categorization is the categorization of the reporting verb, claim originally, it is categorized in non-factive category by G. Thompson and Ye (1991). However, based on a series of empirically research findings from Bloch (2010) and Hunston (1993, cited in John, 2012), this reporting verb implies an indication that writer’s stance is different from that of the author’s. Thus, in this study, we categorize the verb claim into counter-factive category.

As for the analysis of reporting verbs in self-sourced reporting clauses, the reporting verbs are categorized from the perspective of denotative potential, following
Hyland’s (1999a) and G. Thompson and Ye’s (1991) categorization. The reason of adopting this categorization is that through the analysis of denotative potential of reporting verbs used in reporting writers’ own work, we could figure out how these writers position themselves as a writer, a researcher and an opinion-holder. Therefore, reporting verbs are categorized into research acts, cognition acts, and discourse acts, the categorization of which is based on their specific processes:

1) *research (real-world) acts*, which occur in statements of findings (e.g., observe, discover, notice, show) or procedures (e.g. analyze, calculate, assay, explore);

2) *Cognition acts*, concerned with mental processes (e.g., believe, conceptualize, suspect, view);

3) *Discourse acts*, which involve verbal expression (e.g. ascribe, discuss, hypothesize, state)

(Hyland, 1999a, p. 349)

Another two terms are borrowed from G. Thompson and Ye’s (1991) categorization, because of the functions that discussion sections normally realize, as indicated in section 1.2.3: comparison of the findings with other research and an explanation of why the results occurred.

4) *Comparing writer acts*: verbs which indicate the writer’s activity of comparing their own work with some other author’s work, usually by means of comparison or contrast; for example, correspond to, accord with, anticipate, contrast with.

5) *Theorizing writer acts*: verbs which indicate the writer use their own work to explain some existed theory; for example, account for, explain, support.

(G. Thompson and Ye, 1991, p. 370)

The detailed coding scheme of reporting clauses can be seen in Figure 3.2.
3.4.3 Procedure for Data Coding and Analysis

The data in this study was coded in a corpus program named UAM Corpus Tool (O’Donnell, 2007). The coding of the data in this study is firstly from the reporting clause level and then from the reporting verb level.

In the coding of data from the reporting clause level, the coding scheme, as categorized in the previous sections, was firstly programmed into the corpus tool, and the features identified in the corpora are manually annotated in the corpus tool. A trial coding session of 20% of the corpora, namely, 2 discussion sections from each of the corpus, was firstly carried out by me and a classmate who was also doing research on academic writing, and the agreement rate reaches approximately 85%. All the discrepant cases were identified and reexamined by both of us. Nearly all the occurrences of the discrepant cases were due to carelessness. After the discussion on the discrepant cases, we recoded the four texts, with an agreement rate of 98%. What’s
more, to ensure the reliability of the data coding, all the texts in the two corpora were recoded by the present writer one month after the first round of coding, and the two rounds of coding showed a high intra-rater agreement rate of approximately 96%. Both the intra-rater and inter-coder agreement rate indicate that the coding of the corpora is reliable.

After the coding, the descriptive data of the different categories between the two corpora were generated by the corpus tool, and all the reporting clauses annotated under different categories were generated and printed out for further analysis.

After the data coding from the clause level, the reporting verbs used were coded. All the reporting clauses generated in the clause-level coding were further constructed into text documents based on their different categorization of reporting clauses and these respective dissertation writers, and then were incorporated into the corpus tool. New coding scheme of reporting verbs were programmed into UAM corpus tool, and then two rounds of coding of 20% of the reporting verbs by both the present writer and a colleague were carried out. This time the emergence of disagreeable items were mostly due to the ambiguity of some of the reporting verbs, since some of them belong to different category in different contexts, which has also been exemplified in G. Thompson and Ye (1991). For example, the verb *conclude* can be categorized into cognition acts or discourse acts, due to the nature of the verb itself. Thus, the two coders discussed those ambiguous verbs based on their respective contexts, and finally reached consensus on those ambiguous items. Similar to the coding of reporting clauses, a second round of coding within an interval of about a
month was conducted by the present writer. The intra-coder and inter-coder agreement rate were approximately 92% and 93% respectively, and all the discrepancies were further examined and solved after the discussion between the two coders.

3.5 Interviews

In this study, the quantitative and qualitative data obtained from the textual analysis could help us to identify and raise awareness of the distributional differences of particular patterns of reporting behavior. However, if the investigation stopped here, it would do little in helping explain the reasons behind those features (Hyland, 2005a). Thus, after the textual analysis, interviews were carried out to some of the writers of the dissertations in the two corpora. The rationale for carrying out the interviews, the selecting of informants for interview as well as the interview questions are discussed in this section.

3.5.1 Informants for the Interview

After the data analysis based on the coding scheme mentioned in previous sections, interviews were carried out to 5 graduates that graduated in 2010 and 2011, the reason being those students who had handed in their dissertation no more than two years ago would be more familiar with their own dissertation and the reasons for choosing particular reporting patterns and would be more clear about the original thought and factors that may have influenced their own choices. As can be seen from Table 3.1 and Table 3.2, SC corpus includes six MA students meeting the requirements of this study, with five in CC corpus. It would be ideal in principle if all the 10 students could be invited for the interview. However, ‘in sampling… that
theory meets the hard realities of time and resources’ (Kemper et al, 2003, p. 273, cited in Dörnyei, 2007). Thus, the choice of the informants in this study was based on convenience or opportunity sampling, where participants in the research meet the criteria of availability, accessibility and their willingness to participate (Dörnyei, 2007).

Altogether there were five informants for interview, two from the 10 MA students doing dissertations in Singapore and three from those in China. The three informants doing dissertations in China are from the two universities chosen, with one from one of the two universities and two from the other.

The interviews were carried out in Mandarin Chinese, because both the present writer and all the informants share the same first language, and it will be easier for communication and understanding between the interviewer and interviewees, so as to ensure the reliability of the interview data. Only one of the informants is still in Singapore pursuing a PhD degree, thus this was the only face to face interview, with digital recording and being further transcribed. The other four informants were in China (three from the CC group and one from SC group), thus the interviews were carried out through instant messaging service of QQ or MSN. All the data obtained were later translated into English by the present writer.

3.5.2 Interview Questions

The interviews were carried out after the analysis of the reporting clauses in Discussion Chapters/Sections in their dissertations. Firstly, the reporting clauses in discussion sections written by the informants were analyzed by the present writer, and
the prominent features in the corpora were identified. Then specific questions concerning the motivations of linguistic choices were raised to the informants, the purpose of which was to figure out their motivations and their own understanding towards the rhetorical effect of a particular reporting behavior.

Hyland (2005a) believes that writing should be manipulated as a reconciled negotiating process between the writer and the institutions and cultures in which the writing is formed, due to the inherent social purposes embedded in writing. Thus, besides questions on features of the reporting clauses, those informants were also invited to talk about their respective academic background which may influence their choice of those linguistic features.

The questions concerning their academic background include explicit instruction and implicit knowledge that have been gained during their MA studies. As the name suggests, explicit instruction refers to the explicit knowledge those informants could have gained in their MA study, which mainly comes from the tutors and supervisors. For example, informants are asked ‘which courses/teachers have helped you most in your MA studies concerning the questions I just raised?’, and ‘why do you think they are helpful?’. Implicit knowledge refers to the knowledge on academic writing obtained from self learning, like readings of books and journal articles. Questions include ‘Is there anything else that you have benefited from other than the instruction from MA courses?’, etc. Requirements from the universities and the department on dissertation writings have also been collected for further comparison.
3.5.3 Procedure of Interview Data Coding

The interview data were analyzed in order to investigate the informants’ own perceptions of the employment of particular linguistic features found in the textual analysis as well as the academic culture that have influenced their reporting behavior in their MA studies. Some of their responses were their understanding and perception directly, and some are less explicitly concerned with their perception on the employment of certain linguistic patterns, but more like a story concerning the process that might have influenced their reporting behavior in academic writing, which was also illuminating in helping us understand their choice.

The basic procedure employed in coding interview data is firstly on the basis of individual case, the job of which is to write up the separate cases independently (Patton, 2002) and then using cross-case analysis, which is used to search ‘for patterns and themes that cut across individual experiences’ (Patton, 2002, p. 57). The concrete procedure is described as follows.

The information obtained from the interview was firstly analyzed and translated based on individual cases. This kind of single case analysis could make sure that the motivation and their own perception of particular linguistic features are grounded in those individual cases and their contexts (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, cited in Patton, 2002).

To ensure the validity of the data, after analysis and translation of the individual interview, data were sent back to the informants to ensure that their perceptions were not misinterpreted (Richards, 2003). They affirmed that my
interpretations could represent their perceptions, with a few minor revisions on the wording based on the interviewees’ feedback.

After confirmation of the individual case interview data, the data were sorted using cross-case analysis, searching ‘for patterns and themes that cut across individual experiences’ (Patton, 2002, p. 57) and having those motivation patterns categorized based on their different learning background. As indicated in the previous section, the interviews were carried out based on the sorted patterns of linguistic features of the informants’ own MA dissertation and their academic background, namely, the explicit and implicit knowledge from their learning. In other words, the sequence of questions might differ, but it was easy to find related items across the cases, which made the cross-case analysis easier.

One of my colleagues was invited to be independent coder and our agreement rate reached 85%. We discussed the discrepancies and confirmed with the informants until we agreed on all the coded items.

To ensure the intra-rater reliability, the coding process was repeated one month after the first round of coding, and the reliability rate reaches 95%, with some discrepancies due to carelessness.

3.5.4 Ethical Issues

Permissions were obtained from all the informants before carrying out the interviews. They are willing to participate in this study, but they prefer to disguise their real names in reporting their views. Thus, pseudonyms were used in this study to maintain the confidentiality.
3.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the methodology adopted in this study. Firstly, I have explained the rationale of the research design and outlined the mixed method research design in this study, which include both textual analysis and interviews. Secondly, the construction of the two corpora in this study, the operationalization of reporting clauses as well as the coding schemes for this study were given in detail, followed by the concrete method of carrying out the interviews as well as the procedure of interview data coding. In the following chapter, the findings obtained from the textual analysis and interviews will be reported.
Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings from the textual analysis and the discourse-based interviews, with research questions raised in Chapter 1 being reiterated and addressed. First, I will summarize the findings from the comparison of the reporting clauses of SC and CC corpora, supported by both quantitative and qualitative data. Next, the informants’ perception towards their preference of reporting clauses and factors that may have influenced their choice of reporting clauses, which were elicited from the interviews, will be presented.

4.2 Findings from Text Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative textual analyses were employed to answer the first two research questions posed in section 1.3., namely, the current situation of authority construction through reporting clauses in discussion sections of Chinese students’ MA dissertation writing in the chosen universities in Singapore and China and the difference between the performance of the two groups of students in SC and CC corpora. The analysis will be reported from the perspective of other-sourced and self-sourced reporting clauses, incorporating the scheme presented in Figure 3.1 on reporting clauses and the scheme in Figure 3.2 on reporting verbs.
4.2.1 Other-sourced Reporting Clauses

Table 4.1 shows the frequency number (N) of types of other-sourced reporting clauses in the two corpora, and the difference in the frequency number (G²) between the two corpora. Because the two corpora vary in the total number of words, the data in this study is normalized into the number of occurrences of specific features per 1,000 words, which is also shown in the table. The frequency number is further calculated using Rayson’s Log-likelihood Calculator (Rayson, undated), expressed by Dunning’s G² ratio, which was employed as a statistical measure to compare the frequency of a specific linguistic feature between two corpora when the total number of words in the two corpora differ (Rayson & Garside, 2000). Higher value of G² ratio indicates more significant difference between the two frequency number (‘a G² ratio of 3.8 or higher is significant at the level of p<0.05, and a G² of 6.6 or higher is significant at p<0.01’) (Gardezi & Nesi, 2009, p. 242).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>SC (total words: 28966)</th>
<th>CC (total words: 22516)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Percent (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Units</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>-non-research</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
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<td>-research</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>RESEARCH</td>
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<tr>
<td>-integral citation</td>
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<td>40.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-non-integral citation</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>55.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-general reference</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 Frequency number of Other-sourced Reporting Clauses in CC and SC corpora

As shown in Table 4.1, the frequency number of the various categories of other-sourced reporting clauses differs significantly except in integral citation and
general reference statistically. After further examination of the data in the two corpora, I found that even though the frequency number of integral citation and general reference does not differ significantly, their specific usage in the two corpora differs.

This section compares the prominent features in other-sourced reporting clauses from the comparison of the two corpora quantitatively and qualitatively, namely, the total frequency number of citations and non-integral citations (section 4.2.1.1), the use of general reference (section 4.2.1.2) and reporting verbs used in integral citations (section 4.2.1.3) from the perspective of authority construction.

4.2.1.1 Citation and Non-integral Citation

As mentioned in section 2.2, other-sourced reporting clauses are associated with citations (Charles, 2006). Based on the corpora in this study, all the other-sourced reporting clauses, except the non-research and general reference ones, are citations.

From Table 4.1, it is obvious that the SC group used many more citations than the CC group, with 12.01 other-sourced reporting clauses used in SC corpus, which is more than twice the number in CC corpus, and based on the G² value, the difference is significant at p<0.01. The reason for this difference will further be investigated in a later section of this chapter, through interviewing some of the MA dissertation writers, the informants of this study.

From the comparison, another interesting feature between the two corpora in the use of other-sourced reporting clauses is that the major difference in the use of citations is realized through the use of non-integral citations. As Table 4.1 demonstrates, the frequency number of integral citations used in the SC and CC
corpora is 4.87 and 3.95 per 1,000 words respectively, and the $G^2$ value is 2.40, which indicates that the difference in frequency number of integral citations does not differ much, whereas the number of non-integral citations used in the SC and CC corpora is 6.70 and 0.76 per 1,000 words respectively, and the $G^2$ value is 133.03, which confirms that the frequency number of non-integral citations makes the major difference in the total number of citations used in the two corpora. This sharp contrast in frequency number indicates that MA students in SC corpus employs much more non-integral citation in other-sourced reporting than those in CC corpus, and the frequency number of integral citation is similar.

If we take a closer look at the non-integral citations in both corpora, there are also some more features worth noting. In coding the non-integral citations in the corpora, as mentioned in section 3.4.2.1, I coded as one instance when I met with a parenthesis, no matter how many references there are in that parenthesis. I have chosen to do so because all the references in one particular parenthesis were used to support one argument or be representative of one group of people holding a particular viewpoint, which constitutes one reporting clause. However, when we take a closer look at the non-integral citations in the two corpora, there is more distinct diversity beyond the number between 6.70 and 0.76. Through detailed calculation of the number of references in the form of non-integral citation, I find that altogether there are 432 and 21 in the SC and CC corpora respectively, with 149.1 and 9.33 references per 1,000 words in the corpora (shown in Table 4.2). The repeated references are included in the counting because the same article might be referenced in their
dissertations from different angles. Thus, the average references used in other sourced reporting is 2.23 in SC corpus and 1.24 in CC corpus, with the average number in SC corpus almost double that in CC corpus. The difference in the frequency number of references per non-integral citation shows that more references are used by students in SC corpus, at least in the form of non-integral citation, which indicates that they have read more related literature.

<table>
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<th>Feature</th>
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<th>CC (total words: 22516)</th>
<th>G² value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Non-integral-citation</td>
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<td>17 N/1,000</td>
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</tr>
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<td>References in non-integral citation</td>
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<td>21 0.93</td>
<td>+361.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of references per non-integral citation</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Number of references and non-integral citations

Typical examples of non-integral citations from the SC corpus are:

Example 1:

*The literature has pointed to them as a possible explanation for Chinese students' differing perceptions of plagiarism from those widely sanctioned in the Western academia (e.g. Bloch & Chi, 1995; Hayes & Introna, 2005; Matalene, 1985; Pennycook, 1996; Scollon, 1995). (SC)*

Example 2:

*The reason why plagiarism in exam essays tended to be considered acceptable might be related to the emphasis on knowledge recall in exams in Chinese schools (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Matalene, 1985; Sapp, 2002; Tweed & Lehman, 2002) and the common practice of memorising / imitating model texts for exams among Chinese students. (SC)*

Whereas typical examples from CC corpus are:

Example 3:

*First of all, the general trend of test items about culture of knowledge and culture of communication reflects the current importance of culture teaching in college English education while verifies the education idea of*
the equal importance of culture of knowledge and culture of communication (Hu & Cao, 1997). (CC)

Example 4:

This finding is supported by some previous studies (Pintrich, 2000). (CC)

In Example 4, even though the writer of the dissertation has mentioned that his/her finding is supported by some previous studies, there is only one reference in the parenthesis, which seems odd.

As can be seen from both the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the use of non-integral citations, many more non-integral citations are used by SC group and the number of references per non-integral citations is higher in SC group than that of CC group. Non-integral citation is normally used to serve as supporting materials for the writer’s argument, regardless of whether the writer’s attitude towards the statement is positive or negative. The number of references per non-integral citation could demonstrate that more related literature could be used to uphold the writers’ argument, and this demonstrates the writer’s authority at least from the perspective of dialogic awareness. Specifically, in this study, the students in SC group show more dialogic awareness through their use of non-integral citations. However, it may be the case that the use of more references in each other-sourced reporting clause doesn’t necessarily lead to more convincing argument and the sharp contrast in the number of references per non-integral reporting clauses will be further explored from the interviews and in Chapter 5 Discussion.
4.2.1.2 Use of General Reference

As can be seen from Table 4.1, the number of general reference in reporting clauses is very similar on the surface, with the frequency number being 0.45 and 0.98 in SC and CC corpus respectively, and the G² value (5.16) indicates that the frequency number differ significantly at the level of p<0.05. If we take a closer look at the clauses and the sentences around the particular clause, the situation is quite different between the two corpora.

Take a reporting clause with general reference in CC corpus for example:

Example 5:

As is known, metacognitive theory and the use of metacognitive strategies play a very important role in foreign language learning, as many scholars have pointed out that there is high correlation between the use of metacognitive strategies and English scores. (CC)

The use of this sentence is by no means problematic on its own. However, I searched around this sentence, and found no trace of the so-called many scholars mentioned in the text. The use of many scholars in the reporting clause indicates that the reported clause or reported statement is based on some research done by those many scholars, but unfortunately, we could not find any report on those scholars’ research. What is surprising is that most of the other-sourced reporting clauses in the form of general references in CC corpus do not have supporting details, which makes the argument difficult to hold water.

By contrast, the use of general reference in reporting clauses from the SC corpus is quite different. Take a sentence from a corresponding dissertation which is also on metacognition:
Example 6:

This finding is consistent with several previous studies on metacognitive strategy use and awareness in effective and ineffective listeners elicited through other means of analysis. Goh (1997) found... In Goh’s conclusion, ... (Goh, 1997, p. 361). In another study, Goh (2002a) found that ... Her comparison .... Through ..., Vandergrift (2003a) also reported that ... (SC)

This sentence is also based on research on metacognition, and if we pay attention to sentences that follow this sentence, we will find that a series of studies carried out by Goh and Vandergrift are discussed to support this argument.

Generally, the linguistic resources of employing general reference could help writers to construct authority because it indicates that some, not one, previous literature could support the writers’ proposition. However, if it is used improperly, like in example 5, the effect of general reference would be ineffective.

4.2.1.3 Reporting Verbs and Nouns Used in Other-sourced Reporting Clauses

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the reporting clauses investigated in this study include not only the traditional reporting clauses of mental and verbal process, but also a list of others, among which one important category is nominalization of the reporting verbs. Thus, in analyzing the reporting verbs of this study, nominalized verbs in the form of nouns (for example, findings, analysis, etc.) are also included, which also helps to position the writer’s stance and help them provide evaluation to the reported clauses.

The reporting verbs/nouns employed in other-sourced reporting clauses of the two corpora are analyzed based on G. Thompson and Ye’s (1991) categorization from
the perspective of evaluative potential (factive, non-factive, and counter-factive) from writers’ stance, as indicated in section 3.4.2.2. The result is shown in Table 4.3.

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<td>Factive</td>
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<td>Non-factive</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter-factive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 Use of reporting verbs in integral citations

As is shown in Table 4.3, most of the reporting verbs used in integral citation to report others’ work in both SC and CC groups are non-factive ones, with the percentage being 69.23% and 77.11% respectively. Very few counter-factive reporting verbs are used in both groups. The G² values in different categories of reporting verbs do not differ much. The above results demonstrate that the percentages of using factive, non-factive and counter-factives reporting verbs are similar in both SC and CC groups, and non-factive reporting verbs were most frequently used.

From the total number of reporting verbs/nouns used in integral citations (117 and 83 in SC and CC respectively), shown in Table 4.3, and the number of integral citations (141 and 89 in SC and CC respectively), shown in Table 4.1, it can be easily calculated that there are 24 and 6 instances of integral citations without reporting verbs (in the form of verbs and nominalized verbs) in SC and CC corpus respectively. Specifically, they are in the form of adjunct of reporting (according to). The employment of reporting adjunct could function to introduce the source of reporting, but with little space to indicate writer’s stance towards the reported clauses. The
employment of reporting adjuncts play similar role as non-factive reporting verbs in constructing writer stance.

As can be seen from Table 4.3, the most frequently used reporting verbs in the corpora are non-factive verbs. Thus, non-factive verbs, together with the adjunct of reporting in the form of prepositional phrase like *according to*, form the biggest constituents of reporting in the corpora, through which the writer does not indicate what his/her stance is towards the reported clauses.

We then take a closer look at the factive and counter-factive reporting verbs used in SC and CC corpus to examine how they are used in context.

**Factive reporting verbs**

The distribution of factive reporting verbs in the two corpora does not differ significantly, as can be seen from Table 3.4, with $G^2$ value being 2.65. A more detailed analysis finds that the use of factive verbs in both SC and CC group does not differ much.

**Counter-factive reporting verbs**

As is presented in Table 4.3, only 1 and 2 instances of counter-factive verbs are employed in SC and CC corpus respectively. Here are examples from each of the two corpora:

Example 7

*Wen Qiafang (1996) claims that self-evaluation is the very core of management strategies and each decision made in the managing process is based on evaluation. Besides guiding students on how to make plans and do self-monitoring in English learning, it is also important to guide them on how to make self-evaluation, including the*
evaluation of learning effect, the use of learning strategies and the completion of plans. (CC)

In Example 7, from the context, it is easy to figure out that the writer quotes the sourced author Wen to support his/her proposition of the importance of self-evaluation. However, the choice of the reporting verb claim may make readers confused concerning what the writer’s stance towards the sourced author is. The other example employing counter-factive reporting verb claim in CC corpus is also mistakenly used.

The following example, Example 8, is from SC corpus:

Example 8

The findings from both the textual judgment and the questionnaire data suggest that the participants tended to perceive plagiarism considerably differently from the Western academia. This does not seem to fully bear out Flowerdew and Li’s (2007) speculation about the macro shift of non-Western academic discourse conventions to Western ones, although a longitudinal study is needed to tease out whether this macro shift actually occurs. (SC)

In Example 8, the writer is comparing his/her own research finding with Flowerdew and Li’s speculation, and their speculation is denied by the writer’s research finding. Here the writer employs the nominalized form of reporting verb speculate to indicate his/her different attitude towards the proposed argument.

In summary, this section has presented the finding from the analysis of other-sourced reporting clauses. The result indicates that more non-integral citations are used by students in SC corpus, and the specific use of reporting verbs by the two groups of students also differs. In the next section, we will continue to examine self-sourced reporting clauses.
4.2.2 Self-sourced Reporting Clauses

Table 4.4 presents the findings from the analysis of self-sourced reporting clauses. The total number, percentage in each corpus and standardized number (N/1000 words), and the comparison between the two corpora (G² value) of each self-sourced type are presented, including emphasized averral, hidden averral with internal and general attribution and averral without attribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>SC (total words: 28966)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>CC (total words: 22516)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>G² value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Percent (%)</td>
<td>N/1,000</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Percent (%)</td>
<td>N/1,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Units</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>10.43</td>
<td></td>
<td>146</td>
<td>6.48</td>
<td></td>
<td>+23.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELF-SOURCED</td>
<td>N=302</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N=146</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-emphasized averral</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>13.58</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17.12</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>+0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-hidden averral with internal attribution</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>76.16</td>
<td>7.94</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>71.23</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>+22.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-hidden averral with general attribution</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-averral without attribution</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10.26</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11.64</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>+1.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Self-sourced reporting clauses

As can be seen from Table 4.4, the percentage of the four self-sourced type (with hidden averral with general attribution missing in both corpora) is similar in the two corpora, which indicates the writing style of making self-reporting is similar in the two groups of Chinese students, at least on the surface. As for the frequency number, the total number of self-sourced reporting clauses differ between the two corpora (G² value=23.27), which is mainly realized through the frequency difference in hidden averral with internal attribution (G² value=22.28). In what follows, I closely examine these three self-sourced types (emphasized averral, hidden averral with internal
attribution and averral without attribution), and explore the difference behind the similarity.

4.2.2.1 Emphasized Averral

As indicated in section 3.4.2.1, emphasized averral refers to self-sourced reporting clauses in which the writers emphasize and foreground their own role in a particular statement, attribute the statement to themselves and take full responsibility (Hunston, 2001), which can be realized through first person pronouns (I, exclusive and inclusive we) and the (present) writer. As indicated by Harwood (2005b), inclusive and exclusive we could be ambiguous to differentiate because English language itself does not make a clear distinction between their uses. Thus, to distinguish inclusive we from the exclusive one, we have to rely on the context to predict their rhetorical functions, and accordingly make decisions whether they are inclusive or exclusive ones.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of emphasized averral</th>
<th>The writer (N/Percent)</th>
<th>I, my (N/Percent)</th>
<th>We (inclusive) (N/Percent)</th>
<th>We (exclusive) (N/Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>7/28%</td>
<td>4/16%</td>
<td>14/56%</td>
<td>0/0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>0/0%</td>
<td>35/85.37%</td>
<td>3/7.32%</td>
<td>3/7.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$G^2$ value</td>
<td>+8.05</td>
<td>-36.70</td>
<td>+5.22</td>
<td>+4.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5: Number and percentage of different source form in emphasized averral

As seen from Table 4.4, the total frequency number and percentage of source form in emphasized averral do not vary significantly, but the form employed to realize emphasized averral differs significantly between the two corpora, indicated by the $G^2$ values of the use of different first person pronouns, as listed in Table 4.5. Even though all the forms of self mentioning, the writer, I, we (inclusive and exclusive), can help
the writers construct the presence of themselves, the focus of those forms differs, which has been reviewed in section 2.4.

As shown in Table 4.5, in CC corpus, most of the emphasized aerral reporting clauses are realized by inclusive *we* and *the (present) writer*, which in a sense weakens the visibility of the writer, thus the writer will take responsibility for the statement but in a delegated form. For example in inclusive *we*, the writer will take the responsibility, but since the argument or conclusion is drawn by not only the writer himself/herself but also the readers, the readers will feel engaged and the writer visibility and responsibility will get weakened. In SC corpus, most of the emphasized aerral are realized through singular first person pronoun *I*, which makes the writer more directly visible to the readers and through this, the writers make clear that they will take full responsibility for any statements or arguments that followed, and construct a more authoritative image.

To some extent, the different preference of the subject (*the present writer* or first person pronouns) of emphasized aerral indicates that the ways the MA students in the two groups prefer to position themselves in relation to their statements and their audience differ. Besides serving as subject of the clauses, the pronouns also help to change the visibility of the writer (Harwood, 2005c), with the help of different reporting verbs (Ivanič, 1998; Tang & John, 1999).

We now examine the reporting verbs used in emphasized aerral reporting clauses, and more traces of difference in the writers’ positioning of themselves between the two groups of MA students could be revealed. Here we categorize those
reporting verbs using the coding scheme for reporting verbs of this study (as is shown in Figure 3.2), namely, *research acts, cognition acts, discourse acts, comparing writer acts,* and *theorizing writer acts.*

The analysis of the reporting verbs using the coding scheme for reporting verbs shown in Figure 3.2 reveals that all the verbs used in emphasized averral are *research acts* and *discourse acts,* no *cognition acts,* *comparing writer acts* and *theorizing writer acts* verb appears in CC corpus, and in SC corpus, most of the verbs are also *research acts* and *discourse acts,* with only 1 *cognition acts,* no *comparing writer acts* and *theorizing writer acts,* and the emphasized averral clause with *cognition acts* are listed below as examples:

Example 9

*I believe this argument is applicable to students from both streams.* (SC)

From the above example, we can find that this novice writer in SC corpus does not at all hesitate in expressing and taking responsibility for his/her argument, which can be seen from the employment of the *cognition acts* reporting verb (*believe*) and the employment of emphasized first pronoun *I,* through which the argument is strengthened and a strong writer authority is constructed. On the other hand, writers in CC corpus employ the pronoun *the present writer* and inclusive *we* more frequently, and these pronouns collocate with *research acts* and *discourse acts* reporting verbs like *write, analyze, measure, find,* etc., which show a lower writer visibility and construct a comparatively less obvious writer authority.

To conclude, most of the self-sourced reporting clauses with first person pronouns in both SC and CC corpora have collocated with reporting verbs of discourse acts and research acts to realize the rhetorical functions of guiding the readers through
the text and explaining research procedures respectively (Hyland, 2002b), which are categorized as low-risk rhetorical functions by Hyland (2002b), and those rhetorical functions are regarded as showing less authorial presence. Only a few self-sourced reporting clauses with first person pronouns are employed to realize rhetorical functions of elaborating arguments (Hyland, 2002b).

4.2.2.2 Hidden Averral

As indicated in section 3.4.2.1, self-sourced reporting clauses can also be realized through hidden averral with general attribution and internal attribution. Hidden averral with internal attribution refers to those reporting clauses where the writer attributes responsibility of statements to their own work (e.g., *this chapter reports*... ; *table 3 shows*...). In hidden averral with internal attributions, writers ‘obscure the fact that they are the source of proposition’ (Charles, 2006, p. 500) and persuade the readers that it is not the writers themselves, but the objective fact in the writing, who are reporting, which makes the writing seem more objective and make writers less visible.

The frequency of reporting verbs used in hidden averral with internal attribution, using the coding scheme in Figure 3.2 is summarized in Table 4.6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>SC (total words: 28966)</th>
<th>CC (total words: 22516)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Percent (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Units</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>7.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting verb type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-research acts</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>43.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-cognition acts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-discourse acts</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>20.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-comparing acts</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>26.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-theorizing acts</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6 Reporting verbs used in hidden averral with internal attribution
As can be seen from Table 4.6, there is no cognition act in both groups, which may be easy to explain, since the source of reporting in hidden averral with internal attribution is writer’s work, not human-beings.

The $G^2$ values of different reporting verb types between the two groups indicate that the major difference between the total frequency of hidden averral with internal attribution is realized by reporting clauses of discourse acts and comparing acts, since their $G^2$ values are 8.62 (which is above 3.8) and 16.49 (which is above 6.6), which indicates that the difference is significant at the level of $p<0.05$ and $p<0.01$ respectively.

According to Hyland (1999a), *discourse acts* in reporting verbs are verbal expression, which, in self-sourced reporting clauses, are actually used to guide the writer through the text. For example:

Example 10

*This part will discuss the result of data analysis.* (CC)

Example 11

*In this chapter, major findings of this study and their relevance to previous studies will be discussed.* (SC)

Examples 10 and 11 serve to guide the readers through the text (Crismore & Farnsworth, 1990). By employing the above sentences, the writer is previewing what is going to be talked about in the next part of the dissertation, which serves the function of guiding the readers in the dissertation. The comparison of *discourse acts* in reporting verbs indicates that MA students in CC group employ significantly fewer reporting clauses which function to structure the discourse (Hyland, 2002c, p. 255).
The other difference in using reporting verbs in hidden averral through internal attribution in self-sourced reporting clauses lies in comparing acts of reporting verbs. These verbs such as accord with and contrast with are employed by writers to compare the arguments or research results from their research with previous research in the community, which also helps to construct authority of writer through positioning their argument and research results in the larger academic community and thus contributing to the large academic conversation. For example:

Example 12
The importance of doing listening practice emphasized by the participants here corresponds to Graham’s (2006) observation. (SC)

Example 13
The finding in this study can to some extent prove the conclusion by Lu (2006). (CC)

The comparatively more employment of comparing reporting clauses indicates that MA students in SC corpus are more conscious of the academic convention of positioning their research in the academic community and thus construct more writer authority and be more qualified would-be members of this community.

4.2.2.3 Averral without Attribution

As can be seen from the Table 4.4, averral without attribution is employed in both groups at a percentage of about 10%, and the $G^2$ value between the two groups is 1.38, which is smaller than 3.8, indicating that the difference is not significant between the two groups. When reporting their own work, students in both groups employ some averral without attribution, which did not attribute their proposition to a particular source, and the readers have to infer themselves. Of course, writers have to take
responsibility for all propositions in their writing. However, the use of averral without attribution could help them to make a seemingly more objective argument, which is normally realized by passive voice and *it* subject. For example:

Example 14

*It was found that the verbal predicators of research acts such as show or prove dominated those that-constructions and conveyed a high degree of certainty in abstracts. (SC)*

Example 15

*It is advised that teachers could give an instruction on strategies use so that students would be conscious of making use of strategies when doing listening practice. (CC)*

In Example 14, we can infer from the context that it is the writer him/herself who had the findings based on his/her own research. However, in the writing, s/he did not attribute it to him/herself nor elsewhere like his/her research, but simply use an objective sentence pattern *it was found that*.... Similarly, in Example 15, based on his/her research result, the writer put forward the advice but did not give any indication of his/her existence in this sentence. In averral without attribution self-sourced reporting clauses, we can see less writer visibility and the writer did not show responsibility for the statements.

4.2.3 Summary of Findings in Textual Analysis

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of reporting clauses in discussion sections of MA dissertations has provided some findings concerning the difference in the use of reporting clauses between the SC and CC groups.

For other-sourced reporting clauses, SC group employs more other-sourced reporting clauses, which indicates that they use more citations in discussion sections.
SC group also uses more non-integral citations than CC group, and the average number of references in non-integral citations also outnumbers that used in CC corpus. The specific way of using general references has also been examined, which indicated that some of the MA students in CC group do not follow the convention in academic discourse that propositions shared by the discourse community should have theoretical or empirical support and should not be taken for granted. Reporting verbs have also been examined, using G. Thompson and Ye’s (1991) categorization. The findings indicate that non-factive verbs are most frequently employed by both groups. Detailed examination of the specific use of reporting verbs shows that there are some ambiguity between the stance writers conveyed through reporting verbs and the real stance reflected from the context in CC corpus.

The examination of self-sourced reporting clauses also shows some trends in authority construction. Emphasized averral is not frequently employed by Chinese students, even though there is some difference in the specific use of emphasized averral between SC and CC groups. Comparatively, more authority and visibility is portrayed by Chinese students in SC group, specifically by using first person pronouns and reporting verbs of cognition acts (see Table 4.6). The large number of hidden averral with internal attribution of self-sourced reporting verbs shows that Chinese students prefer to obscure their visibility in text through attributing the responsibility to their own work. The difference between the two groups lies in the frequency of reporting verbs reflecting discourse acts and comparing acts. Averral without attribution is also frequently employed by Chinese writers in authority construction.
In the next section, the 5 dissertation writers’ motivations of employing those reporting patterns and their perceptions on factors that could influence their reporting patterns will be investigated through interviewing some of the writers in SC and CC groups.

4.3 Findings from Interviews

As elaborated in section 3.5, interview of this study includes two parts. The first part is dissertation writers’ own perceptions on the use of reporting clauses in their dissertations, and the second part is concerned with factors that may influence their choice of reporting clauses in their MA studies. Findings from the interviews were analyzed in response to interview questions.

The data elicited from the interviews reveals a range of reasons that account for the difference in the use of reporting clauses, which could be attributed to the explicit knowledge gained from the institutions/universities/departments, tutors and supervisors, and the implicit knowledge gained from academic reading. This section will thus report the findings gained from the interviews from the perspectives of their motivation of choosing particular reporting patterns and factors that may have influenced their choice, such as explicit requirements from institutions/universities/departments, guidance and help from tutor and supervisors both explicitly and implicitly, and knowledge gained from their own reading both explicitly and implicitly.

To protect the informants, all the names used in this study are pseudonyms, following Shi’s (2008) way of naming participants. The initial letter of the
pseudonyms indicates the country where those Chinese students receive their MA education: C for China (Carl, Cherry and Cindy) and S (Sam and Simon) for Singapore. Carl received his MA studies in a Chinese university and has selected academic writing related course during his MA studies. Cherry and Cindy are from another Chinese university, but they said they did not select academic writing related course during MA studies. Sam and Simon are from SC group, and Sam has taken academic writing related course during MA studies whereas Simon did not select related courses.

4.3.1 Motivations for Employing Different Reporting Clauses

4.3.1.1 Motivations for Other-sourced Reporting

The major difference in other-sourced reporting has been reported in section 4.2, which is mainly realized by the frequency number of citations, number and use of integral citations, use of general reference and reporting verbs. Interviews concerning other-sourced reporting are mainly carried out based on these distinctive features from textual analysis.

When asked about their motivations of using citations in the discussion sections, the answer varies among the informants. Both informants from SC group recognized the importance of citing in academic writing, and they both employ a lot of citations in their writing. One of the informants from SC group, when asked why citations are used, said:

_I used lots of citations in my dissertation, because I wanted to provide a comprehensive picture of studies in this field and I was trying to demonstrate that I have read those papers. I think I was enlightened by_
courses concerning academic writing, requirements from tutors, as well as my own readings. (Sam)

The other informant from SC group also consciously recognized the importance of citations in academic writing, saying that:

*I think the citations in my dissertation include all the studies in the field, at least the most important ones. There are mainly three purposes: I cited the professionals’ voice to make my argument sound and persuasive; if readers are interested in a particular topic, it will be easy for them to refer to the original paper; I think it is academic convention that we should cite others’ work because my tutors from many courses have asked me to cite in assignments.* (Simon)

My informants from CC group have varied explanation towards their use of citations. Cindy and Cherry share similar experience that:

*I don’t consciously know that I should cite when I discuss my findings, and I think most of the citations in my writing is used to support my argument. I didn’t do much in comparing my research findings with other researchers, because I actually wasn’t able to find related research in Chinese journals, and I remembered I did find some in foreign journals, but I didn’t have access to them.* (Cherry)

And Cindy admits that:

*I am afraid some of the sentences are paraphrased from my readings, but I did not give it a source because some of them are from dissertations of similar topic, which I downloaded from the internet and they are not published.* (Cindy)

The other informant from China, Carl, also complains about the lack of resource but seems more fortunate, he says:

*I have learned from English for specific purpose course that I should cite to support my argument and compare my research results with previous research. Previously I had problems in finding related literature because of limited resources in my university library. However, my supervisor helped me a lot and he sent me many of the related papers.* (Carl)

As for their perceptions on the citation patterns of integral and non-integral citations, and the number of references per non-integral citation (before this interview
question, I had explained the difference of integral and non-integral citations to the informants), informants from SC group hold similar opinions that:

I think if the cited author is not very famous and when I want to emphasize the argument, there is no need to use integral citations; otherwise, it will have impact on the fluency of my writing. I listed lots of reference per non-integral citation because it could help to give an overall picture of the related literature and I want to show that I have read most of them. (Sam)

Surprisingly, the informants from CC corpus show little knowledge of the difference between the functions of integral and non-integral citations (before asking about their perceptions, the underlying meaning of integral and non-integral citations had been explained to them), and they reported that they knew the linguistic forms of non-integral citations, but did not use much.

When asked about their use of general reference in dissertations, informants in SC group thought that this strategy could help them to demonstrate that they knew a certain number of research that could help to support their argument. Informants from CC group held similar points, and they admitted that the major reason that they did not discuss their research results in light of the previous literature was they did not have access to relevant resources and they could only give a general reference but did not go further to elaborate.

Functions of different reporting verbs in positioning the writers’ stance in academic writing were recognized by the informants from SC group, and they consciously knew the different stance that reporting verbs could carry. One of them noted that:

I learn the difference of reporting verbs and I could portray my stance through the use of them from academic writing course and through
reading related literature concerning reporting verbs. What’s more, the large amount of reading pack in my MA studies also contributes a lot for forming a concrete understanding. (Sam)

The other informant from SC group revealed that he did not select academic writing related course during MA studies, but his readings of literature and teachers’ feedback on his assignment had helped a lot in his understanding of reporting verbs, but he modestly said he did not know systematically about the exact difference, only with an intuition, and he was very interested to know that there are some related studies concerning reporting verbs.

The informants from CC corpus admitted that their choice of reporting verbs was arbitrary, the major criteria was try to avoid repetition of reporting verbs and clauses, and they did not think much about the stance that could be carried by those reporting verbs. They were also very interested to know that there are related studies on reporting verbs. One of the informants said,

In the course of writing for specific purposes, my teacher has told me the difference of tense of verbs would influence the stance that could portray, but I don’t know much about the verb themselves, and I think most reporting verbs could be used interchangeably, since the explanation of those words in dictionary is similar. (Carl)

4.3.1.2 Motivations in Self-sourced Reporting

The major difference in self-sourced reporting among the two groups is realized through specific use of emphasized averral (mainly through first person pronoun), hidden averral with general attribution (mainly through reporting verbs of discourse acts and comparing acts). Thus, the interview focuses on informants’ motivation in these prominent differences.
When asked about their perceptions of using first person pronouns in academic writing, the informants in SC group indicated that they were not at all opposed to the use of first person pronouns, and they have used them a lot in their writing. One of the informants from SC group, said he had noted the different opinions on using first person pronouns held by different people in academic community, and he personally accepted the use of first person pronouns in academic writing:

I know previously some people suggests that first person pronouns should not be used in academic writing, but now I think the academic community is gradually encouraging people, especially novice writers to use first person pronouns in their writings. I think the latter view is influenced by the post-modernism, which hold that nothing is absolutely objective, and I agree with this view. On the other hand, I also think the use of first person pronouns could help to engage readers and make the points of view more easily accepted by readers. (Sam)

The other informant from SC group also used a lot of first person pronouns in his writing, but did not use first person pronoun to pronounce his arguments. He used first person pronouns mostly in textual guidance and told readers what he had done in the research:

I think I should use first person pronouns when I am telling the readers what I have done in the research and what I will do in my writing because of several reasons. Firstly, everyone knows that these things are done by me, not someone else. Secondly, I think using first person pronouns could portray a confident self to readers. Thirdly, I have read many research articles which also use first person pronouns. However, I prefer not to use first person pronouns to express my opinions, because I am still a small potato, I don’t think it is suitable for me to argue in such a straightforward way. (Simon)

The informants from CC corpus held different opinions, one of the informants said,

In my draft dissertation, I used some first person pronouns, but later I read some guidance book on academic writing, and it says we should
not use first person pronouns in academic writing, the use of which will make the writing too subjective. (Cherry)

Another informant from CC corpus also said,

My teachers and supervisors told me that I’d better not use first person pronouns in academic writing. So sometimes when I think I have to mention myself in the writing, I will use the present writer, which makes the writing more objective. (Carl)

Cindy was not against the use of first person pronouns in her writing, but she preferred inclusive we more, because she thought it was better to engage the readers and the use of I and exclusive we is too subjective.

When discussing the use of discourse acts in hidden averral with internal attribution, one of the informants from SC corpus said,

I use those sentences to help the readers read my dissertation. I have read from some articles or books that dissertation is normally long, and these sentences will help them read through the whole dissertation and not get lost. Besides, English is a writer responsible language, which means the writing has to be reader friendly. (Sam)

The other informant from SC corpus had different experience:

I actually do not know why I should have used so many sentences to guide the readers. In my draft dissertation, I didn’t write it in this way, my supervisor suggest me to add those, and I always trust him and know it is better, even though I do not know exactly why it is better. (Simon)

Given the fact that the number of sentences with discourse acts by writers in CC corpus is fewer, and their views are also different from the SC group:

I don’t know whether there is rules for writing sentences to guide the readers. I personally think there is no need to add those sentences because the readers could know what has been done and what will be done in the previous/following section or chapters from the context. (Cherry)

The other two informants say they did not consciously notice the functions of sentences with discourse acts.
As for comparing acts in hidden averral with general attribution, the informants’ answers are similar to those in citing practices. Some of the informants from CC group do not consciously know they should compare their research results with the previous research, and some do know but they have limited access to research articles, especially to those published in foreign journals.

4.3.2 Contributing Factors that may Influence Student’s Use of Reporting Clauses

Informants’ perceptions concerning factors that have influenced their writing of discussion sections, especially in reporting behavior, differ a lot, originating from their different learning experience.

The informants from SC group, who have taken academic writing related course, says,

I think I have gained much from the course of academic writing, from which I have known the available linguistic resources which I could use in my writing when reporting my own work and others’ work, even though I might not be able to do very well, but I consciously know the difference. Before I wrote my dissertation, I have also read the handbook for dissertation writing from our department, from which I know consciously what is valued by the examiners, and I know which direction I should work towards. I also think I have learned much by reading, you know, the reading pack in this university is famous among Chinese students, which was a burden for us, but now I think I really gain a lot from that once frustrating experience. The specific requirements for course assignments also helps much in understanding what is valued in academic community, so is teachers’ feedback for my assignments. My supervisor also helps me much in the writing. (Sam)

The other informant, who did not select academic writing related course, says,

My supervisor helps much in my dissertation writing. He has provided much guidance in my writing and he gives quite a lot of useful suggestion when I revised my dissertation. Of course, I think the reading also plays an important role in my writing. (Simon)
The informants from CC group held slightly different opinions:

*I don’t think I have learned much in my MA studies. For my dissertation, since the university only provide guidance on word limit and format and there is no available academic writing related course for us to choose, I read many senior’s dissertations and finish mine. I didn’t read many English articles because they are not available. I am afraid my supervisor did not help me much either. In the revision process, I think he focuses more on the use of punctuation and format of the references. He is too busy.* (Cindy)

The other informant from the same university seems luckier:

*I think my supervisor is of great help in my writing. She provides lots of help and suggestions in my writing process and on my draft.* (Cherry)

The informant from the other university, who has taken academic writing related courses, says,

*I think I have gained much from the academic writing course, which basically provide me with an overall picture of what is academic writing and what should be included in my dissertation. My supervisor also helps me much for providing me with suggestions and feedback, what’s more important, he generously shared related reading pack with me, which is really helpful.* (Carl)

In summary, the interviews show that these MA students’ motivation in reporting behavior and their perceptions on factors that have influenced their authority construction in dissertation writing differ. Specifically, MA students in SC group know consciously or unconsciously about the importance of authority construction, which can be seen from their perceptions on the use of other-sourced and self-sourced reporting clauses. The situation among CC group is more complicated. Some of the students from CC group know consciously about the importance of authority construction but they have limited access to needed resources and some others do not even know about the construction of authority and ways to realize their authority in their writing. The reasons and factors of the differences have also been explored,
which mainly can be attributed to explicit and implicit knowledge from the university, courses and tutors.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented major findings from quantitative and qualitative textual analysis and interviews with some of the dissertation writers. It reveals some similar and different patterns between the two groups of Chinese MA students in their performance of academic reporting and authority construction. It also explores the factors that may influence their different performance in reporting. The next chapter will discuss the authority construction among Chinese writers and factors that may have influenced their authority construction in academic reporting through reporting clauses, so as to provide pedagogical implication for future teaching of academic writing to Chinese writers.
Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I will provide a discussion of the major research findings presented in Chapter 4, in relation to previous research findings on reporting clauses and in response to research questions raised in section 1.3. Specifically, I will first discuss Chinese students’ authority construction through reporting clauses and compare the performance between Chinese students doing MA studies in Singapore and China. Then, factors that may influence the difference between the two groups of Chinese students will be discussed. This chapter ends with a brief summary of the discussions.

5.2 Chinese students’ Authority Construction and the Comparison between SC and CC Groups

As indicated in previous chapters, authority construction refers to both writers’ awareness of positioning their work in the academic community and their ability to assert their own voice in the academic conversation, which could be realized by the use of reporting clauses (Tang, 2009). It appears from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of discussion sections of the selected MA dissertations conducted in Chapter 4 that Chinese students who receive their MA studies in Singapore did better than those in China from the perspective of authority construction in reporting clauses.

In this section, the first and second research questions will be discussed. Specifically, Chinese students’ performance in authority construction through
reporting clauses and the difference between SC and CC groups are discussed, from the perspective of self-sourced and other-sourced reporting. Both textual analysis and part of the interview findings presented in Chapter 4 will be drawn upon.

5.2.1 Other-sourced Reporting Clauses

Tang (2009) has argued that although student writing is normally read by supervisors and examiners, the dialogic/heteroglossic feature of their writings makes their work also communication between the student writer and the wider disciplinary community, which makes authority construction important in students’ dissertation writing from the perspectives of showing dialogic awareness and the ability to incorporate their own stance in the writing.

When bringing other voices into their argument, whether in agreement or otherwise, writers have set up a dialogue, which can demonstrate their familiarity with the works of a particular discourse community. However, as Tang (2009) argues, this reference to other works is far from enough for the construction of textual authority. What’s more important is the writer's ability to incorporate his/her voice/stance into the dialogue within the discipline.

My discussion of authority construction through other-sourced reporting clauses will proceed from the perspectives of the most prominent findings from the textual analysis, i.e., number of citations, number of non-integral citations and cited references, use of non-research source type in reporting clauses, use of general references and reporting verbs.
The total frequency number of citations in SC and CC corpus and $G^2$ value of the frequency number against the total number of words of the two corpora indicate the significant difference in the employment of citations between SC and CC corpus, which has shown the fact that more citations are employed in SC group. Comparing the standardized number of citations (per 1,000 words) in this study with that in research articles in the field of applied linguistics from Hyland (1999), we can find that the number of citations per 1,000 words in SC corpus ($N=12.01$) is larger than that in research articles ($N=10.8$), whereas the number in CC corpus ($N=5.33$) is smaller. This comparison can only be taken as rough reference because in Hyland’s (1999) study, his corpus consists of the whole research articles, whereas in the present study the corpus is constituted only by discussion sections in MA dissertations. However, the comparison could at least indicate that SC corpus employ a large number of citations, as indicated by the comparison of reference frequency with the research articles written by competent writers. This doesn’t appear to conform to the usual stereotyped research results as found by Taylor & Chen (1991), Bloch & Chi (1995), and Yeh (2010) that Chinese writers tend to use markedly fewer citations than their native speaker counterparts, though MA Chinese students in CC corpus use much fewer citations than those in SC corpus.

Interviews with some of the informants indicate that the convention of comparing the research findings with previous literature to demonstrate the contributions of a particular study to the academic community is not shared by all the Chinese students. This research result is similar to the findings from Bitchener and
Basturkmen (2006) that half the MA student informants in their research do not perceive the necessity and importance of making links between the results and the literature. This lack of knowledge on the academic convention of linking their own research findings to the academic literature prevents writers from constructing authority in their academic writing.

All the informants from CC group who received their MA education in China reported that there were limited academic resources for them to refer to when writing their dissertations. The problem of limited academic resources is also a major constraint that hinders Chinese writers, especially those who reported a lack of resources, from taking part in the academic dialogue in the academic community. This problem has also been raised in Taylor and Chen’s (1991) study that the access to academic resources is limited for Chinese scholars.

Another prominent difference between SC and CC groups is the use of non-integral citations in discussion sections, in terms of frequency number of integral citations and number of references used per non-integral citation. As indicated by Ivanič (1998), the employment of non-integral citation helps the writers to make a particular argument and attribute it to the writers back-grounded in the parenthesis, through which s/he could both claim ‘it as her own view, as well as acknowledging its source’ (p.189). In other words, the explicit argument behind the employment of non-integral citation is that the writer takes an argument as true and someone in the discourse community supports that argument.
The quantitative analysis of non-integral citations indicates that there is a significant difference between the numbers used between the two corpora. Interviews with the informants indicate that some of Chinese students in CC group do not know explicitly the difference between integral and non-integral citations (here the difference does not refer to the specialized vocabulary, but the function of linguistic resources), and because of lack of practice, they normally employ the most straightforward form of integral citations in their writing. Comparatively, the interview data also indicates that students in SC group know explicitly or implicitly the different functions integral and non-integral citations could realize in reporting, and they employ those citation forms flexibly to realize their specific purposes in writing. When they want to emphasize the important role the cited author in their proposition, integral citations were used and non-integral citations were used only to acknowledge the source of proposition.

The significantly greater use of non-integral citations in SC corpus is similar to the research findings in Hyland’s (1999a) and Yeh’s (2010) study of research articles. Yeh’s (2010) study found that writers from different cultures employ significantly more non-integral citations than integral ones in their research articles and Hyland’s (1999a) qualitative study also shows that more non-integral citations are employed by research article writers in most fields including the field of applied linguistics. Students in SC group’s explicit knowledge of integral and non-integral citations elicited from the interviews and their use of these citation forms demonstrated by the textual analysis indicate that Chinese MA dissertation writers in SC group are more
familiar with the academic conventions in the academic field, at least in the field of
applied linguistics, which helps to show their authority in demonstrating their
familiarity with the academic conventions and it will be easier for them to be
legitimate members of the discourse community.

Besides the basic academic conventions of showing familiarity with privileged
academic conventions, what is more important is that writers should also be able to
demonstrate their ability to construct authority through using reporting verbs to realize
their rhetorical purposes in writing.

The examination of reporting verbs in this study indicates that non-factive
verbs are most frequently employed by writers in both SC and CC groups, which
concurs with the research finding from Hyland (1999a) that research articles in most
fields use non-factive verbs most frequently, compared to counter-factive and factive
reporting verbs. However, closer scrutiny of the use of counter-factive reporting verbs
in both corpora indicates that some of the words are mistakenly used in the CC corpus.
Common problems that have been found include that counter-factive reporting verbs
are used when the writer wants to express that s/he agrees with the reported clause, as
judged from the context. This kind of mistake will make the readers confused when
reading the text, a phenomenon which has also been noted by G. Thompson and Ye
(1991). Interviews show that some of the MA students from CC group use reporting
verbs arbitrarily so as to avoid using the same reporting verbs repeatedly. This finding
concurs with the findings from Bloch’s (2010), John’s (2012), and Pecorari’s (2008)
findings that some L2 writers are more concerned with the diversity and variety of
reporting verbs in their writing to avoid repetition. Simple substitution of reporting verbs is a normal strategy for them to prevent their writings from being dull, the result of which is that readers will find contradictory arguments from reporting verbs and from the context. Because of the random choice of reporting verbs in the writing, L2 novice writers are often regarded as a group who does not have the ability to weave the reported claim with their own perspectives (Bloch, 2010; McEnery & Kifle, 2002), who cites previous research without interpretation (Bruce, 1989), and who are not explicit about the relationship between the reporting verb and reported clause (Milton & Hyland, 1999). A major reason for this difficulty could be that many L2 learners learn English through dictionary, and there is often a difference between the explanation of a word in a dictionary and the meaning it could convey in academic writing (Beaugrande, 2001; Bloch, 2010).

Thus the findings from the current examination of other-sourced reporting clauses in discussion sections of Chinese MA students’ dissertation writing seem to be in conflict with the previous stereotyped findings that Chinese students are reluctant to use citations in their writing (Bloch and Chi, 1995; Taylor and Chen, 1991; Yeh, 2010) because of their cultural background. The Chinese students in SC group of the study employ a comparable number of citations to that of research article writers in Hyland (1999a) study. The performance of authority construction through reporting verbs also differs between the SC and CC group, which indicates that Chinese writers can not be stereotyped as a group who are reluctant to construct authority in academic writing because of their cultural background. The MA students in this study were educated in
the same cultural background before their MA studies and they perform quite differently in their authority construction through academic writing. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that Chinese students’ performance of authority construction may be influenced by culture, but culture is not the whole story, and there are other factors that could constrain or facilitate their academic performance, which are worth the attention from educators and researchers.

### 5.2.2 Self-sourced Reporting Clauses

The major foci in examining self-sourced reporting clauses in this study were first person pronouns and reporting verbs used in emphasized averral, reporting verbs used in hidden averral with internal attribution, and averral without attribution. Data analysis in section 4.2.2 shows that there are both differences and similarities in authority construction through self-sourced reporting between SC and CC groups.

Chinese MA students in both groups do not employ many emphasized averral with first person pronouns. The reason, as indicated in the interviews, is that they are taught that academic writing should be objective and it should be the facts (for example, the research or research findings) that talk, not themselves as researchers. The preference for first person pronouns differs between the two groups. Students from SC group use more pronouns like *I* and exclusive *we*, whereas students from CC group use more inclusive *we* and *the (present) writer*, which obscures the writers’ visibility in the writing.

The reluctance to use first person pronouns in academic writing, as the interviews indicate, was mostly influenced by tutors, supervisors and guidance book of
dissertation writing, which concurs with the finding from Hyland (2002b) that students’ conscious avoidance of using self-mention pronouns could be accounted for by ‘recommendations from style manuals, … conflicting teacher advice’ (p. 1107).

As for the reporting verbs following first person pronouns, most of them are research and discourse reporting verbs, and only a few cognition verbs are employed by Chinese writers. As indicated by the interviews, the informants think that they feel it acceptable to introduce the research procedure and findings and to guide the reader through the text through first person pronouns, where they take full responsibility and show authority, but they do not feel it necessary to introduce their arguments, using first person pronouns, because of lack of confidence in themselves, as indicated by Simon’s comment that ‘we are still small potatoes’.

The research finding on first person pronouns use and the reporting verbs collocated with first person pronouns agrees with the findings from Hyland (2002b), who has found that Hong Kong Chinese students avoid the use of first person pronouns in their writing, especially in realizing high risk functions and relatively more first person pronouns are employed in low-risk personal exposure statements.

The difference in the use of emphasized averral indicates that students in SC group tend to show more writer authority in self-sourced reporting. The findings from the analysis of emphasized averral also shows that students should be provided with the available linguistic resources that they could choose from for their own rhetorical purposes, not simply being told that first person pronouns should be avoided in academic writing. Only when students are equipped with the knowledge of the
functions of first person pronouns in different contexts will they be able to construct authority and visibility flexibly when needed.

Compared with emphasized averral, much more hidden averral with internal attribution are employed by Chinese MA dissertation writers. Through hidden averral with internal attribution, readers could also infer that the writers take responsibility for the arguments, but with somewhat disguised form, as if it is the research result that talks, not the researchers’ subjective argument.

In the comparison of the use of hidden averral with internal attributions, it is found that students in SC group use significantly more reporting verbs of discourse acts and comparing acts, which indicates that there are more reporting clauses functioning as guiding the reader through the text and comparing the present research with previously existing literature in SC corpus.

Interviews indicate that some of the Chinese students know consciously that English is a writer-responsible language and they should act as a guide to help readers through the text, some of them know little about it, and some of them think there is no need for writers to guide readers through text, since readers could infer from the context, which is influenced by the writing style of Chinese language (Nida, 1982). The importance of strategies of guiding readers through the text has been emphasized by P. Thompson (2001), who recommends that more textual guidance should be used so as to help the readers, especially the examiners, to understand the dissertation rather than ‘perplex’ (p. 3) them, since it will increase the readability of the dissertation by
providing the readers a picture with a particular chapter/section and understand better how a particular part of the dissertation relates to other parts (Bunton, 1999).

As for the motivation of using *comparing acts* reporting verbs, the informants’ answer is similar to that in citation practices. That is, MA students in SC group know the academic conventions to position their research findings in the academic discourse to indicate their authority as a writer and make clear that their work contribute to the academic conversation in the academic field. Some of the students in CC group know the convention but have limited access to academic resources and some of them know little about the academic convention that in discussion sections writers should associate their own research findings with the literature and then provide possible explanation to the findings.

This comparison of the motivation and textual performance in self-sourced reporting clauses indicates that the Chinese MA students who have explicit or implicit knowledge of academic conventions in academic writing could perform better in constructing writer authority in writing, through employing strategies to construct visibility of a continuum from being visible by using emphasized averral to being invisible through using averral without attribution.

Based on the research findings from this study, in the next section, factors that may influence students’ performance in authority construction will be discussed.

**5.3 Factors that may Influence Students’ Performance**

Contrastive rhetoric research has revealed that cultural difference is one of the prominent reasons accounting for the different discourse practices in academic writing,
especially for non-native speakers (NNS) (Connor, 1996; Vassileva, 2001). However, not all differences in discourse practice could be accounted for by cultural issues.

As indicated by Costley (2009), the skill of academic writing is not an innate one, which is not decided by intelligence quotient or brain size. Rather, academic writing is ‘something that you learn to do in a particular way that is in line with your field, audience, institution, funding bodies, supervisors, and whoever else may be involved in your work’ (p. 85). Hyland (2009) also argues that writers’ choice in academic discourse is partly influenced ‘by the dominant ideologies of privileged literacies in particular communities’ (p. 70). Thus, the ability to construct authority in academic writing, which is an essential skill for novice writers, especially L2 learners, could be influenced by the educational background and institutional culture. Based on the research findings from my textual analysis and interviews, this section discusses the third research question concerning factors that may influence MA students’ performance in authority construction in academic writing through reporting clauses.

Through analyzing reporting clauses quantitatively and qualitatively, comparing the use of those clauses between SC and CC groups and interviewing the five informants, some factors are found to play vital roles in facilitating or constraining those Chinese writers’ performance in authority construction. Deeply influenced by Confucius’ notion of learning, Chinese students, since their kindergarten days, are taught to learn through memorizing, imitating and continuous practice (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). In such a social context, textbooks and teachers are regarded as origin of knowledge (Hu, 2002), which can partly explain the difference in perception.
of knowledge concerning their use of reporting clauses and their authority construction through reporting clauses and this also indicates the essential role academic background plays in forming students’ writing style. The interview data also indicates that the factors that have influenced those MA dissertation fall largely into two types: explicit and implicit knowledge from MA education and reading habits influenced by the academic culture.

5.3.1 Explicit and Implicit Knowledge

Shi (2004) has indicated that the reasons for Chinese students’ problems in citation use might be accounted for by Chinese students’ limited explicit knowledge of conventions of citations. His suggestion that L2 students with Asian background should be taught explicitly about the technique of summarizing source text and referencing with various textual devices agrees with the findings from the present research.

For EFL and ESL students, the most salient way for them to access the conventions of academic writing is through pedagogy of English for academic purposes (EAP). Pedagogy of EAP can be further realized through requirements from university/department, teaching and requirements from academic writing related course and other courses, supervisors.

5.3.1.1 Role of University and Department as Policy Maker

Dissertation requirements from university or department can serve as a basic guide to help students develop an overall understanding of what a dissertation is like, more specifically, what the discussion section of a dissertation looks like. Through
interviews as well as browsing the websites of most universities in China and Singapore, it is found that universities normally have a basic format, overall structure, and very general information and requirements on different parts of the dissertation. This is reasonable since different departments educate students in different disciplines and may have different specific requirements on dissertation writing. The fact is that requirements for dissertation from most university English departments in China do not have more information than the school’s requirements, and they only change the Chinese version requirements into English ones, the reason being the English department is the only department that requires students to write dissertation in English. The situation in English language department in Singapore is different, where specific guidelines have been provided. The guideline for discussion section clearly points out that findings should be interpreted with argument and students should connect their own findings to related literature, which, as one of the informant mentions, is very helpful for them to understand what should be done in dissertation writing.

Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that university and departments, as policy makers, play an important role in helping students develop a basic understanding of what is required and expected (Hyland, 2005a) and what is needed and necessary to be included in dissertation. Following the criteria, students will do better in authority construction since they will have a basic understanding of the academic conventions and requirements.
5.3.1.2 Role of Academic Writing Related Courses

The importance of academic writing related courses has been demonstrated by the interview data from informants in both SC and CC groups. The informants, Sam and Carl, who have selected academic writing related courses in their MA studies, have noted the importance of academic writing related course in their dissertation writing in both interview questions concerning their motivations of particular reporting behavior and in their perceptions of factors that have influenced their academic writing. The explicit instruction from academic writing related courses will help students establish a conscious understanding of the academic conventions, and then students may consciously or unconsciously get more explicit about those academic conventions through their readings and writing practice.

This finding is consistent with many studies on problems of authority construction among L2 writers. Swales and Feak (1994) and Myers (1996) have indicated the importance of teachers’ role in helping students consciously know that different reporting verbs could be employed to realize different rhetorical functions. Bloch (2003) also argues that the difficulty encountered by NNS learners in incorporating evaluation in their writing could be lessened by specific training from instructors.

However, some of the students might have neglected the importance of those courses. In these circumstances, the gap in the knowledge could also be made up by the role of supervisors and other courses.
The importance of influence from courses other than academic writing related ones has also been emphasized by Sam, an informant from SC group, who thinks that the requirements and practice from various courses also help much in forming a basic understanding of what academic convention is and what is appreciated by members in that community.

5.3.1.3 Role of Supervisors

Besides instruction from academic courses, the supervisor is the person who can provide most direct guidance to the writing practice of novice writers, and the most salient one. From classroom instruction, students normally can get a conscious understanding but without specific writing practice, it is difficult for them to form a systematic understanding of what is valued and appreciated in academic community. Therefore, supervisors are the most important people who can provide guidance for the students’ writing, and give guidance associated with students’ writing practice, which can be more effective and more efficient (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006).

The essential role supervisors play in helping students understand the academic conventions has been emphasized by most of the informants in this study, except Cindy, whose supervisor was too busy to spare time to provide enough guidance to her. Some informants mention that their supervisors may have explicitly or implicitly helped them in learning the academic conventions such as the importance of sentences functioning to guide the readers through the text. One of the informants says his supervisor helps when there is limited resource accessible from the university library. Of course, supervisors’ role in students’ academic path is more than such seemingly
trivial help. The above mentioned help is elicited from informants through the interview questions of this study.

However, as mentioned by Cindy, some supervisors are really busy, as they may supervise two to three students per grade. This means some supervisors may have to supervise more than five students, and have to undertake teaching and other social activities, which is a burden to many of the supervisors. One of the reasons is that every MA student in China has to write an MA dissertation so as to obtain their MA degrees and there are more and more MA students in Chinese universities and the universities do not have enough qualified supervisors and make many of the supervisors extremely busy. On the other hand, for many MA students, they may stop doing research the day they get the MA degree, which means dissertation might be a burden for them. Therefore, it is suggested that universities in China can also follow the system in Singapore whereby students could choose to do a dissertation if they want to continue their career in association with research or they could choose to do a smaller scale study and select one more course to fulfill their MA studies.

In a nutshell, interviews with informants from both SC and CC corpus indicate that the pedagogy in Singapore has provided more support to MA students in their dissertation writing, which helps them to understand the academic conventions of authority construction in the discourse community and students from the SC group do perform better in authority construction in discussion sections of their dissertations.
This finding of MA dissertation writing experience is similar to that of one of the participants, Wei Ying, who just completed her second masters degree in Singapore, in Tang’s (2012, p. 221) research:

During the writing of my [first] MA dissertation [in China], I had a feeling of utter helplessness … One of my coping strategies was just to follow structures of other people’s dissertations… I think if I had more and better knowledge about academic writing, genre-specific features, rhetorical moves in various sections of a dissertation and possible expectations of English discourse community, I would have had a much easier, more pleasant and fruitful writing experience at that time.

Her experience of writing dissertation both in China and Singapore also indicates the importance of explicit knowledge concerning the conventions of academic writing, which could equip students with more confidence and benefit them more in the process of their writing.

Another participant, Chang Yu, PhD candidate in Singapore, in Tang's (2012) research has also noted the deficiency in teaching of academic writing in China:

… academic writing in English seems to be an area which needs more attention in English language teaching in China. Even for English major students, academic writing is not given enough attention … many students barely even know what the constitutive parts are of a dissertation or why they have to cite from others. But the policy in China all over the country is to require all English major undergraduates to submit a paper in English before they can get their degrees… it becomes imperative for teachers and researchers alike to devote more attention to help students to improve their academic writing ability and meet such requirement.

MA students, as promising members of the academic community in the near future, should be given more attention and more guidance in their writing experience. With the equipment of knowledge concerning the language itself as well as academic conventions in academic writing, it is quite possible that Chinese young scholars’
voice would be heard by the world, since these non-native English speakers do have their ‘useful cultural capital’ (Tang, 2012, p. 205).

Besides the explicit and implicit knowledge gained from pedagogy, students can also gain knowledge concerning academic writing from their reading, both to fulfill course requirements and their own study needs.

**5.3.2 Influence of Reading Habit on Students’ Performance in Academic Writing**

Besides pedagogy, the other important route for students to access academic writing is through reading relevant journal articles and books, whether in fulfilling course requirements or for their own needs to finish their own writing.

Through the examination of teaching manuals and teaching students how to position their attitudes, Swain (2009) found that textbooks could function to facilitate the apprentice learners’ acquisition of expressing their views flexibly towards a given theory or topic with their own preference of more assertive or more tentative expressions.

Sam, an informant from SC group, has indicated the function of reading literature on his understanding of academic conventions, which is also helpful for his authority construction in writing. Even though it was a burden for him, later he has realized the importance of reading and appreciates that experience much.

Compared to MA students in SC group, the CC group was not that lucky. As one of the informants in CC group, Cherry, recounts in the interview, she used some first person pronouns in her draft and because she learned from guidance book on academic writing that first person pronouns should be avoided, she made
modifications in revised dissertation. In her case, the guide book has restrained her from constructing authority in her writing and roughly guided her to avoid the use of first person pronouns.

Furthermore, most of informants from CC group have reported the lack of accessible resources. Bloch (2010) has emphasized the importance of reviewing relevant previous literature by citing Isaac Newton’s famous metaphor ‘I can see further because I stand on the shoulders of giants’ (p. 222). It is through review of the literature that we can figure out what has been done and what their limitations are and identify the potential research areas worth exploring. Knowledge could accumulate because everyone in the field contributes their parts. However, if there are limited accessible resources, novice researchers will have little understandings on what has been done, and what is worth doing. Authority construction will be impossible because of lack of familiarity with the conventions of academic field.

5.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have summarized the major findings of this study and discussed them in relation to the three research questions raised in section 1.3. The results have also been discussed with reference to related previous studies.

This study has compared the authority construction through reporting clauses in the discussion sections of MA dissertations written by Chinese students who receive MA education in China and in Singapore, and found that there are some similarity and difference in authority construction through both self-sourced and other-sourced
reporting clauses. Comparatively, MA students in the SC group perform better in authority construction from the textual analysis.

Interviews with some of the MA writers in SC and CC groups indicate that a number of factors influence the authority construction through reporting clauses, and it is revealed from this study that explicit and implicit instruction and students’ reading habit both play important roles in their performance in academic writing.
Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I will firstly present a summary of the present study, including a recapitulation of the objectives and research questions, methodology used in this study and a summary of the key findings. Then, pedagogical implications for teachers and universities will be provided, followed by limitations of the present study and suggestions for further research.

6.2 Summary of the Study

6.2.1 Objectives and Research Questions

There are mainly three objectives in this study. The first is to explore Chinese students’ authority construction through reporting clauses in the discussion sections of their MA dissertations. The second is to compare features of authority construction between Chinese students receiving MA education in China and Singapore. And the final objective is to explore the factors that may influence their authority construction, aiming to provide pedagogical implication for future academic writing instruction to Chinese students. The specific research questions are:

1. How do the Chinese MA students construct authority through reporting clauses in discussion sections of dissertation writing in the chosen universities in Singapore and China?

2. Is there any difference between the two groups of MA students in their construction of authority?
3. What factors may have influenced their construction of discoursal self with authority?

6.2.2 Methodology

This study employed a mixed method research approach, including a quantitative and qualitative textual analysis and discourse-based interviews. The interview questions are based on the prominent features found from textual analysis to explore those dissertation writers’ motivation of employing certain reporting clauses. Questions concerning factors that may influence their choice were also asked. The interviews involved five writers in the two corpora. The employment of this mixed method research approach was to provide a more comprehensive view of the features and motivations of authority construction through reporting clauses.

6.2.3 Summary of Key Findings

The major findings in this study will be summarized in relation to the three research questions:

6.2.3.1 Features of Authority Construction by Chinese Writers

It appears from this study that Chinese writers should not be stereotyped as one homogeneous group who lack dialogic awareness, tend to use fewer citations in writing and to use sources without acknowledgement. The examination of other-sourced reporting clauses in this study indicates that many Chinese students are conscious of authority construction and are willing to construct authority, but their
performance in authority construction varies because of available access to needed resources.

The examination of self-sourced reporting clauses reveals that students from both SC and CC groups tend to hide their visibility in the writing. The interviews indicate that there are two reasons. One is that the students lack confidence in their academic reputation, and the other is that they have received relevant guidance from teachers that academic writing should be objective and they should let the research result speak by itself; this is especially true in the CC group.

6.2.3.2 Comparison of Chinese Writers’ Authority Construction between SC and CC Groups

The comparison of reporting clauses written by Chinese writers between SC and CC groups indicates that students in SC group perform better in authority construction, in terms of both dialogic awareness and the ability to insert their own stance or voice in the larger academic conversations in the community. Students in SC group employ more other-sourced reporting clauses, which shows their knowledge and willingness to position their own research in the academic conversation. They also perform better in specific use of reporting verbs, which conforms more to academic convention, whereas many instances in CC corpus indicate that their choice of reporting verbs is random and thus shows less writer authority in their writings.

Textual analysis of self-sourced reporting clauses and corresponding interviews regarding the use of emphasized averral and hidden averral with general attribution indicate that students from SC group are more explicit about the different rhetorical
functions that different self-sourced reporting clauses would realize and are more capable of using those different reporting forms to realize their own purposes.

6.2.3.3 Factors that may Influence Chinese Writers’ Authority Construction in Academic Writing

Interviews indicate that many factors influence Chinese writers’ performance in authority construction, among which the most important ones are explicit and implicit knowledge that students could gain from requirements from their universities and departments, classroom teaching, supervisors and their own reading habit.

The requirements from universities and departments can not only help students have a basic understanding of what dissertation is like but also make them explicitly aware what kind of writing is expected from their institutions.

Classroom teaching could help students develop a more explicit understanding of what kind of academic writing is appreciated by the academic community and students could consciously know what their writing should be like.

Supervisors could provide help to students from different angles when students are writing dissertations, since dissertation writing is an authentic practice of what they have learned from class.

Students’ reading of literature could help them to develop a better understanding of what they have learned in class.

6.3 Pedagogical Implications

One major contribution of this study is its pedagogical implications on the importance of explicit teaching of academic conventions in academic discourse
community. What’s more, educators and teachers in China should be aware of the existing problems in students’ academic writing and try to solve them through various ways. Suggestions on reform of MA requirements are also provided below.

6.3.1 The Importance of High-quality Education of Academic Writing

For the Chinese MA students both in China and Singapore, English is not their first language, so it can be very difficult for them to construct authority effectively in English. However, many of them will continue with academic research after their MA education and academic writing will be in their personal and professional interest. Besides, if working in institutions of higher learning or teaching at tertiary levels, they may be pressed to publish in English for their future career. It is through the MA studies that they could prepare themselves for their future research. Thus, it is very important for the university and the department to try their best to prepare those students well at their novice stage. As indicated by the findings in this study, explicit and implicit knowledge from university culture and classroom instruction is very important for novice Chinese writers.

6.3.2 More Variety Needed for MA Education: The Division of Dissertation Route and CI Route

Some of the MA students may leave research after the completion of their MA study because of their own interest or their career planning. For this group of students, it may be better to provide them with a choice where they can develop their potential via professional training programs such as Critical Inquiry projects rather than leaving them with no choice but to struggle with something that may be less valuable to them.
For supervisors, they could save more time, energy, and efforts for their own research and for those students who are more interested in doing research, which in turn will improve the overall quality of the MA education.

6.4 Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

Even though the present study has found some features of authority construction through reporting clauses by Chinese students in China and Singapore, it should be noted that this study is only an exploratory and small-scale research, which explores only ten dissertations in one Singapore university and ten dissertations in two Chinese universities. The reason for the relatively small corpora in this study is due to the availability of the SC corpus, as indicated in Chapter 3, and the limited number of students who can satisfy the requirements of sharing similar cultural and educational backgrounds with those in the CC corpus. In spite of the fact that the textual data in this study were randomly selected from the dissertations database and have certain degree of representativeness, the quantitative and qualitative results presented in this study cannot be generalized to all Chinese MA students. Besides, because of the time limit and the limited access to the dissertation writers, this study only carried out interviews with five dissertation writers. It is hoped that future research could collect more dissertations written by Chinese students from different universities of different regions in China, and more informants could be invited to be interviewed.

Another limitation is that the informants had finished the writing of the dissertations one or two years before and therefore may not remember the details of their decision making during their dissertation writing. In future studies, interview data
could be collected in the process of the students’ dissertation writing, which would make the research result more reliable and more valid.

Because of the limited scope of this dissertation, only discussion sections of MA dissertation were examined in this study. The authority construction in more sections, such as introduction and literature review section is also worth investigating in future studies.

Due to the time limit and the limited availability of supervisors, only dissertation writers were interviewed in the present study. In future research, the supervisors’ perceptions could also be examined, following, for example, Bitchener & Basturkmen (2006), which will provide a more extensive and comprehensive view of what should be included in the pedagogy for academic writing.
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