



Understanding Chinese High School ESL Learners' Use of L2 Attitudinal Resources in Letter Writing: A Systemic Functional Perspective

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While adolescent L2 writing has gained exponential research spotlight in the field of L2 writing, yet research on adolescent L2 English letter writing remains relatively scanty. In this paper, I draw on Appraisal from systemic functional linguistics to investigate the attitudinal resources used in L2 English letters written by adolescent Chinese EFL learners. I collect the data from two English letters written by a class of 50 junior three ESL students in Guangzhou China. I mainly look at Affect, Judgement and Appreciation from the system of Attitude in Appraisal to examine the interpersonal meaning-making in ESL learners' L2 letter writing. I utilize both quantitative and descriptive approaches to analyze the data, which are repeated measures ANOVAs and case study. The findings reveal that judgment is the dominant attitudinal resources that used in the interpersonal meaning-making in these students' letter writing and there exist significant differences under the use of different attitudinal resources between the two letters studied. These findings provide feedback to our understanding of interpersonal meaning-making in adolescent L2 letter writing. In addition, they also offer implications on how Appraisal could be leveraged as a framework in L2 writing assessment.

儘管青少年第二語言寫作在第二語言寫作領域取得了指數級的研究關注，但關於青少年第二語言英語書信寫作的研究相對較少。本文借助系統功能語言學中的評價理論，研究中國青少年英語作為外語學習者在第二語言英文信件中使用的態度資源。我從中國廣州的50名初三英語作為第二語言的學生班級中，收集了他們寫的兩封英文信件作為研究數據。我主要關注評價理論中態度系統中的情感、判斷和鑒賞，以審查第二語言學習者信件寫作中的人際意義建構。我使用定量和描述性方法分析數據，包括重複測量變異數分析和案例研究。研究結果表明，判斷是這些學生信件寫作中的人際意義建構中主要的態度資源，而且兩封信件在使用不同態度資源方面存在顯著差異。這些發現有助於我們理解青少年第二語言書信寫作中的人際意義建構。此外，它們還為如何將評價理論作為第二語言寫作評估的框架提供了啟示。

Keywords: adolescent L2 writing, Appraisal, systemic functional linguistics, interpersonal meaning-making, L2 letter writing



Introduction

Compared with the literature in tertiary L2 writing, the body of scholarship in adolescent L2 writing is relatively sparse (Harklau, 2013). However, ever since Matsuda & DePew (2002) pointed out the paucity of literature about adolescent L2 writing in high school settings, we have seen a growing body of literature in it, consisting of various aspects with different theoretical perspectives: writing instruction (e.g., Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2002), feedback (e.g., Lee, 2008), bilingualism and multilingualism (e.g., Enright, 2011), text analysis (e.g., Lindgren & Stevenson, 2013), genre and content writing (e.g., Harman, 2013). Besides these major themes in adolescent L2 writing literature, we also see some emerging theoretical aspects used in the investigations of this group of writers: such as, identity (e.g., Harklau, 2000), L1 use (e.g., Kibler, 2010), writing time allocation (e.g., Roca de Larios et al., 2008) and students' reactions to process writing (e.g., Pennington et al., 1996). While most of these studies have focused on writers in North America context, few studies have investigated Chinese adolescent L2 writers.

Writing as Meaning-Making

The relatively recent conception of writing as meaning-making stems from the theoretical lens of systemic functional linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). It places a strong emphasis on investigating writing from a meaning-making perspective (Byrnes, 2013). That said, the goal of writing is to utilize linguistic resources to make meaning. Therefore, writing studies from this perspective focus on what students can mean in their L2 writing, rather than on their mistakes (Schleppegrell & Go, 2007).

Writing as meaning-making perceives learning writing as learning how to mean with the combination of different lexicogrammatical resources (Byrnes, 2013). Studying young foreign language writers who are developing their L2 literacy and expanding their L2 meaning repertoires provides a valuable opportunity to explore writing from the perspective of meaning-making (Byrnes, 2013). According to Byrnes (2013), writing as meaning-making and teaching writing as teaching how to mean is a relatively marginalized sub-field of L2 writing research and it should receive more research attention. Past studies have focused on aspects such as, genre (Harman, 2013), grammatical metaphor (Liardét, 2013). However, few have looked at the attitudinal resources that are employed by young writers in their L2 texts. In terms of Halliday's three meta functions-textual, experiential and interpersonal function, attitudinal resources express certain kinds of interpersonal meaning (White & Martin, 2005). Specifically, attitudinal resources express meanings to do with affect, judgment and appreciation (White & Martin, 2005). Mastery of these aspects of attitudinal meanings is particularly important for students to produce texts that are interpersonally appropriate to the context and purposes of the writing requirement.

In addition, Lindgren & Stevenson (2013) found that, for adolescents, letter writing is a means of establishing relationships with others. They showed how adolescent writers will take this opportunity to express their attitudes, feelings and opinions. For this reason, investigating adolescent L2 letter writing was one of the best ways to see what and how they used attitudinal resources in their L2 learning (Lindgren & Stevenson, 2013).

Research into Interpersonal Meaning-Making in Students' Writing

Interpersonal meanings are meanings which express a speaker's or writer's attitudes and judgement (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). Interpersonal meaning-making has, in fact, been identified not merely as a part of the language learning process, but as a sign of advancement. For second language learners too, the expression of evaluative meaning that is relevant to the members of their learning environment is central

(Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2002). Rintell (1984) found that higher proficiency correlated with improved ability to identify different types of emotions as well as rate the intensity of those emotions.

The development of evaluative language has been studied most often in educational settings, in both L1 and L2 contexts. In the context of first language learning, Coffin (2002) found more sophisticated use of features of Judgment to reflect higher scores. Swain (2007) found that a balance of dialogically expansive and dialogically contractive Engagement resources resulted in a more persuasive voice. In the other study (Swain, 2010), she found a correlation between high scoring student essays and the frequency of Engagement resources used. Scholars also have looked at Appraisal features in L1 academic writing, such as, dissertations (Geng & Wharton, 2019, Liardét & Black, 2019); narrative (Macken-Horarick, 2003); literary texts (Love, 2006). The findings of research in the context of L2 learning mirror those of the L1 environment. Liskin-Gasparro (1996)'s found a movement toward greater lexical richness and broader use of evaluative devices as the learner progressed from Intermediate to Advanced. Ryshina-Pankova (2013) found a connection between the types of evaluative resources used and the students' ability to develop a successful argument.

Previous studies have demonstrated the usefulness of appraisal analysis in the investigation of students' writing, for example, building solidarity with their audiences in their writing (Coffin, 2002) and mapping out children's attitudinal development (Painter, 1999). In the present study, I investigated the attitudinal resources that are used by Chinese junior secondary three writers (equivalent to grade 11 in the US system) in their L2 English letter writing with the theoretical lens of Appraisal (Martin & White, 2005). I collected two letter-writing tasks from the participants during the final year of their junior secondary schooling. I examined the attitudinal resources that they used in their letter writing to express interpersonal meaning. I also examined the different attitudinal resources that they used in the two letters they wrote to provide feedback to the L2 writing curriculum design and material development.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Appraisal Framework in Systemic Functional Linguistics

The present study adopted the Appraisal framework developed by Martin & White (2005) within the paradigm of systemic functional linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013).

Appraisal consists of attitude, graduation, and engagement. Attitude deals with our feelings, emotions, and opinions, for example, emotional reaction, judgment of behavior and evaluation of things. Engagement deals with the source of attitude and the voice of the claim in the text. Since the letters I investigate are not about academic writing, there will be no referencing or quotation involved in these letters. Therefore, I will not include engagement for the present study. Graduation deals with the fine-tuning of our emotions or attitudes, for example, amplifying or softening our feelings (Martin & White, 2005 p.35) See Figure 1. Appraisal framework

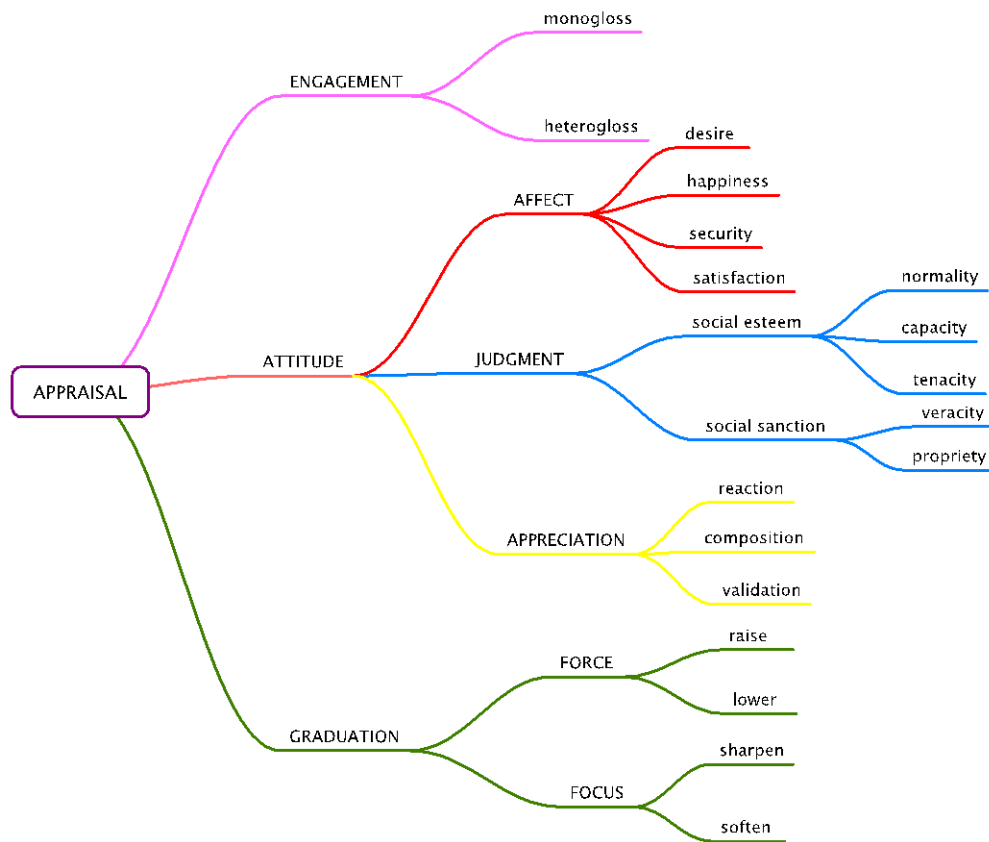


Figure 1. System of Appraisal in systemic functional linguistics (Martin & White, 2005).

The present study focused mainly on Attitude. It was an attempt to map out how students deploy different attitudinal resources in their L2 English writing. Such a design was inspired by what Chen (2010) found from her analysis of attitudinal resources deployed in EFL secondary textbook in China. It aimed to investigate such interpersonal meaning-making resources from the output perspective. The system of Attitude deals with how we use different linguistic resources to express our feelings (Affect), to evaluate social behavior (Judgment) and to appreciate things (Appreciation).

Affect is concerned with the expression of one's negative and positive feelings (Martin & White 2005: 42). This category is divided into four subcategories: desire (e.g., want, determined), happiness (e.g., happy, smile), security (e.g., close, intimate) and satisfaction (e.g., full). Most of these meanings are realized by adjectives (e.g., happy), verbs (e.g., love), or nominalizations (e.g., happiness).

The category of Judgment and Appreciation was described by Martin (2000) as the "institutionalization" of feeling. Judgment and Appreciation are concerned with the moral and ethical aspects of social behavior or character.

Judgment, which deals with the evaluation of social behaviors, is the institutionalized affect of human beings' social behavior or character (Martin & White, 2005:52). It is subdivided into two main categories

(social esteem and social sanction). Social esteem is concerned with the traits that we admire or criticize, consisting of normality, capacity, and tenacity. Normality, capacity, and tenacity are about how special, capable and dependable an individual is. Social sanction is concerned with the social behaviors that we appreciate or criticize, consisting of veracity and propriety. Veracity and propriety refer to how honest and ethical an individual is. The category of judgment is mostly realized by adjectives, for example, diligent or lazy.

Appreciation involves the appreciation of the values of physical or abstract things (Martin & White, 2005: 56). Appreciation has three subcategories: reaction, composition, and valuation. Reaction deals with our reactions to things and phenomena, for example, comfortable or disgusting. Composition deals with the texture or complexity of the things, for example, soft or hard. Valuation deals with the values of things, for example, amazing or authentic (Martin & White, 2005: 56).

Research Questions

The research questions were: (1) What kinds of attitudinal resources do the students use in their interpersonal meaning-making in letter writing in English? (2) Given the similar text types students wrote, are there also differences in the attitudinal resources used by the students?

Research Site and Participants

The present study was conducted in No.X high school in Guangzhou, which is one of the top five high schools in Guangzhou. The school consists of junior secondary and senior secondary school education. A class of the 50 best students from secondary junior 3 was chosen as the participants for the present study. The best students were defined by their academic performance through public exams. The class consisted of 24 boy and 26 girls. They were in the final year of their junior high school, which is the end of the nine years compulsory education in China. The choice of such a school was inspired by what Christie & Derewianka (2008) did in Australia. They targeted their study to the best students in each grade and delineated the possible linguistic repertoire that the students have mastered, aiming to provide feedback to the curriculum design.

The students received 40 minutes of English instruction every day, from Monday to Friday. At junior secondary level most of the instruction focuses on grammar and vocabulary learning (Huang, 2006). The students do endless multiple-choice questions to assess the accuracy of their grammar. Compared with grammar and vocabulary learning, practicing writing seems to take up less time in the current school system. The head of the English department told me during our discussion that the students would practice writing once in a month. According to the conversation with the English teacher in this school, there is no definite writing curriculum for the students. The arrangement of the writing tasks or tests based on the writing tasks from the public exam. In addition, most of the teachers receive little training on how to teach L2 writing. Therefore, most of the teachers don't know how to teach L2 writing (Gan & Yang, 2018).

Data Collection

The participants would take English exam every week to prepare for their public exam in grade nine to get admitted into a prestigious senior secondary school. I collected two pieces of English letters written by the participants under such exam circumstance. The exam was administered by the English teacher who taught the participants. The exam was a comprehensive one, which lasted for two hours, including listening, reading, and writing. The students were given 30 minutes to finish the writing tasks in this exam. The students

received little training on how to write such tasks. As a former teacher there, I know that there is very little teaching of features of appraisal and how might they be different in different texts. Basically, the two writing tasks I collected were students' natural output without any intervention.

TABLE 1
The Two Letters

Time	Topic	Content
Semester one	A letter to Mike	Mike gets sick easily these days because of his unhealthy lifestyle. Could you please write a letter to Mike and give him some ideas and suggestions on how to keep healthy and lead a happy life.
Semester two	A letter to Alice	Recently, your friend, Alice has become unhappy with her Mum, because she finds that her Mum talks too much when they get together. Due to this reason, she has argued with her Mum several times. Tension exists between her and her Mum. She said that she was no longer a child. She didn't want to be controlled by her Mum. As Alice's friend, could you please provide her with some ideas and advice on how to improve her relationship with her mother?

Data Analysis

Coding

There are four stages of my coding, which are transcription of the handwritten texts, identification of unit of analysis, identification of attitudinal resources and analysis.

Transcription of the Handwritten Texts

I transcribed the handwritten texts into electronic format to prepare them for analysis. To make the transcription the same as the original, I transcribed the texts according to the original spelling, layout, and symbols (Lindgren & Stevenson, 2013). Then, I excluded all the personal information about the writers and replaced the names with their student numbers to ensure their anonymity.

Identification of Unit of Analysis

To quantify the findings from systemic functional text analysis, I needed to identify units of analysis within each of the texts (Lindgren & Stevenson, 2013). Generally, there were several types of units of analysis for text analysis in current use, for example the T-unit (Byrnes, 2009) and the C-Unit (Schneider, Dube & Hayward, 2002). Since different expressions of attitude can occur in both independent and dependent clauses, I used the clause as the basic unit of analysis. I used Halliday & Matthiessen's (2013) method of identifying clause boundary (see Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). To do this, I did the following steps: first, I segmented the texts into ranking clauses (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). A ranking clause is one that is not embedded within another clause. Second, I numbered all the sentences in each text and then numbered the ranking clauses within each sentence with the numbers 1.2.3..., for example, 4.3 refers to sentence 4 and the third ranking clause (Klein & Unsworth, 2014).

Identification of Attitudinal Resources

After segmenting all the ranking clauses within each text, I identified the attitudinal resources used by the writers focusing on attitude and graduation (Lindgren & Stevenson, 2013). I then conducted pilot coding with one colleague who helped data coding for this project before the main coding, to resolve the different interpretations by different coders (McCarthy, Guo & Cummins, 2005). This colleague was pursuing her PhD degree while I began to do this project. As a native speaker of English, she received formal and professional training in systemic functional text analysis. Following the 12 sub-categories of attitudinal resources outlined in Figure 1, I coded the data manually. We then each coded the writing tasks based on the agreement we had reached from the pilot coding. 91% of our coding are the same, which ensure the reliability of our coding.

Analysis

Both quantitative analysis and an in-depth linguistics analysis of the texts from the 8 students were used. I first calculated the overall number of attitudinal resources used by the students in the two compositions. To present the overall usage of attitudinal resources, I used raw numbers and percentages. To answer research question 2, I used repeated measures ANOVAs to see if there were any differences in the use of different categories of attitudinal resources.

To do this, I chose 8 best samples from the class to analyze. The choice of these 8 best samples followed these procedures. I first read the whole set of data separately, choosing the 8 best compositions from this class. I then discussed the participants chosen from the first reading with my colleague and consulted the English teacher who taught this class for clarification. The English teacher also gave me the list of the scores that the students got on these writing tasks. After discussing and listening to the teacher's comments, I finally decided which were the best 8 students.

Results and Findings

In this session, following Lindgren & Stevenson (2013), I will report all the following items: means, effect size, power, and significance. Effect sizes of over 0.06 can be considered as medium and over 0.14 as large (Cohen, 1988). For statistical power, I will follow Cohen's (1992) rule of thumb. I will consider that a statistical power should be over 0.80 if we want to claim significant and stable results.

Finally, I will then present a more in-depth analysis of two cases to complement the findings I generate from statistical analyses (Lindgren & Stevenson, 2013).

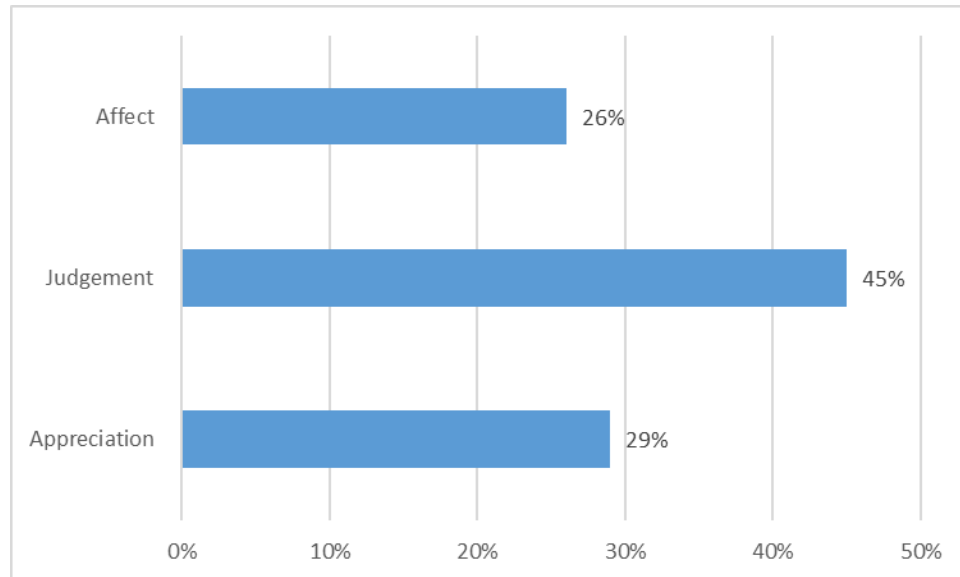
Research Question 1: Overall Employment of Appraisal Resources

Figure 2. Overall deployment of attitudinal resources at the second delicacy.

Figure 2 shows the overall employment of appraisal resources in students' writing. Among the three main types of Appraisal resources employed in the students' writing, Judgment, as shown in Figure 2, takes up as much as 45% of all the 366 instances of attitudinal linguistic resources that I have identified. For the other two categories, Affect and Appreciation, their instances and percentages are relatively similar, covering 26% and 29% of all the Appraisal resources, respectively.

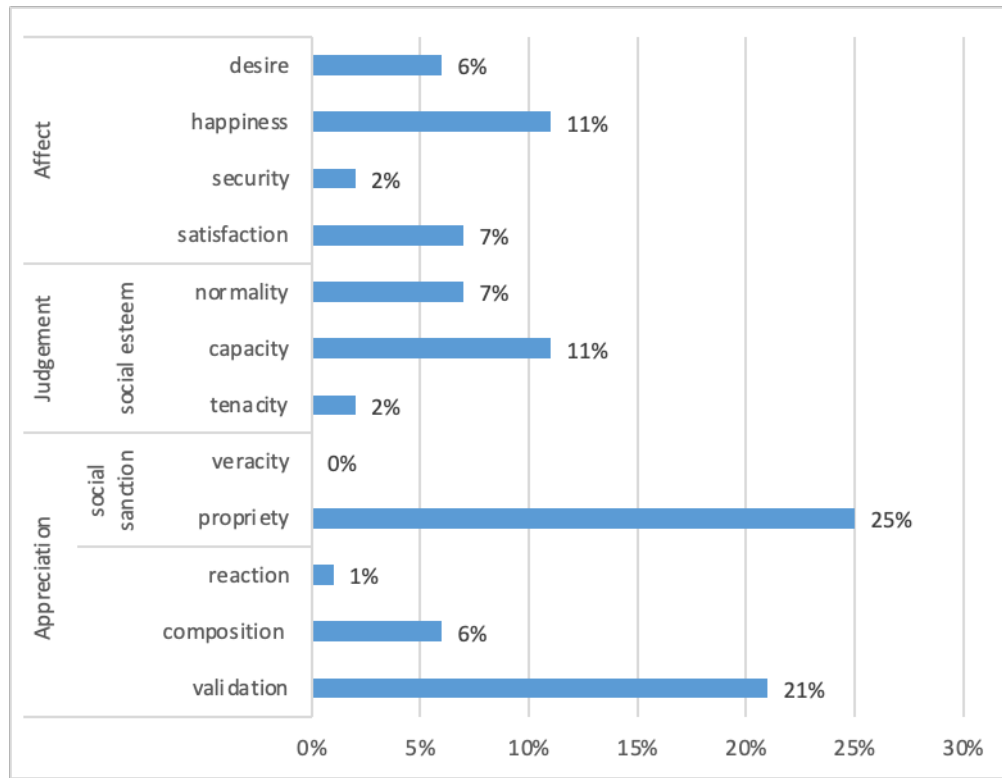


Figure 3. Overall employment of appraisal resources at the third delicacy.

Figure 3 also shows the proportion of different sub types of attitudinal resources employed.

Research Question 2: Comparison between the Two Tasks

TABLE 2

Descriptive Statistics and Results of ANOVA Analysis for the Used Affect, Judgment and Appreciation between the Two Compositions

	Mean (SD)		F (1,7)
	Composition 1	Composition 2	
Affect	6.875 (1.642)	3.75 (1.669)	18.939**
Judgment	8 (2.203)	11.75 (2.964)	7.063*
Appreciation	3 (1.309)	7.875 (2.642)	26.16**

*Significant effect at the p< .05 level

**Significant effect at the p< .01 level.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and results of ANOVA analysis for the Affect, Judgment and Appreciation usage in the two compositions. There are significant effects for all the three categories of attitude. Among them, Appreciation and Affect show major effects while Judgment shows a less significant effect. Appreciation (F (1,7) = 26.16, p=. 001, np2=. 789, P=. 991) is more favored in composition 2 than composition 1 with very good effect size and great power. Affect (F (1,7) =18.939, p=. 003, np2=. 73, P=.

959) is more favored in composition one with a mean 6.875. Judgment ($F(1,7) = 7.063$, $p = .033$, $\eta^2 = .502$, $P = .628$) is more favored in composition 2 with a mean of 11.75. Table 3 will show the analysis of the 12 sub-categories under attitude to see which items have significant effects for the two compositions.

TABLE 3
Descriptive Statistics and Results of ANOVA Analysis for the 12 Sub-Categories of Attitudinal Resources between the Two Compositions

			Mean (SD)		F (1,7)
			Composition 1	Composition 2	
Affect		desire	1.25 (.462)	1.5 (.925)	1
		happiness	3.25 (1.035)	1.25 (.462)	28**
		security	.5 (.755)	.25 (.462)	1
		satisfaction	1.87 (1.457)	.75 (.707)	3.098
Judgment	Social esteem	normality	1 (0)	2.125 (.834)	14.538**
		capacity	.875 (1.125)	4.375 (1.597)	20.176**
		tenacity	0 (0)	1.12 (1.457)	4.765
	Social sanction	veracity	0 (0)	.12 (.353)	1
		propriety	6.12 (1.552)	4 (2.267)	5.174
Appreciation		reaction	0 (0)	.12 (.353)	1
		composition	.125 (.353)	2.875 (1.356)	31.37**
		validation	2.875 (1.246)	4.875 (1.552)	8*

*Significant effect at the $p < .05$ level

**Significant effect at the $p < .01$ level.

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics and results of ANOVA analysis for the 12 sub-categories of attitude between the two compositions. Among the 12 sub-categories under attitude, there are five categories showing significant effects between the two compositions. Happiness ($F(1,7) = 28$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .8$, $P = .994$), with a big effect size and very great power, is more favored in composition 1 than composition 2. Composition ($F(1,7) = 31.37$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .818$, $P = .997$) also has a significant effect for the two writing tasks. The students used more composition in writing task 2 in this study, giving recommendations to their friends to value the mother-daughter relationship. Normality ($F(1,7) = 14.538$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2 = .675$, $P = .903$) has a significant effect between the two compositions. Capacity ($F(1,7) = 20.176$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .742$, $P = .969$) also has a significant effect between the compositions, showing a big effect size and a very strong power. The fifth category with a significant effect is valuation ($F(1,7) = 8$, $p = .025$, $\eta^2 = .533$, $P = .681$). For the remaining 7 categories, I found that there were no main significant effects between the two compositions in the present study.

Case Study

The quantitative findings were elaborated substantively in the previous section. In line with Matthiessen (2013), Lindgren & Stevenson (2013) and Ryshina-Pankova (2011), a case study was deployed to provide a

more elaborated sample for the quantitative analysis. I chose two pieces of writing by the same student from our corpus of data to a) illuminate how she leveraged the Appraisal resources in her writing and b) provide a richer picture of the landscape of resources used to instantiate attitudes and emotions in the two writing tasks.

Text A

[1.0] I am **sorry** to hear [1.1] that you **get sick easily** these days. [2] It's **important** for you to keep **healthy**, especially before the exam. [3] Let me give you some advice about having a **healthy** lifestyle. [4] First, you **should care** for your diet. [5] A **balanced** diet is necessary, [6] you'd **better** eat **various kinds** of food, such as grains, meat and vegetables. [7.0] Make sure [7.1] you drink **plenty** of water **every day** [7.2] and have **less** salt and sugar. [8] Second, you **should** have a **good** sleep. [9.0] You'd **better** sleep early [9.1] and get up early. [10] **Most importantly**, sleep for **at least 8** hours **each day**. [11] Third, do **more** exercise. [12] **Always** do your exercise **carefully every morning**. [13] After school, you can go running on the playground. [14] I **always** play tennis. [15] After school, you can go running on the playground. [16] I **always** play tennis after school. [17] It makes me become **stronger** and **healthier**. [18] All these things above is what a **healthy** lifestyle means. [19.0] If you do [19.1] as I say, [19.2] you'll **soon** become **stronger** [19.3] and have **enough power** to pass the exam. [20] **Best** wishes!

Text B

[1] Your problem is **quite common**. [2.0] Many teenagers at this age have the same problem as you, [2.1] so don't **worry** about this. [3] These are my general views: [4.0] what your mother says seems to be **unhelpful**, [4.1] but these show a mother's **love**. [5.0] If she does not **care about** you, [5.1] she will not say anything to you. [6.0] So you **should** be **pleased** [6.1] that there is someone who **love you so much** in the world. [7.0] If you can't **bear your mother anymore**, [7.1] you'd **better** communicate with her face-to-face. [8.0] You **should** tell her [8.1] that she needn't say **too much** to you, [8.2] and show that you know the **right** things to do. [9.0] Then, you and your mum will understand each other, [9.1] so that you can get along with your mum **happily** in the future. [10.0] I **hope** [10.1] what I said here can **help** you make a change afterwards.

A descriptive analysis of two texts by one student (No. 16) reveals how the patterns of Appraisal resources work to accomplish the generic goals of recommending. In particular, the attitudinal targets of the Appraisal features point to how the writer presents his suggestions to Mike in Text A and to Alice in Text B.

Only one instance of Affect appears in Text A, with the writer as the emoter. The writer begins the letter with “I am sorry to hear...” and thereby establishes his sympathy with Mike, perhaps as a strategy for softening the force of his later suggestions.

Judgment is the dominant attitudinal resources used in this case; Mike is always the target. He “gets sick easily” (1.1) and is told repeatedly what he “should” (4, 8) or “had better” (6, 9) do to avoid this. Over the course of the text, the features shift from these statements of Judgment: Propriety (should, had better) to judgments of Capacity, e.g., stronger, healthier, (Clause 17). This reflects the writer’s move from Recommending to sharing the consequences of those recommendations.

Even more so than Judgment, the features of Appreciation are restricted to just a few lexical items that are repeated throughout Text A. For example, and “important” appear in clauses 2, 3, 10 and 18. These convey positive Valuation of the items they modify, “lifestyle,” “keeping healthy” and “sleeping at least 8 hours each day”. The fact that only positive Appreciation appears in Text A is a strategy that conforms to the

communicative purpose of the letter, which is, as the writer states in clause 3, to give advice. As the Appreciation appears throughout the text, it functions to reiterate the goals of the Recommendation.

A few cases of Appreciation: Composition also appear in Text A. In clause 5, the writer mentions a “balanced diet” as a necessary component of the overall goal of being healthy. In clause 8, “good sleeping” is another such component. Thus, Appreciation: Composition works to identify the elements required to achieve the target of the writer’s advice. Again, these evaluations are loaded positively, which is in line with the writer’s other moves and indicates he is taking the approach of Encouragement in making his Recommendation.

However, Text B uses a different pattern of Appraisal resources. While both texts are of the Recommending text type, the features in Text B indicate that the writer is using a strategy of Sympathy to make his suggestions to Alice.

The Judgment of Alice is always propriety, conveyed by the lexical item “should”. In this, Text B is similar to Text A. In Text B, however, the target of the Judgment: Propriety is in one instance, Alice’s mother, which suggests that she is also implicated in the problem being discussed. The statement in the very first clause, where the problem is described as “quite common” serves a similar function of alleviating Alice of some of the blame for her predicament, which is again suggestive of the writer’s sympathy.

Affect takes on a much larger role in Text B than in Text A. In Text B both Alice and her mother are the emoters of the instances of Affect, so that the negotiation of the two actors’ feelings becomes central to the text. Thus, the writer is sympathetically in tune with Alice’s feelings, but also strives to create empathy with her mother to show to Alice her mother’s perspective on the situation. This strategy of Sympathy/Empathy functions to support the writer’s recommendations in a way like Graduation in Text A. It seems that the difference between the strategies in Text A and Text B are a result of differing fields within the same text type (Recommending). As such, the field can be a determining factor in the types of Appraisal resources appropriate in each text within a given text type.

Summary of Attitudinal Resources Used in Students’ English Letter Writing

Figure 4 shows the kinds of attitudinal resources that the students used in these two compositions to realize their interpersonal meaning. As shown in the table, under Affect, happiness and satisfaction are the two mostly elaborated categories. In Judgment, we can see that propriety and capacity are the two most popular categories in students’ writing. In Appreciation, we can see more valuation and composition in the students’ writing. This summary can be a good reference for the curriculum designer to see what interpersonal resources secondary junior three students can master in their English letter writing.

Desire+ Hope, Would like to, want,	Desire- Null	Happiness Love, like, Happy, pleased, Happily, Heart-bridge,	Unhappiness Regret, annoy, lonely, Annoyed, worry about, Sorry,	Security Safety, sure	Insecurity Worry, nervous,	Satisfaction Have a rest, Play games, Have a trip, Make a difference, Warm, better and better, Well, energetic	Dissatisfaction Complain about, bear, Feel tired of, Bored, uncomfortable, Too little time, Sleepy, relax
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Social esteem						Social sanction					
Normality +	Normality -	Capacity+	Capacity -	Tenacity+	Tenacity-	Propriety+	Propriety-	Veracity+	Veracity-		
Common	Illness, ill, sick,	Not lucky, difficult, careful, patient, Nice, can, Strong, Healthy, Stronger, Fit, wise, Good health, healthier,	Null	Insist, are serious about, work better, study hard	Null	Had better, it's important, Should, necessary, Make sure, remember not,	Quite, too much, this problem, Play tricks,	Sincerely	Null		

Reaction+ Null	Reaction- Unaware, Distance,	Composition+ Best, perfect, balanced, good, clear,	Composition- Null	Valuation+ Care about, politely, better, help, right, favorable, guidance, good, gold, stronger, healthy, interesting, helpful, useful, healthier,	Valuation- Unhelpful, Wrong, damage,
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Figure 4. Summary of attitudinal resources used in the students' English letter.

Discussion

This study has examined Chinese secondary three students' EFL letter writing with natural writing data, aiming to address the following two questions: (1) What kinds of attitudinal resources do the students use in their interpersonal meaning-making in letter writing in English? (2) Given that there are small differences in the writing tasks, are there also differences in the attitudinal resources used by the students?

The quantitative and descriptive findings indicate that limited and unsystematic mastery of the attitudinal resources in these students' writing, which bear some similarities with what Gibbons and Markwick-Smith (1992) found in their study of Chinese EFL learners' systems of modality. For example, I found that Affect: happiness, Judgment: social sanction: propriety, Judgment: social esteem: capacity and Appreciation: valuation are the most favored categories in their writing, and cover most of the used attitudinal resources. In addition, I observed that more than 90% of all the appraisal resources are instantiated by simple, congruent, explicit type of adjectives, primarily of positive orientation (76%). This finding has some resonance from what Halliday (1975) and Christie and Derewianka (2008) claimed that young learners have limited linguistic resources in their meaning-making and most of the linguistic resources they use are congruent.

Chinese EFL learners at the level of secondary junior three favored Judgment in their interpersonal meaning-making. 45% of the attitudinal resources I have identified are Judgment, which almost covers half of the appraisal resources they used. Moreover, Judgment: Social sanction: propriety is the most favored sub-categories under Judgment, where the students recommend to their friends to follow their advice or suggestions. Like Hinkel's (2009) and Mayor's (2006) studies in Asian EFL learners, I also found that, in this study, the students use tremendous amounts of obligations, dialogic and hortatory features when they give advice or suggestions to their cohorts. In addition, Appreciation: valuation and composition are also used extensively in students' writing, which is another indicator that we can see how the students use such dialogic

and hortatory features in their interpersonal meaning-making. The only explanation of this phenomenon was given by Mayor (2006) that the hortatory features in Chinese EFL learners' English texts are from their L1 Chinese composing culture. These findings also suggest that not only do tertiary Chinese EFL students write with such tendency, but that secondary students do too.

The findings of the present study follow up on work by Chen (2010) in important ways. Most of the Appraisal resources that the students deployed in these writing tasks are Judgment, which is quite like what Chen (2010) found in her investigation of attitudinal resources in Chinese primary and secondary English textbooks. Her ontogenetic study findings show that Judgment is the dominant attitudinal semantic resource in Chinese junior secondary English textbooks. In addition, the present study has conformity with Chen's (2010) findings, in that most of the Appraisal resources are positively oriented. In this study, of all the 366 instances of attitudinal resources I have identified, 76% are positive Appraisal resources; this is quite consistent with the curriculum emotion and attitude goal set by the Ministry of Education in China (Chen, 2010). On the level of education policy, this means that our findings suggest that instruction and language development of students at this school, a national top five school located in Guangzhou, supports the goals set by the Chinese Ministry of Education.

Through the ANOVA analysis, I have found that the use of attitudinal resources is significantly different within the same field for the two different letters, in which the students deployed different linguistic resources to realize their interpersonal meaning-making. For example, Affect and Appreciation are significantly different, with a big effect size and a strong power, showing the students' mastery of different appraisal resources in interpersonal meaning-making. Teachers and educators can utilize this finding to arrange writing task with difficult lexicogrammatical resources when they assign writing tasks to students.

The present study has shown that on the design of ESL writing curricula and the development of teaching materials for L2 writing, teachers and educators should give attention to the interpersonal domain, in addition to the experiential. The findings of this study describe in detail how evaluative meaning is a key feature in characterizing different registers and strategies for fulfilling the specific and generic requirements of a given writing task. Furthermore, it shows the merit of applying the framework of Appraisal to research on the teaching of L2 writing, especially in investigating interpersonal meaning-making. In terms of assessment, the findings suggest that the Appraisal framework could be leveraged as a set of criteria for evaluating students' writing, especially for writing tasks that are more tenor oriented. In doing so, we can evaluate L2 learners' texts more objectively in terms of interpersonal meaning-making, which takes up a big portion in the English curriculum set by Chinese ministry of education (Chen, 2010).

Pedagogical Implications

As discussed in the literature review, most of the studies from the perspective of writing as meaning-making focused on experiential meaning-making (Harman, 2013; Liardét, 2013). However, as studies from L2 textbook show (Chen, 2010), it is important for teachers or language educators to include interpersonal meaning-making in L2 context.

The findings of the present study show that unsystematic mastery of the system of appraisal is identified in the students' writing, for example, the overuse of judgement is obvious. Therefore, to facilitate the students to learn and use other appraisal resources, such as appreciation and affect, it is essential for language teacher or educators develop a pedagogical framework that includes system of appraisal into the L2 writing curriculum and teaching materials, making sure that students can learn and use these appraisal resources appropriately in different contexts.

This study also indicates that the students' deployment of attitudinal resources is registerially different. This serves as a timely reminder to the language educators in Chinese or similar contexts (Ji, 2009; Trent, 2011; Zhang, 2016). It is essential for teachers to teach judgement, affect, and appreciation explicitly in L2 writing class and provide more different contexts for students to learn and use different appraisal resources to express interpersonal meaning.

In addition, most of the appraisal resources students used in their writing are congruent, for example, the students utilized only simple adjectives or adverbs to realize their attitudinal meanings. Therefore, it is recommended that inclusion of metaphorical appraisal resources into the curriculum is also important to the development of students' interpersonal meaning-making abilities (Xuan & Huang, 2017).

Finally, it is suggested that language educators should inform students from similar contexts of their possible idiosyncratic use of judgement in their L2 writing, such as, giving suggestions or providing a moral lesson to their imagined readers when they write.

Conclusion

Chinese EFL junior secondary three students' English letter writing has been examined quantitatively and descriptively in this study by leveraging the Appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005) in SFL. Our findings have some implications for the teaching and study of adolescent L2 writing. They show the centrality of Appraisal resources to fulfilling interpersonal meaning-making requirements, specifically how the interpersonal plays out in a personal letter. In this regard, our approach demonstrates how the Appraisal framework can be applied both quantitatively and descriptively to reveal target resources for teaching, especially in providing feedback (Cho, 2015) to EFL learners in this context. In addition, it also shows how registerially different the use of attitudinal resources will be, even with the same text type.

Limitations

Despite the in-depth analysis I conducted on the students' letter writing, the interpretation of these findings should be cautious. First, the number of participants is still small. Future studies should include more students from different levels and different schools, meaning that the culture and the proficiency spectrum will be broader if we want to generalize the findings. Second, future studies might address this issue by assessing individual students longitudinally on their writing responses to the same prompt to determine differences, perhaps in evaluative complexity, i.e., a shift to from explicit to implicit forms of evaluation, including indirectness and metaphor. Third, future studies can also include a longer time to study these young learners. With a wider age range of participants, we can see more of the whole picture: adolescent L2 writers' development of their expanding L2 meaning repertoires. To summarize, while the present study has attempted to answer the research questions posed earlier, it has also linked the topic of adolescent L2 writing to the field: L2 writing, indicating how meaning-making can be the heart of text production.

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