

The interpersonal pragmatic functions in the use of English attitude stance adverbs

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Abstract. This study aims to explore the interpersonal pragmatic functions of commonly-used English attitude stance adverbs. Background: Attitude stance adverbs are crucial linguistic elements for expressing speakers' attitudes, emotions and viewpoints in communication, and their proper use is vital for effective interpersonal interaction and cross-cultural communication. Methods: Based on corpus analysis, this study collects and analyzes relevant data from the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus Of Contemporary American English (COCA), identifies 41 high-frequency attitude stance adverbs, and focuses on the qualitative and quantitative analysis of 17 typical ones. Results: Different English attitude stance adverbs exhibit distinct characteristics in lexical-grammatical collocation, contextual application and stylistic distribution, and play diverse interpersonal pragmatic roles such as emotion expression, viewpoint emphasis, relationship maintenance and face protection. Their usage varies significantly across different contexts, cultures and genres. Conclusions: The research findings provide important theoretical references for pragmatics and sociolinguistics research, and offer practical guidance for English teaching and cross-cultural communication, helping learners improve their language application competence and interpersonal communication effectiveness.

Keywords: English attitude stance adverbs, use features, interpersonal pragmatics, corpus analysis, cross-cultural communication

1. Introduction

Interpersonal pragmatic research has long been a key focus in linguistics and social sciences, exploring how language users express attitudes, intentions and establish relationships through linguistic means [1]. Arundale [2] further elaborated on the connotation of "interaction" in interpersonal pragmatics, pointing out that the core of interpersonal communication lies in the dynamic interaction between communicators, which provides an important theoretical basis for exploring the functional realization of linguistic elements such as attitude stance adverbs in interaction. Attitude stance adverbs, defined as adverbs that convey speakers' attitudes, evaluations and positions on events or propositions [3], such as "fortunately", "honestly" and "significantly", play an indispensable role in English communication. They not only help listeners accurately perceive speakers' emotional tendencies and communicative intentions but also contribute to constructing harmonious interpersonal relationships and promoting effective information exchange.

Previous studies have laid a foundation for the research on attitude stance adverbs. Martin and White [4] proposed the "ATTITUDE" framework to describe the functional characteristics of such adverbs, while Hyland [5] explored their usage patterns in academic writing across different disciplines. From the perspective of interpersonal pragmatics, researchers emphasize that the core value of language lies in its interpersonal function, and attitude stance adverbs, as important emotional and evaluative markers, are closely related to the achievement of communicative goals [6, 7]. Notably, Formentelli [8] conducted in-depth research on the use of stance adverbs in English as a lingua franca, providing valuable insights into their interpersonal relationship management functions in cross-cultural academic contexts, which also highlights the necessity of exploring the cross-cultural application of attitude stance adverbs in this study.

However, existing studies still lack a comprehensive analysis of the usage characteristics and interpersonal pragmatic functions of attitude stance adverbs across multiple contexts and genres. For example, Precht [9] summarized the usage patterns

of stance adverbs but failed to deeply explore their pragmatic mechanisms in specific interpersonal interactions. Therefore, there is a need for more targeted research to guide practical application such as language teaching and cross-cultural communication.

This study aims to fill this research gap by addressing the following objectives:

- (1) Describe the multi-dimensional usage features of English attitude stance adverbs, including lexical-grammatical, pragmatic, interactive, social, cultural and contextual features;
- (2) Analyze their interpersonal pragmatic functions in maintaining interpersonal harmony, following politeness principles and conveying intentions;
- (3) Explore the variation rules of their usage across different contexts and cultural backgrounds;
- (4) Provide actionable suggestions for English teaching and cross-cultural communication based on research results.

The significance of this study is reflected in three aspects: Theoretically, it enriches the research perspectives of interpersonal pragmatics and stance studies, providing new insights into the relationship between linguistic form and social function; practically, it offers effective strategies for English learners to master attitude stance adverbs, improving their communicative competence; cross-culturally, it helps reduce misunderstandings caused by pragmatic differences, promoting smooth intercultural communication.

2. Results

After clarifying the research background, objectives and significance, this section will focus on presenting the research results obtained through corpus analysis and multi-dimensional analysis. The results mainly cover the usage features, collocation characteristics, contextual and stylistic variations as well as interpersonal pragmatic functions of typical English attitude stance adverbs, which will lay a foundation for the subsequent discussion and conclusion.

2.1. Usage features of typical attitude stance adverbs

The analysis of 17 typical attitude stance adverbs reveals their distinct characteristics in contextual application and emotional expression:

(1) Emotional adverbs such as "amazingly", "sadly" and "ironically" focus on conveying speakers' emotional responses to events. For example, "Amazingly, he managed to solve the complex math problem in just a few minutes" expresses strong surprise, while "Sadly, she couldn't attend the wedding due to a family emergency" conveys regret and sorrow. These adverbs are often used at the beginning or middle of sentences to highlight emotional tendencies.

(2) Evaluative adverbs including "importantly", "significantly" and "rightly" emphasize speakers' judgments and evaluations of the importance, correctness or effectiveness of things. "Importantly, regular exercise plays a crucial role in maintaining good health" highlights the core status of the proposition, and "He was rightly rewarded for his exceptional performance" expresses recognition of the rationality of the event.

(3) Modal adverbs such as "necessarily", "presumably" and "deliberately" indicate speakers' assumptions, intentions or certainty about events. For example, "To succeed in this field, dedication and hard work are necessarily required" expresses the inevitability of a condition, while "He deliberately ignored her calls to show his anger" clarifies the intentionality of the behavior.

2.2. Collocation characteristics

On the basis of analyzing the basic usage features of typical attitude stance adverbs, this part further explores their collocation rules with other parts of speech, focusing on the collocation characteristics with verbs and adjectives, which can help us better understand the lexical-grammatical features of attitude stance adverbs.

2.2.1. Collocation with verbs

In news reports, attitude stance adverbs tend to collocate with descriptive verbs to maintain objectivity, such as "reportedly describe", "objectively analyze" and "allegedly explain" [9]. In social media comments, they often pair with emotional and behavioral verbs to strengthen subjective expression, such as "strongly support", "completely oppose", "honestly admit" and "deliberately avoid". For example, "The media reportedly analyzed the impact of the policy" maintains neutrality, while "Netizens strongly oppose the unreasonable regulation" conveys clear emotional stance.

2.2.2. Collocation with adjectives

Such adverbs often modify emotional or evaluative adjectives to enhance semantic intensity and attitude expression. Common collocations include "surprisingly good", "significantly different", "appropriately reasonable" and "unnecessarily complicated"

[10]. For instance, "The new medicine has significantly reduced the symptoms" emphasizes the obvious effect, and "This approach is unnecessarily complex" expresses negative evaluation of the degree of complexity.

2.3. Contextual and stylistic variations

After exploring the collocation characteristics of attitude stance adverbs, it is necessary to further analyze their usage differences in different contexts and styles, as context and style are important factors affecting the use of language. The following will discuss the contextual differences and stylistic distribution of attitude stance adverbs respectively.

2.3.1. Contextual differences

In formal contexts such as academic papers and news reports, attitude stance adverbs tend to be neutral and objective, such as "objectively", "arguably" and "reportedly" [8]. For example, "The study objectively reflects the current situation of environmental pollution" maintains academic rigor. In informal contexts like daily conversations and social media comments, subjective and emotional adverbs are more frequently used, such as "totally", "absolutely", "amazingly" and "sadly", as in "I absolutely agree with your viewpoint" which expresses strong approval. It is worth noting that Dong [10] also confirmed in his comparative study of critical and appreciative academic discourse that the selection of attitude stance adverbs is highly dependent on contextual formality, which is consistent with the findings of this study.

2.3.2. Stylistic distribution

- (1) Academic style: Moderately uses adverbs like "arguably", "clearly" and "credibly" to express cautious evaluation and evidence support, e.g., "Arguably, this theory provides a new research perspective".
- (2) News reporting: Employs neutral adverbs such as "reportedly", "allegedly" and "recently" to convey factual information, avoiding subjective bias, e.g., "The incident reportedly occurred in the early morning".
- (3) Argumentative writing: Uses intensive adverbs like "strongly", "firmly" and "critically" to emphasize viewpoints and reasoning, e.g., "We firmly believe that this policy will promote social progress".

2.4. Interpersonal pragmatic functions

Based on the analysis of usage features, collocation characteristics, contextual and stylistic variations of attitude stance adverbs, this part will focus on exploring their interpersonal pragmatic functions. These functions are the core value of attitude stance adverbs in communication, which are crucial for achieving effective interpersonal interaction.

- (1) Emotion expression: Adverbs such as "fortunately", "unfortunately" and "interestingly" directly convey speakers' emotional states, helping listeners resonate emotionally and enhancing communication intimacy.
- (2) Viewpoint emphasis: "Importantly", "significantly" and "obviously" highlight the core of propositions, guiding listeners' attention and ensuring the effective transmission of key information.
- (3) Relationship maintenance: By following politeness principles, adverbs like "appropriately", "understandably" and "reasonably" help maintain each other's face, e.g., "Understandably, you need more time to consider" shows respect for the other party's situation.
- (4) Persuasion enhancement: Strong adverbs such as "strongly", "definitely" and "undoubtedly" strengthen the persuasiveness of arguments, helping speakers gain listeners' recognition.
- (5) Neutrality maintenance: Objective adverbs like "objectively", "impartially" and "presumably" avoid excessive subjectivity, establishing the credibility of communication, especially in formal contexts such as academic discussions and public speeches. This function is particularly important in cross-cultural communication, as emphasized by Formentelli [8] in her research on English as a lingua franca, where appropriate use of neutral stance adverbs can effectively reduce misunderstandings caused by cultural differences.

3. Conclusion

After presenting and analyzing the research results in detail, this section will summarize the key findings of the study, discuss the theoretical and practical significance, and point out the limitations of the research and future research directions, so as to form a complete research closed loop.

This study comprehensively explores the usage features and interpersonal pragmatic functions of English attitude stance adverbs through corpus analysis and multi-dimensional analysis. The key findings are as follows: First, English attitude stance adverbs exhibit distinct characteristics in lexical-grammatical collocation, with specific pairing preferences with verbs and

adjectives in different contexts. Second, their usage varies significantly across contexts and genres, with formal contexts favoring neutral and objective adverbs and informal contexts preferring subjective and emotional ones. Third, these adverbs play diverse interpersonal pragmatic roles, including emotion expression, viewpoint emphasis, relationship maintenance, persuasion enhancement and neutrality maintenance, which are crucial for achieving effective communication.

The theoretical significance of this study lies in enriching the research system of interpersonal pragmatics and stance studies, revealing the interaction mechanism between linguistic form, context and interpersonal function. It supplements the research gaps in existing studies such as Precht [9] by clarifying the pragmatic functions of attitude stance adverbs in specific interpersonal interactions, and further verifies and expands the research conclusions of Formentelli [8] in cross-cultural contexts. In practical terms, the findings provide important guidance for English teaching: teachers should strengthen contextual analysis and collocation training of attitude stance adverbs, provide abundant examples to help students grasp their usage rules in different scenarios, and encourage students to apply them in oral and written practice. For cross-cultural communication, learners need to pay attention to the cultural differences in the usage of attitude stance adverbs, avoid pragmatic failures caused by inappropriate use, and improve cross-cultural communication competence.

This study also has limitations. The research corpus is mainly from British and American English corpora, and the sample size of cross-cultural comparative analysis is insufficient. Future research can expand the research scope by including attitude stance adverbs in other English varieties and non-English languages, conduct in-depth cross-cultural comparative studies, and explore the impact of factors such as age, gender and social status on their usage. In addition, further research can focus on the pragmatic effects of attitude stance adverbs in specific communicative scenarios such as business negotiations and political speeches, providing more targeted practical guidance.

Funding projects

This article represents the phased achievements supported by four research projects:

- (1) the 2022 Hunan Provincial Social Science Fund Project "Interpersonal Pragmatic Study of English Stance Adverbs" (22YBA233) hosted by Yang Xiaojun;
- (2) the "14th Five-Year Plan" Higher Education Research Project of Guangdong Provincial Higher Education Association titled "The Impact of Higher Education Internationalization on the Reform of Talent Cultivation Models in Guangdong Province" (24GYB88) hosted by Yang Xiaojun;
- (3) the 2025 National-Level Cultivation Project of Guangzhou Institute of Technology "Interpersonal Pragmatic Study on the Use of English Stance Adverbs" (2025gjp002) hosted by Yang Xiaojun;
- (4) the Industry-Academia Collaboration and Cooperative Education Project of the Ministry of Education "Exploration of Translation Practice and Internships through a Corpus-Based Approach" hosted by Yang Xiaojun.

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