

## New Meanings of *Promote*? An Investigation of the Verb *Promote* in Chinese Student Writings in English

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### Abstract

Learning a second language is a process of acquiring, comprehending, and using linguistic patterns of a foreign language. (Nordquist, 2019) The language that is often used in this process is called interlanguage. This paper takes a closer look at the interlanguage of Chinese students and investigates semantic features of the verb *promote* found in Chinese student writings in English. The basis for this comparative corpus-based analysis is provided by a corpus of 303 Chinese master theses (5,063,473 words) and 112 Chinese doctoral theses (5,297,278 words), all written in English in Cultural Studies, Linguistics, Literature and Second Language Acquisition. An interlanguage analysis was carried out with the main aim being to describe, categorize and compare the semantics of *promote*. The results indicate that several uses are influenced by the author's L1 and that both groups of students employ *promote* which usually lifts actions, characteristics, and aspects higher than would be expected. It was used slightly more often by doctoral students, and it was found that "contributing to the growth or improvement of something" and "encouraging others to do certain actions" are among the main meanings. Further, some syntactical structures have been found to be an interlanguage use of *promote* and probably unique for Chinese students. It is suggested that such uses are pointed out to the students by pedagogues to improve their L2 and competitiveness in the academia.

### Keywords

Chinese student writings, interlanguage analysis, corpus-based research, learner language, data-driven research

### Introduction

Writing requires the skillful application of evaluation "in order to demonstrate that the writer has succeeded to some extent in transforming knowledge and creating new knowledge" (Geng & Wharton, 2016, p. 80). Another essential aspect in writing is the way authors convey ideas and in how far they are able to correctly use the target language in L2 (second language) writings. In order to analyze the latter, this paper focuses on the interlanguage found in the academic discourse of Chinese students. This aspect has not yet been investigated in depth. However, it is important to identify and discuss interlanguage uses to provide better insights into patterns related to the students L1. In this way, their specific needs can be identified and worked on to improve their L2 and hence to increase their competitiveness in the academia as this became more and more important in the last decades. (Appel & Murray, 202, p. 1)

"At the highest level of education, writers' first language may not exert as much impact on academic writing as it arguably does when writers are at a lower level." (Geng & Wharton, 2016, p.: 89) Chinese writers at the PhD level are likely to have developed "a good command

of resources to evaluate others' research and to make their own proposition in a way that their academic discourse community finds acceptable" (Geng & Wharton, 2016, p. 89) in their L2 English. However, an author's first language may still have an impact on their L2, even at a higher level. Previous studies on Chinese English have mainly focused on texts by experts (e.g., Bruce, 2014; Hyland, 2005a; Xue & Liu, 2021) with less attention given to EFL/ESL student writings (Coffin & Hewings, 2004). The few existing studies on non-expert writings mainly concentrate on the writings of students at pre-doctoral stages of education (e.g., Jiang, 2015; Xie, 2016; Li, Yang & Wolter, 2021; Zou, 2022) and only selected parts of doctoral theses (Geng & Wharton, 2016). That is why this study seeks to analyze and compare the linguistic competence of students at the master and doctoral level by conducting a detailed textual analysis and focusing on one selected term and hence to fill a part of this gap. Investigating the language of students is important because they will most likely compete with other researchers when they publish in international journals. Furthermore, the interlanguage of Chinese students at a higher level has not been widely discussed by many authors, which is why this paper addresses this topic.

During a manual check of my data, the use of *promote* was found to be very particular and striking because it is not commonly expected in academic writings. The high number of instances as well as the specific contexts *promote* was used in seemed rather unique for Chinese students. The interlanguage use of this specific verb seemed worth some further investigation in order to check if the student's writings are influenced by their L1. To discuss and confirm my assumptions about *promote* in this context, I conducted a corpus-based analysis. It has to be pointed out that an inductive approach has been used, meaning that I first observed patterns of *promote* in my data and then developed a list of categories based on these observations and finally categorized *promote*. This categorization has then been used for the main analysis. The aim of this paper is hence to analyze and describe the interlanguage use of *promote* found in academic writings by Chinese students in their (L2) English and to enable a comprehensive understanding of advanced Chinese EFL learner's use of *promote*. This possibly also lays the foundation for a Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (CIA; Granger, 2015).

The next section of this paper outlines previous studies, defines interlanguage and discusses the categorization of *promote* used in this paper. Section 3 describes the corpus and methods used in this paper and addresses limitations. The longest section (section 4) is devoted to the analysis. Here, quantitative and qualitative findings are presented and discussed. Based on these findings, general conclusions are drawn accordingly.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **The definition of interlanguage**

For this culture-specific analysis, it is necessary to first have a look at the definition of interlanguage. The term "interlanguage" relevant in Second Language Acquisition was first introduced by Selinker (1972) who described this concept as an L2 systematic knowledge which is independent of both a learner's L1 and L2. This means that this system is neither the one of a learner's mother tongue nor the target language a learner is in the process of acquiring, but in-between to help with learning another language. This process often leads to different errors that L2 learners make for various reasons such as borrowing patterns from the learner's mother tongue or extending patterns from the chosen target language. (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992) This paper therefore looks at interlanguage uses that may be found in learner's writings. Some studies on interlanguage are introduced in the next subsection.

### Previous studies

There have been several studies that focus on the L2 performance of speakers and writers with different L1 backgrounds (e.g., Jarvis, 2000; Daly, 2016; Yildiz & Turan, 2021; Lu & Deng, 2019; Wei & Lei, 2011; Appel & Murray, 2020). A few of them are reviewed in the following paragraphs.

The main aim of the study by Appel and Murray (2020) is to identify L1 related features in L2 English academic writings by Arabic, Chinese, and French students. The authors analyzed 50 argumentative essays and focused on lexical bundles. Therefore, they performed a Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (CIA; Granger, 2015) to identify “intragroup production tendencies and intergroup production differences” (Appel & Murray, 2020, p. 12) and to compare L1 tendencies of the three mentioned groups of L2 users. The results show group specific differences in their L2 academic writings, which were used to suggest specific focused instructions.

Jarvis (2000) investigated L1 transfer in the lexicon of Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking Finns by giving them different elicitation tasks. His results show the influence of their L1 on their L2 performance. (Jarvis, 2000, p. 245). The author argued that a unified framework for interlanguage studies is needed for interlanguage analyses and therefore introduced three aspects that authors could look at: “(a) intra-L1-group similarities, (b) inter-L1-group differences, and (c) L1-IL performance similarities” (Jarvis, 2000, p. 245).

The study by Daly (2016) analyzed 52 medical manuscripts written by Chinese doctors. The author compared the edited and unedited versions of the research manuscripts in order to create two frequency wordlists that show the differences in use. While Daly (2016) based his research on the concept of interlanguage introduced by Selinker (1972), he also focused on the traditional error analysis (Corder, 1967) to describe “instances of incorrect usage (grammatical or lexical)” (Daly, 2016, p. 35). He found that mostly words related to “register (*that*), stance (*can, has/have been*), and discourse organizers (*although, as, this*)” were edited on the discourse level.

Yildiz and Turan (2021) conducted an interlanguage analysis of doctoral theses with a focus on evidentiality. The two authors created three datasets, two with theses from non-native speakers and one with theses from native speakers of English. Their results show that the student’s choice of evidential markers is influenced by their L1 and that non-native authors do not use evidential markers as frequently as native authors. My mixed-method analysis, however, does not compare the results to these of corpora with writings by native speakers as it is common for CIAs because my paper does not seek to offer a deficit perspective by comparing the results to an assumed standard to show where the language of Chinese students is erroneous. Acceptability is not in the focus here, but the analysis of prototypical uses (rather than new ones). Therefore, a CIA was not considered useful for this paper. However, my findings could provide the foundation for a CIA of the uses of *promote* found in Chinese L1 and L2 writings as well as writings by students with different L1 backgrounds if this was of interest for other researchers.

The verb *promote* has been chosen as a variable for this study because there has not been any study on *promote* yet. In order to identify the interlanguage uses of *promote* by Chinese students in their academic writings, this verb has first been categorized. This categorization is discussed in the next subsection.

### Semantic categorization of *promote* used in the present study

*Promote* usually has a connotation of lifting something higher or wanting to sell, advertise or praise something. (Oxford English Dictionary (OED), 2022, s.v. *promote*) Hence, it would be expected to be rather uncommon in academic writing. The high number of instances found in the Chinese theses therefore seems surprising, except for some collocations such as *promote peer interaction, learning, understanding* that are often found in textbooks. In order to develop a categorization of *promote* based on the meanings found in my data, I firstly observed its different meanings found in my corpus and grouped them together and then I consulted different dictionaries to compare the meanings. Six dictionaries, namely Collins Cobuild, Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary, Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Macmillan Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, OED, and the lexical database WordNet were consulted to gain an overview of the main meanings of *promote*. It was found that none of the dictionary entries was sufficient for my data. I hence combined my new categories with some of the existing ones from the online dictionaries to create my own categorization for the analysis of *promote*. This categorization is presented in Table 1 and discussed further in the analysis in section 4.

Table 1

#### *The Categorization of Promote Used in this Study*

category	category description
1. boost	to boost something (e.g. <i>the economy, peace</i> ; fixed phrases)
1a. contribute	to contribute to the progress, development, improvement or growth of something; to help something to spread, become more successful etc.,
1b. encourage	to encourage or support someone to do something or encourage something to happen
2. better job	to assign sb. to a higher position
2a. higher academic position	to assign sb. to a higher position in the field of academia (academic promotion, promotion at a university)
3. sell/advertise	to encourage the buying of a (new) product, film, etc., to advertise something
3a. advertise yourself	to encourage the acknowledgement and buying of your work, to advertise yourself and your academic work and achievements
4. persuade	to try to persuade people to support or use something (e.g. an idea, change, a claim, an argument)
5. recommend	to strongly (directly/explicitly) recommend something or someone to others, mainly in the field of academia
5a. inspire	to (indirectly/implicitly) inspire others to do something, e.g. to conduct (further) research in a certain field, apply a teaching method or read a thesis, mainly in the field of academia
6. L1 transfer	includes all expressions that do not fit into any of the above-mentioned categories and clearly show an L1 transfer

The categories 1a, 1b, 2a, 3a, 5, 5a and 6 are the ones I created based on my data. Some of them were added as subcategories of already existing ones found in dictionaries. 2a and 3a are mainly related to academic texts, which make up my corpora. L1 transfer includes all instances that clearly count as interlanguage use and that are either ambiguous or not clearly understandable due to the connection to the L1 of the author. However, the other categories include interlanguage uses of *promote* as well. The difference is that it is clear what the author tried to express even though it was often observed that the use is probably influenced by the authors L1. The following section takes a closer look at my corpus and describes my method.

### Data and Methodology

#### Sampling and data collection: The ChAcE-corpus

The basis for this comparative corpus-based analysis is provided by the corpus of Chinese Academic writings in English (ChAcE), a corpus consisting of 303 Chinese master theses and

112 Chinese doctoral theses, all written in English in the disciplines of Cultural Studies, English Language and Literature, Linguistics and SLA (see Table 2). This corpus was divided into two sub-corpora, namely ChAcE-MA and ChAcE-PHD. The data has been collected by two of my Chinese colleagues and me. The theses were all written between 2005 and 2014.

Table 2

*The Sections and Total Numbers of Texts and Words (According to AntConc, 2014) Found in ChAcE-MA and ChAcE-PHD*

ChAcE-MA Corpus	ChAcE-PhD Corpus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 303 MA <u>Theses</u> (2005-2014)</li> <li>- 116 different <u>Universities</u></li> <li>- <u>Sections</u>: SLA, English Language and Literature, Linguistics, Cultural Studies</li> <li>- Total No. of Words: <b>5,063,473</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 112 <u>PhD Theses</u> (2005-2014)</li> <li>- 6 different <u>Universities</u></li> <li>- <u>Section</u>: English Language and Literature</li> <li>- Total No. of Words: <b>5,297,278</b></li> </ul>

As can be seen in Table 2, the number of words found in both sub-corpora is very similar (approx. 5 million words each). As doctoral theses are much longer than master theses, many more master theses were collected in order to balance both sub-corpora well. Whereas the doctoral theses come from only six different universities, the master theses were collected at 116 different Chinese Universities. The theses were downloaded from the platform China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI, 2020). This difference in the number of texts and universities is also due to the limited access to final theses on this platform and in general. Nevertheless, I tried to balance the corpus as much as possible to ensure the representativeness for China and not only one area of the country. Since a comparison of different sections was not intended, only the sections listed in Table 2 were included. All these steps ensured a good basis for my investigation, which is explained in more detail in the next subsection.

### Methods of investigation

This study employs a quantitative and qualitative comparative analysis of collected student writings. The texts are analysed by looking at the interlanguage use of one specific verb. This corpus-based analysis has been conducted with the help of the free concordance software AntConc 3.4.4. (Anthony, 2014). As AntConc requires a .txt format, all files were converted after they had been cleaned and anonymized.

In order to analyse the verb *promote*, several online dictionaries have been consulted as mentioned in section 2.2. Chinese dictionaries (e.g., the Mandarin-English Dictionary Yellow Bridge, MDBG word dictionary) were taken into consideration as well. After an overview of the existing meanings had been gained, a detailed analysis of all instances of *promote* found in the ChAcE-Corpus enabled a more detailed categorization. Therefore, all instances were identified through a Key Word in Context (KWIC) search in AntConc and then checked manually. Several new categories were added, and differentiations made to describe the use of *promote* in my data (see Table 1).

Direct quotes as well as sample words (e.g., found in tables and lists) and instances from interview transcripts have been excluded as these do not include the writer's own words. Headings with *promote* have been included in the analysis since these words are part of the

writer's own words. As the stem *promot* followed by the wildcard \* had been entered in AntConc, not only the verb *promote* but also the noun *promotion* has been listed and analyzed as well as the gerund, the *-ing* form *promoting*. The noun *promoter* has been excluded from this analysis. All findings have been saved in Excel sheets.

Of course, synonyms and near synonyms of *promote* such as *support*, *highlight*, *assert*, *encourage*, *motivate*, *foster*, and *expand on* are also present in my data but were not included here as this would exceed the scope of this study. However, some of them are listed as possible synonyms and replacements in the summary below (section 4.2.10.).

### Scope and limitations

As Schmied (2011, p. 16) stated, the compatibility of data has been a “major problem of comparative research in academic writing”. It is crucial to keep in mind that the text types, here master and doctoral theses, and sections such as Linguistics, Literature and Cultural Studies as well as gender and mother tongue should be evenly distributed in a corpus. Several different variables might influence the style of writing. (Matarese, 2013) In my case, it was not possible to include the independent variable of gender or section and to find more doctoral theses from other universities. Nevertheless, the large number of theses and words as well as different Chinese universities in general allows to draw conclusions that are for the most part representative.

Moreover, the concordance program AntConc has its limitations. When looking at the number of hits in the KWIC tool, it is slightly different from the number of hits in the Word List tool. Apart from that, the program, for example, also includes ‘L1’ when searching for the abbreviation *ll*. As all hits were analyzed manually afterwards, this does not represent a major problem. Additionally, some abbreviations (e.g., ‘s’) that are included in the total number of words can be argued to be false. Since the aim of this study is to investigate and describe the use of *promote* in the fields of English Linguistics and Culture, other sections such as Physics or Political Sciences were neglected. A wider range would of course ensure more representative results. The research questions that underlie this study are addressed in the next subsection.

### Research questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the students' interlanguage use of the verb *promote* and to provide empirical evidence for its different meanings. The research questions addressed are:

1. Which semantic categories of *promote* are used in the corpus of Chinese academic writings?
2. What are the qualitative and quantitative differences and similarities between the uses of *promote* in Chinese master and doctoral theses?
3. Do the uses of *promote* show interlanguage features?

The first research question seeks to analyze the use of *promote* in the ChAcE-Corpus by identifying different semantic categories. The second research question compares the uses of *promote* quantitatively and qualitatively across the two academic genres master and doctoral theses. The focus here is on the comparison. The third research question asks whether or not the uses of *promote* found in Chinese writings can be considered interlanguage uses.

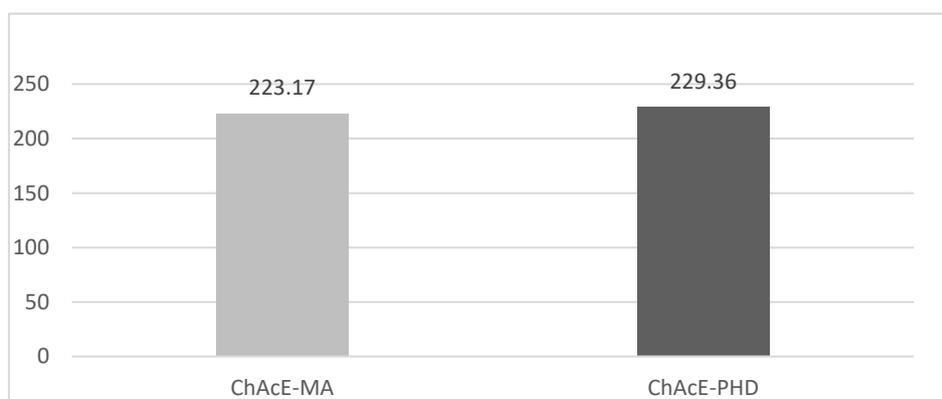
## Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis and Findings of *Promote* in Chinese Student Writings

### Quantitative analysis and findings

As a first step, an overview of the overall distribution of *promote* in my corpus is presented, followed by a more detailed presentation of the findings.

Figure 1

*The Relative Frequencies of Promot\* per 1,000,000 Words in ChAcE-MA and ChAcE-PHD*



The ChAcE-corpus consisting of 415 texts and around 10,3 million words yielded a total of 452,53 occurrences of *promote* per 1 million words. Even though the difference is not very big, it can be observed that *promote* has been used more often in doctoral theses. It is important to note that *promot\** includes all instances of *promote\**, *promoting* and *promotion\**. The following table gives a detailed insight in how the different semantic categories are distributed in my data:

Table 3

*An Overview of the Relative Frequencies of Promot\* per 1,000,000 Words in the Respective Semantic Categories in ChAcE-MA and ChAcE-PHD*

	ChAcE-MA	ChAcE-PHD
<b>Category 1</b>	12.44	7.74
<b>Category 1a</b>	<b>132.32</b>	<b>163.86</b>
<b>Category 1b</b>	18.96	16.99
<b>Category 2</b>	<b>5.53</b>	1.89
<b>Category 2a</b>	0.2	1.32
<b>Category 3</b>	<b>21.72</b>	9.06
<b>Category 3a</b>	0.2	<b>4.34</b>
<b>Category 4</b>	3.55	4.34
<b>Category 5</b>	5.92	6.61
<b>Category 5a</b>	<b>12.84</b>	8.49
<b>Category 6</b>	<b>9.28</b>	4.91

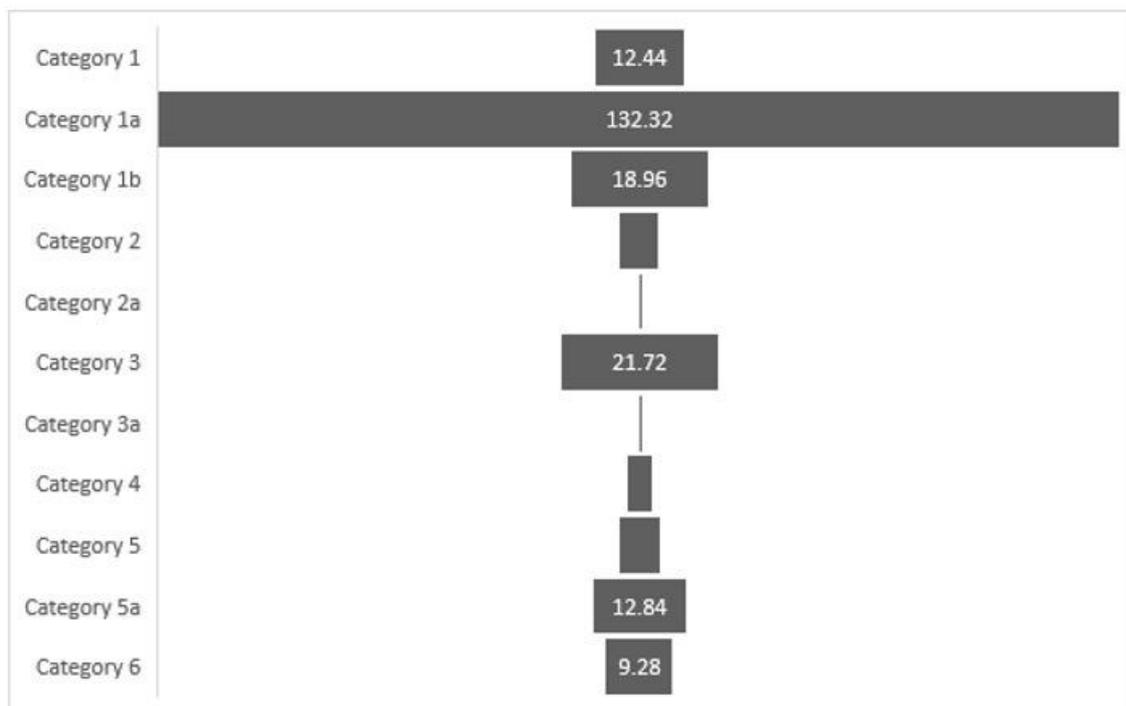
The distribution of the different categories of *promot\** listed in Table 3 shows that category 1a (contribute) can be found most frequently in both sub-corpora. With 30 instances more per 1 million words and a total of 163.86, category 1a expressing “to contribute to the progress, development or growth of something” has been used most frequently by doctoral students in

their theses. Category 1 (boost) is rarely found in neither of the two sub-corpora. Taking a closer look at the relative frequencies, it can be observed that this semantic category is found slightly more often in the master theses. Category 1b (encourage), which includes a construction that seems typical for Chinese students, namely *promote + to* infinitive, has been expressed more often than the rest of the remaining categories with almost 19 hits per 1 million words in ChAcE-MA and almost 17 hits in ChAcE-PHD. An exception is the frequency of category 3 (sell/advertise) in the master theses. However, as this meaning is not commonly found in academic texts and since some theses were written on topics related to advertisements, this category is not of major interest here.

The findings show that category 1 and its sub-categories are favored and are most typically found in academic writings by Chinese students. All other categories are present in the corpus but are not frequently found in the academic writings. The meaning expressed through category 2 (better job) is one of the most well-known meanings of *promote* and is not typically found in theses unless they are related to this topic. Even though category 2a (higher academic position) with 0.2 and 1.32 per 1 million words is almost absent in ChAcE-MA and ChAcE-PHD, it has been introduced in this study to show the difference in meaning between the commonly known meaning “better job” and the meaning specifically related to the academic context, which is relevant for the authors of the texts included in this corpus analysis. The same applies for category 3a (advertise yourself). “To encourage the acknowledgement and buying of your work, to advertise yourself and your academic work and achievements” is obviously more important for doctoral students for their academic careers. It is therefore not surprising that this category is basically not represented in ChAcE-MA but in ChAcE-PHD with 4.34 hits per 1 million words.

Figure 2

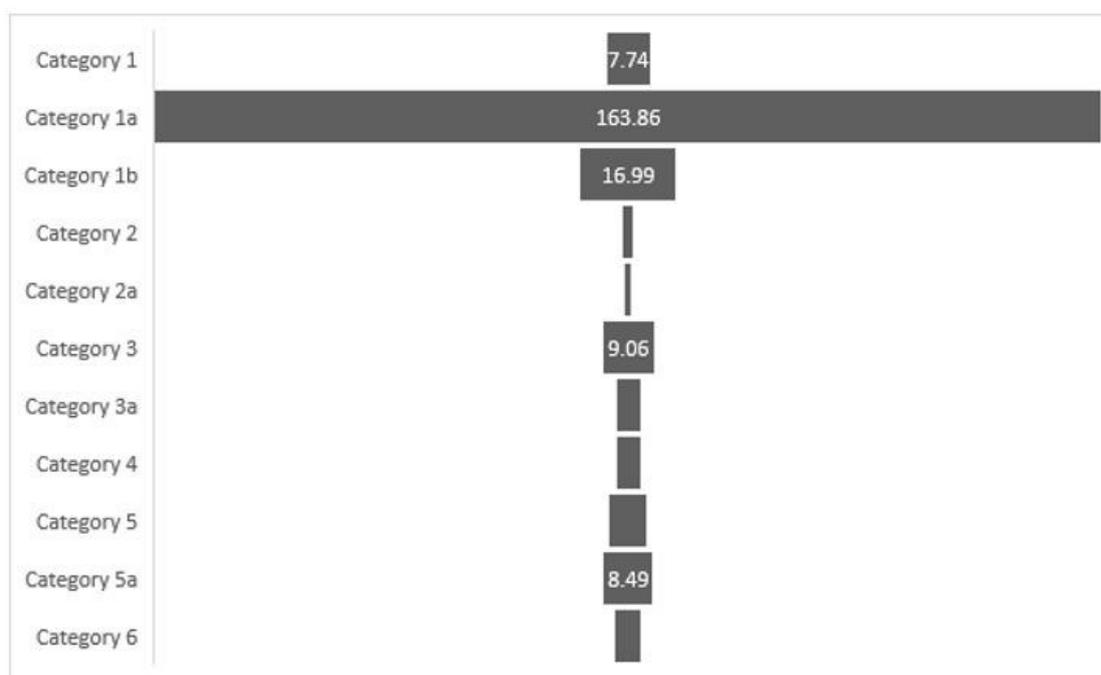
*The Distribution of Promot\* per 1,000,000 Words in the Respective Semantic Categories in ChAcE-MA*



The numbers for *promote* expressing “to persuade” (category 4) are very similar in both corpora and the number of hits assigned to category 5 (recommend) does also not exceed 7 hits per 1 million words. Category 5a (inspire) shows double the hits for the master theses compared to category 5. In 5a, students can express their recommendations and suggestions for further actions more indirectly and implicitly, which was favored by both master and doctoral students. In 5, recommendations are expressed directly and explicitly, which might not be typical for Chinese students, who are generally known for being rather indirect and shy. In both sub-corpora, there are instances of *promote* that could not be categorized and assigned to either one of the above-mentioned categories and that can be assumed to include an L1 transfer, which is typical for interlanguage uses. The number of hits is twice as high in the master theses sub-corpus, which suggests that the writing style in doctoral theses is more advanced and does not include many uncommon English expressions or interlanguage uses. The following figures (Figure 2 and 3) visualize the quantitative distribution of the semantic categories of *promote* found in my corpus.

Figure 3

*The Distribution of Promot\* per 1,000,000 Words in the Respective Semantic Categories in ChAcE-PHD*



Whereas Figure 1 focuses on the distribution of *promote* in general, Figure 2 and Figure 3 show more clearly how the different categories are distributed in both master and doctoral theses. This form of visualization was chosen because the different lengths of the bars indicate well the number of instances per category and their overall distribution. Whenever a category showed more than seven instances per 1 million words, the exact number was indicated.

As can be seen, most of the categories are generally more often found in the master theses, except for the newly added category 1a. As academic writing does not usually include topics that are discussed in journalistic writing, category 3 is, as expected, underrepresented in my data. As the advertisement of their own work is more relevant for them, such instances were mainly found in the works by doctoral students.

*Promote* can be used to lift certain topics or characteristics as well as actions higher and to give them more meaning than it would be the case with the synonyms of *promote* mentioned in my analysis. While the use of *promote* show features of an interlanguage and can be traced back to the L1 of the authors in some cases, it shows in other cases how well the authors interact with the intended readership by using a well-chosen verb and communicative strategies. In this way, the authors can make sure that the readers consider certain aspects and topics from the perspective the authors want them to. Through the use of *promote*, the authors may evoke a certain emotional response and possibly put more emphasis on something than would usually be expected.

In order to see whether the difference between the two text types (master and doctoral theses) is significant, the Chi-square was employed. Tables 4 shows the results:

Table 4

*Observed and Expected Values of the Semantic Categories of Promot\* in ChAcE-MA and ChAcE-PHD and Results of the Chi-Square Test*

	<b>ChAcE-MA observed N</b>	<b>ChAcE-MA expected N</b>	<b>ChAcE-PHD observed N</b>	<b>ChAcE-PHD expected N</b>
<b>Category 1</b>	12.44	9.94	7.74	10.24
<b>Category 1a</b>	132.32	145.93	163.86	150.25
<b>Category 1b</b>	18.96	17.71	16.99	18.24
<b>Category 2</b>	5.53	3.66	1.89	3.76
<b>Category 2a</b>	0.2	0.75	1.32	0.77
<b>Category 3</b>	21.72	15.17	9.06	15.61
<b>Category 3a</b>	0.2	2.24	4.34	2.30
<b>Category 4</b>	3.55	3.89	4.34	4.00
<b>Category 5</b>	5.92	6.17	6.61	6.36
<b>Category 5a</b>	12.84	10.51	8.49	10.82
<b>Category 6</b>	9.28	6.99	4.91	7.20
<b>x<sup>2</sup></b>	18.41			
<b>df</b>	10			
<b>p</b>	0.048391			

The Chi-square test showed a significant ( $p=0.048$ ) result for my dataset, which indicates a rather low degree, but nevertheless suggests that my results are not due to randomness and are statistically significant. It confirms that there is a connection between the text types and hence the level of the students and their different uses of *promote*.

### Qualitative analysis and findings

In this sub-section, the individual categories of *promote* are discussed on the basis of examples taken from my corpus.

#### *Category 1*

Category 1 (boost) refers to instances that include collocations including *promote*, such as *promote the economy, understanding or growth of something*. Here, *promote* is used to express that something is boosted. It usually only takes an object and is not followed by any adverbial

or sub-clause. Sometimes, it is followed by a preposition or conjunction (e.g., *through*, *by*, *so as to*, *in order to*). The authors appear to not have chosen *promote* over other verbs or *promotion* over other nouns merely to highlight something or to engage with the reader in a special way, but because *promote* is part of a collocation that is commonly used in a certain context.

Examples in my corpus include *promote the economy*, *development*, *health*, *growth*, *cooperation*, and *inductive language learning and discovery learning*. These are commonly found in political speeches, journal articles or textbooks. All other instances of *promote* are only followed by an object. Some examples include the *to*-infinitive of *promote*, which is a common feature of the first category. Possible replacements of *promote* in this category are *further*, *advance*, and *improve* and the main collocates are *greatly*, *better*, and *effectively*. These terms are all positively connoted, which shows that *promote* is often used to express that something contributes to the improvement of something.

#### *Category 1a*

Subcategory 1a (contribute) also includes instances that mean “to contribute to the progress, development, improvement or growth of something; to help something to spread, become more successful etc.” Unlike category 1 that includes collocations, this subcategory can include any phrase chosen by the writers (no collocations or fixed phrases) that expresses a very similar meaning to category 1, which is why it is ranked as a subcategory. If someone or something contributes to the growth or progress of something, it still seems to imply that something is boosted. By using *promote*, the writers chose a positively connoted word to engage with their readers. Through such a meaningful term, readers could easily be influenced by the author because it allows them to put more emphasis on an utterance than might be necessary or expected and it allows them to portray something as more positive than it might actually be. For example, stating that someone is “promoted” instead of “encouraged” or “inspired”, sounds more positive and significant. It could therefore possibly be strategic to use *promote* when something is supposed to appear more meaningful and stronger.

However, in my data, the question arises if the students really chose *promote* intentionally and purposefully or if this term is influenced by their L1 and hence an example of an interlanguage use. *Promote* has many more translations and entries in Chinese dictionaries and hence many more different meanings in Chinese as compared to English. Several of the instances in my corpus might therefore have been influenced by the students’ L1. This study mainly aims at describing how *promote* is used by Chinese students and how it can be categorized in academic writing. It therefore does not play a role if a certain use is common or accepted in English. The following examples give an overview of sentences included in 1a:

- 1) Therefore, we can safely state that the purposeful instruction of language learning strategy can not only improve the awareness of LLS, but also **promote** the poor students’ oral performance and proficiency. (CMAC08SP\_17)
- 2) Smiling **promotes** the teacher-student relationship. (CPhD13\_03)
- 3) In this round of action research, the researcher makes a hypothesis that self-assessment helps to **promote** the students’ critical thinking skill of self-regulation and to enhance their self-monitoring and self-managing ability in the whole writing and rewriting process. (CPhD12\_05)
- 4) Good reading teaching should not only **promote** readers to relate new texts to what they have already known, but should also **promote** students to be active readers as well. (CMAC08RE\_21)

- 5) Students can **promote** their learning strategies, improve their learning efficiency, and achieve ideal learning effects as long as they consciously understand the advantages and disadvantages of their own cognitive style in language learning. (CMAC09LI\_17)

All instances of *promote* in examples 1 to 5 can be replaced by *contribute to the development/progress/growth of*. Other replacements are *build up, improve, help, increase, enhance, expand, and cultivate*. These were used to confirm if the identified instances really belong to subcategory 1a. Among many clear instances, there were also some unclear ones. The collocates in this category reveal that *promote* is mainly used in positive and meaningful contexts. The following collocates are the most common ones in my data: *greatly, effectively, better, successful, success, effective way, effective strategy, effectiveness*.

In the first three examples, it can be assumed that the authors decided to boost their statements by using *promote*. In this way, an utterance is given an even stronger meaning. Furthermore, the structure including *promote* in example 4 is very interesting and unique of the Chinese student writings in my corpus. *Promote\* + to-* infinitive of an action verb has not been mentioned in any English dictionary. “To promote someone to do something” does not work in English, but it seems to be a common structure in Chinese. When it is replaced with *encourage* or *motivate*, however, this structure works in English. Even though it includes an L1 transfer, it was not ranked as such as the whole phrase is logical and understandable and expresses the main meaning of category 1a.

#### Category 1b

“To encourage or support someone to do something or encourage something to happen” is the description of subcategory 1b. Instances in 1b also express that something or someone is boosted, but this happens more actively and through direct support or intervention. The following examples illustrate this meaning:

- 6) Carol (2001) believes that tasks perceived as high stakes are likely to **promote** more attention to form. (CMAC08ME\_22)
- 7) Therefore, he proposes that, fundamentally, the teacher, the learner, even the material writer should **promote** engagement with vocabulary. (CPhD14\_05)
- 8) Teachers can **promote** this reflection by being explicit about the particular teaching requirements and remind students of their personal goals they set before. (CPhD14\_04)
- 9) The other learners are **promoted** to listen attentively since they have been informed that their final scores would be based on their representatives' public presentations [...]. (CPhD14\_01)
- 10) To make the students be active, the teacher is expected to be skillful in “warming the classes” which means that the teacher can employ strategies to constantly **promote** students to express themselves and join in interactions. (CPhD13\_01)

In examples 6 to 10, *promote* can be replaced with *encourage* but not necessarily with *improve* or *contribute to the development of something*. The focus here is not on the final result (e.g., an improvement or development) but on the action itself. In example 8, *promote* occurs with a modal verb (*can*). From the context, it becomes clear that teachers should or can encourage students to reflect upon their own work and goals. Such a *reflection* does not need to be improved but encouraged. It is further suggested how this reflection can be encouraged, indicated through the preposition “by”.

In example 9, *promote* is used with the passive voice and in connection with a *to-* infinitive of *listen*. Learners are encouraged *to listen actively*. A reason, introduced by the conjunction *since*, is also given. Almost all dictionaries that have been consulted only include instances where something, not someone, is encouraged. Only the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2019) adds that *promote* can also express “to encourage people to like, buy, use, do, or support something”. This meaning, however, is very similar to advertise something (category 3) and to boost something (category 1). It is hence concluded that the structure *promote* + animate object as well as *promote* + *to-* infinitive, which was most frequently found in this subcategory, is unique for Chinese students. Next to the already mentioned features, *promote* co-occurs with the adverb *constantly* in example 10. Other adverbs found in my data in this category are *actively*, *highly* and *effectively*, which further underlines the focus on the action in this category and not on the result. Possible replacements are *encourage*, *advance*, *facilitate*, *support* and *help*.

### Category 2 and 2a

The meaning expressed in category 2 (better job) is probably one of the most popular meanings of *promote*. To be promoted and hence “assigned to a higher position” is surely one of the first associations people form when hearing *promote*. As such instances are not common for academic writings and as this meaning should be clear to everyone, examples are not provided here. This category is furthermore underrepresented in my data. This is the only category where *promote* only functions as an intransitive verb.

A subcategory that is new in my categorization is 2a (higher academic position). Since my data only includes academic writings and the topics are mainly from the field of academia, it seemed necessary to subdivide this category, even though not many instances were assigned to category 2a. Examples include:

- 11) In China, a lot of researchers on co-operative learning believe it is beneficial for English learners to take use of the co-operative learn method, because it is not only conducive to teaching and learning, enhance teacher-student relationship, arouse the students' enthusiasm in study, to **promote** teacher's professional level, but also can improve the students' learning interest and enhance the consciousness of students' — autonomous -learning. (CMAC10ME\_14)
- 12) This implies that a person's scholarly worth is usually weighed according to the number of research articles s/he manages to get published and that s/he could secure **academic** prestige and **promotion** by means of writing research papers and getting them published. (CPhD05\_02)
- 13) The short-term plans were mainly concerned with writing articles or the **promotion** of either academic position or academic certification. (CPhD10\_11)
- 14) As the publication of RAs is regarded as a prerequisite for **promotion** at most universities and academic institutions, scholars from non-English speaking countries are under increasing pressure to publish their RAs in English. (CPhD11\_01)

Next to the phrase promote teacher's professional level (example 11), phrases such as academic promotion (example 12), promotion of an academic position (example 13) and promotion at universities and academic institutions (example 14) are found in my data. The noun promotion is most frequently used in this context and not the verb form promote. Whereas promote functions as the predicate in example 11, promotions functions as an object in the other examples. This subcategory has been introduced to differentiate between the well-known

promotion at any kind of job and the academic promotion at universities and academic institutions where not only a better job is referred to but also higher positions such as PhDs and professorships as well as academic prestige. The promotion of an academic position and academic certification (example 13) does not necessarily involve an occupational advancement and a boss who promotes an employee. Whereas an occupational promotion found in category 2 counts as a collocation, the instances related to the field of academia have a higher impact on the academic audience and do not count as common collocations.

### *Category 3 and 3a*

Besides the occupational promotion, the most known meaning of *promote* is “to encourage the buying of a (new) product, film, etc.; to advertise something”, included as category 3 (sell/advertise) in this categorization. It is not only mentioned in all dictionaries but also in Halliday and Matthiessen’s taxonomy of texts presented in their *Introduction to Systemic Functional Grammar* (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). For this meaning is widely known, this description is kept rather short here. Similar to category 2, category 3 has also been subdivided since there are a few instances that are typical for academic writings and refer to the advertisement of something but yet are different from the advertisement of products etc. Subcategory 3a (advertise yourself), which is my addition, includes instances of *promote* that “encourage the acknowledgement and buying of your work, to advertise yourself and your academic work and achievements”. The following examples give an idea of this meaning of *promote*:

- 15) Self mention is an important way in which writers can gain approval for their research and **promote** their scholarly identity. (CPhD12\_06)
- 16) The use of particular move structures and highlighting specific linguistic features with metadiscourse can demonstrate their insider status to **promote** themselves and their research [...]. (CPhD12\_06)
- 17) Concluding and **promoting** the present study. (CPhD11\_06)

In example 15, *promote* is found in a subclause in connection with the modal verb *can*, which expresses the possibility for students to *promote their scholarly identity* by using the authorial *I* in their works. It could be argued that the author rather referred to improving and lifting the scholarly identity of the students higher through self-mentions, but it could also be interpreted as “to encourage the acknowledgement” of the students’ work and their scholarly identity. The author of example 16 clearly states that students can *promote themselves and their research* through *the use of particular move structures*. As has been mentioned above, headlines have been included in my analysis as well because the word choices in headlines are also originally made by the authors. This headline (example 17) of the last stage of the student’s thesis shows that the promotion of his or her doctoral thesis is seen as an essential step. This example clearly fits to the category description of 3a and includes the advertisement of a student’s work. It has to be noted that this category is underrepresented in my data and that most of the examples above represent single cases. Nevertheless, this category was found to be unique for my data.

### *Category 4*

In category 4 (persuade), *promote* is used “to try to persuade people to support or use something”. The following examples have been selected to describe this category:

- 18) That means there is more space for people to **promote** their ideas. (CPhD06\_04)
- 19) The reason is probably that Chinese society traditionally advocates and **promotes**

- the culture of respecting the elderly and caring for the young. (CPhD08\_07)
- 20) To be kind to others and to do good deeds are always appreciated and **promoted** in Chinese society. (CPhD08\_07)
- 21) These researches have deepened people's understanding of washback as well as **promoted** the reform of testing and teaching to some certain extent. (CMAC07LI\_15)
- 22) CDA theorists aim to investigate critically the social inequality expressed, signaled, legitimized in discourse to uncover the oppressive power relations and ideological structure so as to **promote** the social change. (CPhD11\_13)

*Promote* mainly co-occurs with the nouns *idea*, *change*, *claim*, and *argument* in this category. This can also be seen from the examples above where *promote* occurs with *ideas* (example 18), *culture* (example 19), the culture of *being kind to others and doing good deeds* (example 20), *reform* (example 21) and *social change* (example 22). In general, only examples in this category related to academic writing and the respective sections (e.g. Linguistics, Cultural Studies) have been included in my analysis. Others related to advertisements where *promote* is the only possible expression, have been excluded. *Promote* co-occurred with the adverbs *strongly* and *effectively* in this category.

*Persuade* is stronger in meaning than *boost*, *contribute*, *encourage*, or *advertise*. However, is it not commonly found in academic writings. Ideas, claims or theories are often introduced, supported, or suggested as well as recommended and appraised in academic texts, but readers are rarely explicitly persuaded to apply a certain theory or to accept a claim. This meaning of *promote* is different from “recommend, inspire, advertise” because *persuade* mainly refers to something that the author or e.g. the state or culture under discussion has to offer, has found, developed or is at least strongly convinced of. *Persuade* goes one step further than merely recommending something, which is the meaning of the next category.

#### Category 5

Category 5 (recommend) is also subdivided and includes one subcategory (5a). Both are my additions to the categorization of *promote* found in dictionaries. Both categories are mainly found in academic texts and have been defined and added on the basis of my data. In both cases, *promote* is a transitive verb.

Category 5 is concerned with instances that are used “to strongly (directly/explicitly) recommend something or someone to others, mainly in the field of academia”. Examples 23 to 26 demonstrate this:

- 23) Based upon the hard work of these linguists, the study on gender language as well as women's language is greatly **promoted** and developed. (CMAC13CU\_26)
- 24) Wuhan University is the first State 985 Project university that extensively **promoted** the computer and network-based college English teaching model. (CPhD11\_10)
- 25) In short, the Integrated Unit curriculum plays an important role in reforming the CE curriculum, especially in content and methods **promoted** by the Ministry of Education in China. (CPhD11\_06)
- 26) In 2002, the first National Cognitive Linguistics Seminar was held, which played a more active role in **promoting** the study of metaphorical linguistics, and the discussion of relationship between metaphor and foreign language teaching was put on the agenda. (CMAC13SE\_9)

In example 23, *promote* clearly expresses “to recommend something”. If it expressed “to contribute to the growth or development of something”, the verb *develop* that directly follows would not be there. The adverb *greatly* also suggests that *promote* expresses that *the study on gender language* is explicitly promoted here and not indirectly inspired (cat. 5a). *Greatly* does also not seem to be a natural collocation of *inspire*. Other adverbs that co-occur with *promote* in this category are *extensively* (example 24), *directly*, *actively*, and *constantly*. A further collocation is *play a significant/ great/ active role in* (example 26).

In example 25, it is further included by whom something is promoted. In this instance, the *content and methods* included in *the Chinese English curriculum* are recommended by *the Ministry of Education*. It is rather uncommon to say that a Ministry promotes something. A Ministry might suggest, request, introduce, institute, or pass something, but it is unlikely that it advertises or boosts a curriculum.

*Promoting the study of metaphorical linguistics* in example 26 has been categorized as expressing “to recommend something” because it is stated that it has been promoted at an academic seminar. It is furthermore stated that holding this seminar *played an active role in promoting* it, which shows that it had a direct part in it and should not be ranked as “to inspire” (cat. 5a).

When something is recommended by someone, it can still be said that it is somehow advertised or at least appraised. The meaning is further similar to that of category 1b (encourage), yet different. In 5, something is appraised and recommended without directly encouraging someone to do something. Here, possible replacements are *recommend* and *support*. The following subcategory is similar to category 5, but the meaning of *promote* is not as strong as in 5.

#### Category 5a

“To (indirectly/implicitly) inspire others to do something, e.g., to conduct (further) research in a certain field, apply a teaching method or read a thesis, mainly in the field of academia” may be expressed through subcategory 5a (inspire). The following examples describe this category:

- 27) This research is hoped to **promote** interest in the study of thematic structure in Early English. (CPhD06\_03)
- 28) This Study aims at applying cognitive semantics to vocabulary teaching and attempts to **promote** such vocabulary teaching method among English teachers and students. (CMAC13SE\_15)
- 29) Lu, Ziwen (2004) put forward real-task teaching theory, **promoting** the use of teaching materials related to real life in English teaching classroom and designing authentic tasks, which can facilitate the relationship between English language learning and social practice. (CMAC14ME\_9)

In example 27, *hoped to*, in example 28, *attempts to* and in example 29, *put forward* are used in connection with *promote*. These verbs are semantically rather weak and are used to indirectly inspire an action, not to obviously encourage (category 1b) or persuade (category 4) someone. The author of example 27 aims at *promoting interest in studies* with the goal of the readers either reading studies in these fields or conducting their own research. No one is directly persuaded or motivated to conduct further research, but the authors hope that this will eventually happen through arousing interest in these fields.

The difference between 5 and 5a is not always clear. One difference can also be found in the words used within the scope of *promote*. “To recommend” is closer to advertising something and is more often followed by a noun compared to “to inspire” which is closer to encouraging people to take an action and hence followed by a verb. In category 5a, *promote* mainly collocates with semantically weak terms such as *can*, *hopefully*, *it is hoped to*, *may be*, *may*, *aims to*, *attempts to*, and similar hedges in general.

#### Category 6

The last category has been added for all instances that displayed issues in their categorization. It “includes all expressions that do not fit into any of the above-mentioned categories and clearly show an L1 transfer” and are hence examples of interlanguage uses. The following examples give an idea of some expressions that are found to include an L1 transfer:

- 30) Students also thought about the consequences of doing poorly on course assignment and/or tests to **promote** themselves to keep studying hard. (CPhD08\_02) (EM)
- 31) He **promoted** that China has its own traditional way to write the history of literature on the basis of the literary trends and genres, with special emphasis on the representative writers (Wang Zuoliang, Zhou Jueliang, 2006: XVIII). (CMAC08LIT\_33) (EM)
- 32) Having educated herself in the achievements of blacks, Morrison, already **promoted** into the fiction of French, English, and Russian novelists, entered Howard University in Washington D.C. (CMAC05LIT\_28) (no EM)
- 33) This “Language-and-Culture Craze” **promotes** globe wide research into the relationship between language and culture. (CMAC10CU\_19) (no EM)

The meaning of *promote* in examples 30 to 33 can either only be guessed or is totally unclear. Some translations surely come from Chinese, but the actual meaning is difficult to guess for non-natives of Chinese and the constructions do usually not work as such in English. Both examples of interlanguage uses of *promote* + *into* (examples 32, 33) are different, yet both difficult to comprehend and therefore included in this category.

A quick KWIC search in AntConc showed that in my corpus, there was a variation in the use of *promote*, *enhance*, *contribute* and *improve*, which may be related to the common practice of students of finding synonyms in writings in order not to sound repetitive. This, however, does not change the fact that the high number of *promote* in the ChAcE-corpus is striking and the different (partly interlanguage) uses significant for Chinese students.

#### Summary meanings of *Promote*

The two diagrams below visualize firstly the different categories and secondly summarize the different meanings of *promote*, which at the same time function as replacements or synonyms of *promote*.

Figure 4 shows the six main categories of *promote* as well as the five subcategories and their connections. The most common and well-known meanings of *promote* are “to assign someone to a higher position (better job), category 2” and “to encourage the buying of a (new) product, film, etc., to advertise something (sell/advertise), category 3”. These two categories are rarely confused with others and rarely overlap with others. That is why they stand alone. “L1 transfer” was put in the center as it can include instances from all the other categories. Further overlaps

in meaning were discussed above. “Boost” and “contribute” are displayed bigger than the other categories because they occurred more frequently in my corpus than the others and are generally expected to be found in academic texts more often.

Figure 4

*An Overview of the Different Meanings of Promote Found in the ChAcE-Corpus*



## Conclusion

Academic writing has undergone a great change in the past years and decades. It is not seen as a faceless and impersonal type of writing anymore but as a form of interaction between the authors and their readers. (Hyland, 2005b) The competitiveness of native and non-native authors who publish in international journals has also increased. It is therefore surely useful to investigate the academic writings of novice writers in order to help them improve their writings. Therefore, an interlanguage analysis has been conducted. This kind of analysis “has become a highly popular method in Learner Corpus Research” (Granger, 2015, p. 7) since it was introduced in 1996 as CIA. Its design allows to uncover and analyze features that are distinctive of the language of learners. (Granger, 2015, p. 7) I did not perform a full CIA but laid the foundation for further research.

I analyzed the interlanguage use of one verb in order to describe its uses and interlanguage features found in Chinese academic writings. I looked at the different semantic meanings of *promote* and investigated its semantic features in detail. Therefore, I analyzed the uses found in 303 master theses and 112 doctoral theses written in English. A detailed categorization of *promote* has been developed on the basis of well-known meanings found in dictionaries and additional meanings found in my data (RQ 1) beforehand. For this, an inductive approach has been adapted and my own categories have been developed based on the meanings found in my data. Two different genres, master and doctoral theses, were compared based on their different uses of *promote* and the overall results were visualized. Even though the difference between the level of English of master and doctoral students is not big, it is still considerable. Doctoral students are usually older, have had more hours of English and more extensive instructions, have read more advanced texts and probably discussed their topic with different academics and hence have received more feedback. It is therefore interesting and significant that *promote* was

generally used more often by doctoral students (RQ 2). Furthermore, it was found that “contributing to the growth or improvement of something (categories 1, 1a)” and “encouraging others to do certain actions (category 1b)” are among the main meanings of *promote* found in both academic writings in the disciplines of Linguistics, Cultural Studies, English Language and Literature as well as SLA.

This detailed analysis of *promote* also confirmed that *promote* shows several features of an interlanguage and that the uses are rather culture-specific and that some may be unique for Chinese students (RQ 3). For example, one syntactical structure that has been found to be an interlanguage use of *promote* is *promote* + animate object as well as *promote* + infinitive *to*. It was found that the author’s first language did not only have an impact on their second language at the master’s level, but also at a higher level. It is therefore important that teachers are aware of the fact that the English of their students might include features of an interlanguage and I believe that it is helpful to point out such interlanguage uses to the students in order to improve their L2 and their competitiveness in the academia. This paper only looked at one verb, but nevertheless showed that the L2 of Chinese students includes interlanguage uses. Even though *promote* is not typically found in academic writing, it seems to play a role in the writings by Chinese students. Therefore, this study aimed at finding out how *promote* is used in Chinese theses in English.

As my corpus only includes writings from the four above mentioned disciplines, the findings cannot be generalized to other disciplines. Further research could compare the use of *promote* in expert and non-expert writings as well as in different genres such as journal articles and argumentative essays. A CIA of *promote* in academic texts by writers with different L1s would surely also be interesting.

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