



Vagueness in Communication: A Corpus Driven Study of Academic Discourse

Research Article

Correspondence:	Dr. Syed Azaz Ali Shah <zee_shah21@hotmail.com>	Assistant Professor, Department of English, Kohat University of Science and Technology, Pakistan.
	Dr. Kifayatullah <kiffayat@gmail.com>	Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Chitral, Pakistan.
	Naseer Ahmed <naseeramazai@gmail.com>	PhD Scholar, Qurtuba University of Science and information Technology, Peshawar, Pakistan.

Publication Details

Received: July 12, 2023

Accepted: August 28, 2023

Published: September 30, 2023

Abstract

The present research paper aims to analyze one of the most frequently used vague words, namely "thing", as employed by Pakistani students in their undergraduate assignments and essays. The data was collected from the Pakistan National Corpus of English (PNCE) and analyzed using the Antconc corpus software. The objective is to determine whether the word "thing" is utilized as a vague noun, for meta-discourse, or in any other capacity in order to understand how effectively Pakistani students communicate. This study yields several conclusions, with the primary one being that the word "thing" is consistently employed both in a discussive and non-discussive manner. It often serves as a placeholder for various objects, which are subsequently elucidated in preceding or subsequent statements by the students. The frequent use of this word also lends legitimacy to its usage by Pakistani students. However, it is important to note that the recurrent use of the word "thing" poses a risk of creating confusion in written work due to its repetitive nature.

Keywords: communication, vague/vagueness, PNCE, discussive, non-discussive



1. Introduction

In both written and spoken English discourses, certain words are employed to refer to or represent other words. As exemplified in the preceding sentence, the term "certain" encompasses a list of words that function to refer to other words. Within the context of Pakistani academia, where English is predominantly used as a second language (L2), the exploration and analysis of such words becomes not only interesting but also imperative in terms of prevalent conventional discourse practices and effective communication. Following the established traditions set forth by prominent scholars in the realm of metatalk and metadiscourse (Swales, 2001; Biber et al., 1998), it becomes essential to comprehend and investigate how words are perceived and utilized by a linguistic community, particularly words used to denote both concrete and abstract, as well as animate and inanimate objects.

One such word is "thing," which has been categorized as a form of 'vague reference' by Biber and Gray (2016, p. 202). The term "thing" is a noun, defined as representing "an object whose name is not used either because it is unnecessary, undesirable, or unknown" (Oxford Learners Dictionary, 2020). Its origins can be traced back to the Germanic language, where it signified "meaning, matter, concern," as well as inanimate objects (Merriam-Webster, 2020). In contrast to sense-datum language, "thing-language" consists of terms that refer to spatiotemporal entities, events, and their physical attributes. As a noun, "thing" is a content word that can be intentionally or unintentionally used in place of another noun (Brown, 1958). This word also falls into the category of "vague" words, as proposed by Channell (1994). Scholars such as Swales (2001) express disapproval of its use in academic writing and often view it with a degree of skepticism. However, Swales (2001), in his research on the metadiscursive use of the words "point" and "thing," found that the metadiscursive use of the word "thing" accounts for approximately 17 percent of occurrences in The Michigan Corpus of Academic Speech in English (MICASE). It is worth noting that the corpus analyzed by Swales was based on spoken language, specifically lectures. The use of "thing" as a vague substitute noun was considerably less frequent in speech acts, as revealed by Swales.

Given the burgeoning interest in corpus linguistics for comparing the use of English by native and non-native speakers, coupled with the substantial volume of research conducted and published in English by non-native speakers of the language, it is intriguing to explore how the word "thing" is employed by non-native speakers in their written academic discourse. Written discourse also serves as a model for establishing, preserving, and advancing conventions within any genre. Therefore, an analysis of written discourse enhances our understanding of the utilization of the word "thing" within the established standards and conventions of written academic discourses. This research endeavors to investigate how the word "thing" is employed in the written academic corpus of non-native English speakers in Pakistan. It also seeks to determine whether "thing" serves a metadiscursive, vague noun, passé idiomatic, or any other function within the selected academic corpus. Given its vagueness, "thing" could potentially refer to any object, whether animate or inanimate, abstract or concrete. The researchers have also sought to examine the distribution of the usage of "thing" within the selected written discourse to comprehend the specific purposes for which this word is recurrently employed in the academic discourse of Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

The primary focus of this research paper is to delve into written academic discourse and examine how the word "thing" is utilized by non-native speakers of English. This interest aligns with the broader corpus linguistics trend of investigating the language use by both native and non-native speakers (Granger, 1998). Corpus-driven studies are instrumental in shedding light on how various words are employed to convey different meanings.

Abbas and Zahra (2019) conducted a corpus-based analysis of research articles in the field of history to explore the metadiscursive culture of academic writing. They found that the metadiscourse in history is deeply rooted in a rigid disciplinary cultural framework, limiting the communicative aspect to some extent.

Sabet and Zhang (2015) conducted a lexical analysis of the words "things" and "thing" in both native (L1) and non-native (L2) speakers, including Persian and Chinese English users. Their findings were intriguing, revealing differences in the usage of "things" by L2 speakers compared to L1 speakers, particularly in terms of frequency. The contrast was stark, with Persians using "things" 37 times and Chinese 28 times, whereas L1 speakers used it only 8 times. However, the disparity was less pronounced in the case of "thing." As a placeholder, "thing" was used 82 times by Chinese, 74 times by Persians, and 72 times by L1 speakers. Nonetheless, the patterns of "thing" usage varied among these groups. Chinese frequently used "thing" in clause-final positions (30 times), whereas Persians and L1 speakers did so 14 and 7 times, respectively. Similarly, "thing + conjunction" was predominantly used by Chinese (11 times) compared to Persians (4 times) and L1 speakers (6 times). "Thing + subject pronoun" was used nearly equally across all three groups, with 14 times by Chinese and L1 English speakers and 9 times by Persian speakers. An interesting observation was that L2 users employed "thing" for reasons, additions, and results, while L1 users used it mainly for contrast. This suggests that as a vague placeholder, the word "thing" serves different purposes and follows distinct lexical patterns.

Raffman (2014) characterizes vague language as being based on unruly words used for various purposes, making it challenging to establish clear boundaries. She posits that all theories related to vagueness concur that some level of ambiguity exists in the use of such language. According to her, words like "tall," "blue," "heap," "rich," and "old" are prime examples of vague words that lack clear boundaries and cannot be precisely defined in linguistic communication. Vagueness represents a permanent level of ambiguity in a word, and omitting a vague word from a sentence could significantly alter its meaning. Hence, vague words are a linguistic necessity, and their removal would compromise the communicative function of a sentence.

"Thing" is an example of such a vague and versatile word that it can even be employed for the process of thinking itself (Holbraad and Wastell, 2007). While thinking through things is a philosophical concept, it is rooted in linguistic implications and can be contextually nuanced depending on various situations and contexts.

Fronek (1982) conducted a study on the use of the word "thing" to understand its function in communicative events. He concluded that "thing" is an exceedingly functional word with various uses across different contexts. It can desemantize to a considerable extent and function as a proform.

Unlike other proforms, "thing" is more autosemantic and can be easily used in plural form, alongside articles, infinitives, adjectival attributes, prepositional phrases, participial constructions, and relative clauses. It can also serve as a detached inflectional or derivational morpheme. Fronek's research compared the communicative events of L1 users with L2 users of English from Czech, Russian, and German backgrounds, revealing various functions of the word. This suggests that "thing" is not only important in English language functions but also plays a diverse role in everyday and academic communication.

Zuoxiong (2014) conducted a corpus-based analysis of written communication by Chinese English language learners and L1 English language learners. He compiled a corpus of essays to study the use of the word "thing" and found that Chinese students used the word more frequently than L1 users. Analyzing the frequency of word usage, he concluded that beginners of English tend to overuse this simple word, which serves as an indicator of their language proficiency. However, its usage decreases over time, reflecting improved language proficiency. He made this inference by comparing the data with the use of "thing" by L1 users, who used the word less frequently, indicating higher language proficiency. Brittons (1960) also studied the function of the word "thing" by analyzing a poem by Havelok, suggesting that "thing" was used in plural form to maintain rhythm in verses. However, this kind of study may be considered limited, as it highlights a specific use by one creative writer, which may not be generalized as in corpus-driven studies.

Arngart (1981) compared Middle English with Modern and Oxford English, arguing that "thing" is typically used in adverbial phrases, often at the end of the phrase. It can be used in both singular and plural forms. For instance, the phrase "sure thing" is noteworthy, where "thing" is used in the adverbial phrase and in singular form. This phrase can also be replaced with "surely," both in plural and singular forms.

Numerous studies have focused on specific uses of the word "thing" in particular contexts. For example, Jones (1996) explored Durkheim's use of the word "thing" and concluded that it represents real objects as well as abstractions like humanism and scientific data. Bhalla (1980) examined the word in the context of law, asserting that it can stand for concrete and abstract concepts in legal discourse. He argued that considering "thing" as vague and elusive is a misjudgment, as it has clear and distinct meanings in its general and specific usage. In the realm of law, Bhalla suggested that "thing" is used to represent physical entities, rights and obligations, and any interest, value, or advantage. These meanings are precise, and considering them unclear would be a mistake.

The existing literature on the use and implications of the word "thing" suggests that it has been explored both in a general sense and in specific contexts. It underscores the significance of this word, drawing attention from readers, scholars, and researchers. However, there is still a need to understand how "thing" is currently employed in the realm of academia, particularly in research where systematic and scientific comprehension of concepts, natural laws, and phenomena is central. In contemporary academia, vagueness is rigorously analyzed and evaluated to achieve clarity and precision.

3. Research Methodology

This research adopts a quantitative approach and utilizes the AntConc (2011) corpus analysis software to conduct a detailed examination of the word "thing" in the selected corpus. The data used in this study consists of undergraduate-level essays from various academic disciplines, including social sciences, arts, and humanities, drawn from the Pakistan National Corpus of English (PNCE).

The application of AntConc software proves invaluable for this research as it enables the investigation of word frequencies and the generation of concordance lines, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of how the word "thing" is employed within the selected corpus. This analysis extends to understanding its use as a vague noun, its metadiscursive functions, and any other roles it might assume.

The interpretation and analysis of "thing" within its collocates offer insights into its meanings, purposes, and the diverse ways in which it is employed. By employing a corpus-driven technique, this research aims to derive results that can be generalized to the broader context of English language use in academia in Pakistan.

This study makes a substantial contribution to the ongoing exploration and comprehension of the word "thing," particularly within the academic sphere, which represents one of the most prolific domains of written communication worldwide. The utilization of corpus-driven techniques for exploring the word "thing" builds upon the established methodology found in the works of renowned linguists like Swales (2001), who pioneered corpus analysis studies for investigating specific words, their content-driven meanings, and their technical grammatical aspects in various communicative contexts.

4. Analysis and Discussion

In the undergraduate student essays extracted from the Pakistan National Corpus of English (PNCE), there were slightly over 200,000 tokens. Among these, the word "thing" appeared 262 times, and its plural form "things" was used 285 times, ranking at positions 115 and 104, respectively. For the purposes of this paper, both the singular and plural forms have been considered for analysis and discussion.

When examining the words closely associated with "thing" and appearing immediately after it, the most frequent collocates were "that" (36 times), "is" (24 times), "in" (17 times), and "which" (15 times). However, the words that preceded "thing" included "every," "one," "good," "any," and "first," suggesting that "thing" is commonly followed by adjectives and is typically used as a noun. To ascertain the specific type of noun for which this word is used, a concordance analysis of the term was conducted. Similarly, the word "things," in its plural form, was used in similar ways, frequently appearing after words like "the," "these," "many," and "others," and often followed by "are," "in," "and," "that," and "which."

Drawing from Swales' (2001) categorization of the word into discussive and non-discussive uses, the results from the analysis of essays written by Pakistani undergraduate students largely align with Swales' findings. Most instances involve the non-discussive use of both the singular and plural forms of the word as nouns, suggesting that "thing" is employed as a substitute for various objects, whether

real, imaginary, conceptual, animate, or inanimate. Furthermore, "thing" is used to refer to tangible items found in stores:

- "I need to buy a few "things" from the store."

- "She placed her "things" on the table."

These findings indicate that "thing" serves as a versatile and adaptable term employed by students to represent a wide range of objects and items in their essays.

(1) In city shops are close to our houses, we can get any *thing* at any time

Thing is also used to stand for imaginary noun:

(2) If any phenomenal incident occurs near them the first *thing* came to them that it is really possible in science language

And for the animate objects like:

(3) yet considered the woman a *thing* created for the humble service of the man

In all of these three examples *thing* is used to clearly denote a noun. However, there was also vague use of the word as noun. In the following example, the use of the word marks its significance towards vagueness:

(4) the *thing* are not bad itself the use made so it is your choice who you work with it

Unlike Swales findings, the researchers could not find a single instance of passe idiomatic expression of the word *thing* in the corpus.

Table 1. Frequency Breakdown of *Thing(s)* Meaning in Pakistan National Corpus of English (PNCE)

	Number	Percentage
<i>Thing(s)</i> = aspect/feature ("best <i>thing</i> about social media")	99	18.1
<i>Thing(s)</i> = Idea/point/plan ("know <i>anything</i> about body")	146	26.8
<i>Thing(s)</i> = Material object ("shop the <i>things</i> ")	123	22.4
<i>Thing(s)</i> = Non-material ("social media is a good <i>thing</i> ")	156	28.5
<i>Thing(s)</i> = Action/activity ("the first <i>thing</i> I did")	23	4.2
Total	547	100

From the table provided, it is evident that the word "thing(s)" in the Pakistan National Corpus of English (PNCE) exhibits relatively fixed meanings, primarily falling into four major categories. The most frequent usage of "thing(s)" is for non-material nouns, suggesting that Pakistani students often rely on this word when discussing non-material concepts. This could be due to a lack of vocabulary or knowledge, or it may stem from the perceived ambiguity of non-material nouns. Using "thing(s)" allows students to clarify their arguments.

The second most common meaning associated with "thing(s)" is its use to convey an idea or point that the writer wishes to express. It is often synonymous with "idea" in expressions like "the very thing in my mind." These expressions also imply a plan or concept present in the writer's mind. Instead of listing multiple items, Pakistani students often use "thing(s)" to encompass a broad range of ideas, both material and non-material.

The fourth most frequent meaning of "thing(s)" is its use to indicate an aspect or feature of a noun. Typically, it is preceded by an adjective, such as "good thing about it" or "bad thing of it." This usage suggests that writers want to highlight a specific aspect of the noun they are discussing, emphasizing their point of view.

To further explore the discussive use of the word, a concordance analysis was conducted to determine if "thing(s)" refers to something else within the discourse, whether it has meta-discursive functions, which verbs are commonly associated with it, whether it is used cataphorically or anaphorically, its prosody (positive or negative), its distribution in essays, and the implications of its discussive use.

Out of a total of 547 concordance hits for the words "thing" and "things," it was found that these words are frequently used with verbs like "is/was/were" and "has/have/had." While these verbs typically serve as helping verbs, Pakistani students use them with "thing(s)" as if it were an independent and static noun. As indicated in Table 1, only 4.2% of instances suggest that "thing(s)" are involved in an activity. More often, it represents something that exists in its current form and condition. However, other verbs like "come," "need," and "want" are also occasionally used with "thing(s)," along with single instances of words like "the thing I love," "thing always hits me right," "thing are easily provided," "thing as little as being obsessed," "thing can occur if," "thing created for the humble service," "thing I love about," "thing have some effects," and "thing I had planned." There are also examples of "carrying" verbs like "think," "plan," "keep," and "help."

An important aspect of exploring the discussive use of "thing(s)" was to analyze whose discourse was being referred to. It was observed that the most frequent usage of "thing(s)" was in reference to one's own discourse, whether it pertained to material or non-material objects, ideas, or topics.

I am telling so many *things* about the topic engineering

Things refers to the aspects and features of engineering which is the main topic of the essay.

every house in a society has these *things* and they are using them in excess

In the context of the essay, "things" typically refer to external objects that have been previously mentioned by the writer. The Pakistan National Corpus of English (PNCE) provides numerous examples of this usage. However, there is relatively less reference to the discourse of other interlocutors. This could be attributed to the nature of the topics chosen by the students, which may have required personal viewpoints with little consideration for the perspectives of others. In broad terms, references are either made to one's own discourse or to third-party objects. Nevertheless, the highest frequency of the word's usage is in reference to the writer's own discourse.

As Swales (2001) also points out, these tendencies reflect an "egocentric" and "interpersonal" approach to discourse production, which is prevalent in the contemporary world. This personalized view of the world and knowledge may also be influenced by the emphasis placed by educators on students' understanding and meaning-making activities. Educational practices often encourage students to examine the world from their own perspectives, fostering their own understanding and interpretation of the world.

Additionally, it's worth noting that the word "thing(s)" is predominantly used cataphorically. In this context, "cataphoric" refers to instances where "thing(s)" is used to refer to a point or concept that appears later in the text. Here are some examples illustrating this cataphoric usage:

- "One important “thing” to consider is the impact on the environment. This “thing” cannot be ignored."
- "Before we proceed, let's discuss one more “thing”. This “thing” relates to the topic we were just talking about."

In these examples, "thing(s)" anticipates and sets the stage for what will be discussed or elaborated upon later in the text, demonstrating its cataphoric function.

I have learnt one thing from my father that spend much money on *things*

The first *thing* I did after reaching Muree was to meet all my family members

One more *thing* I want to add up here is that many of us criticize the system

In the examples provided above, it's worth noting that the sentences employ different tenses, which were deliberately chosen to illustrate the cataphoric use of the word "thing(s)." In each case, "thing(s)" anticipates and refers to the words or ideas that come after it. This particular usage is referred to as the prospective use of the word, as described by Swales (2001). In this context, "prospective use" indicates that the word is introduced prior to the idea it ultimately represents.

Compared to the prospective use of "thing(s)," instances of its retrospective use are relatively rare within the PNCE corpus. The following example illustrates how the anaphoric use of the word has been employed:

- "The concept of environmental sustainability is crucial. This “thing” requires our attention."

In this example, "thing" is used anaphorically to refer back to the previously mentioned concept of environmental sustainability, demonstrating its retrospective function.

but one must not let these *things* play with his head and keep working hard for that one *thing*, that one thing he has longed for his entire life. Throughout my life, I have seen poor people lying on the streets, screaming out of pain due to some unknown illnesses or dying at their homes just because there are unable to pay the bills of the hospitals in order to get treated. and this *thing* always hits me right in the feels

In instance (10), "thing" refers to the aim of life that the writer had previously mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. Similarly, in the second instance, the word "things" collectively signifies the pains of being ill and suffering due to a lack of money, which the writer empathizes with, making a retrospective reference. While these examples of retrospective use are less frequent compared to the cataphoric use of the word (comprising 32% of the total cataphoric and anaphoric instances in the corpus), they clearly demonstrate "thing" being employed retrospectively.

Regarding the prosodic use of the word "thing(s)" in terms of whether it conveys a negative or positive tone, the research findings indicate that in PNCE, the prosody of the word is predominantly positive. Examples include phrases like "good thing," "helpful thing," and "favorable thing." There are also instances of negative prosody, such as "bad thing," "strange thing," "minor thing," and "funny thing." However, the majority of instances are neutral, with writers primarily referring to the factual existence of things, as in "every thing," "common thing," and "one thing." These neutral phrases indicate the type of thing in terms of its existence, recurrence, or commonality.

Phrases like "one thing" or "the only thing," while intensifying the discussion, also suggest that the idea or object being referred to is singular and unique, emphasizing its distinctiveness.

The concordance plot of the word "thing" suggests that its usage is fairly evenly distributed among all the writers, indicating that multiple writers employ this word in their essays with similar frequency.



Its comparison with the plural form of *things* also brings interesting results.



The distribution of the singular and plural forms of the word "thing" is fairly even on the concordance plot, with a noticeable decrease in usage towards the ending part of the corpus. This observation suggests that students who habitually used the word "thing(s)" consistently placed it in their essays wherever they saw fit for either discussive or non-discussive purposes. This reinforces the idea that the egocentric and interpersonal tendency of students to use the word "thing(s)" is persistent and prevalent, with the majority of students adopting this practice, except for a few towards the end of the corpus.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the corpus-driven study conducted on the academic discourse in the Pakistan National Corpus of English (PNCE) reveals that the use of the word "thing" (in both singular and plural forms) is persistent among the majority of students. It is employed for both discussive and non-discussive purposes, often functioning as a noun that stands in for other nouns, whether they are material or non-material, real or imaginary. The word "thing(s)" is utilized to convey a range of meanings, including ideas, features, plans, aspects, actions/activities, various material objects, and non-material imaginary concepts.

It is noteworthy that there is no fixed carrying verb consistently used with "thing(s)" in the PNCE. Instead, the choice of carrying verb varies according to the needs of the discourse, with "be" and its

forms being the most commonly used. This finding aligns with the view that the discussive use of the word often pertains to objects existing in their static form.

The most frequent use of the word "thing(s)" is cataphoric, and its prosody is typically neutral but tends to be positive when compared in terms of negative and positive prosody. The analysis of the results in this corpus-driven approach also indicates that the use of "thing(s)" is persistent among Pakistani students in their academic discourses. The prevalence of its usage legitimizes its place in the Pakistani English corpus, as it has become conventional due to its recurrent and persistent use.

In essence, "thing(s)" can be characterized as a vague word that students often contextualize by explaining it in the preceding or following expressions within their academic discourses. However, the researchers suggest that a corpus-driven approach, while helpful in understanding the technical aspects of word usage, can be complemented by other analytical methods, particularly qualitative approaches, to gain a deeper understanding of why and how "thing(s)" is used.

Funding: This study was not funded in any shape or form by any party.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Bio-note:

Dr. Syed Azaz Ali Shah is an accomplished individual, holding the position of Assistant Professor at the esteemed Kohat University of Science and Technology in KP. With an unwavering commitment to research, he has made notable contributions in the fields of applied linguistics, linguistics, psycholinguistics, discourse and corpus linguistics. His primary research focus lies in delving into the L2 Motivational Self-System of seminary students, particularly in their pursuit of mastering the English language within the context of Pakistan. He stands as a self-driven and independent researcher, exemplifying a remarkable dedication to his craft. His scholarly endeavors are reflected in a substantial body of publications, attesting to his expertise and intellectual prowess.

Dr. Kifayatullah Buner, a literatus and academic from Buner Valley, is currently an Assistant Professor and Head, of the Department of English Language & Literature, at the University of Chitral, Pakistan. He has a Ph.D. in English Literature from Qurtuba University, Peshawar, specializing in the fictional diaspora of Afro-Asian novels, focusing on the selected works of Jhumpa Lahiri, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. He has been teaching English Language and literature since 2009 at various institutions including the University of Engineering & Technology, Peshawar, The University of Agriculture, Peshawar, and Edwardes College, Peshawar.

Naseer Ahmed is a dedicated PhD Scholar currently pursuing advanced research at Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology in Peshawar, Pakistan. With a keen interest in corpus linguistics, Naseer is committed to expanding the boundaries of knowledge and contributing to academic excellence.

References

Abbas, A., & Zara, T. (2019). Exploring Metadiscursive Culture of Writing in History Research ArticlesPublished in Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, XL (2), 95-121.

- Arngart, O. (1981). The Word "THING" in Adverbial Phrases. *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 368-369.
- Bhalla, R. S. (1980). The Concept of *Thing* Revisited. *Journal of the Indian Law Institute*, 22(4), 555-567.
- Biber, D., & Gray, B. (2016). *Grammatical complexity in Academic English: Linguistic Change in Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Britton, G. C. (1960). A Note on the Word "THING" in "HAVELOK THE DANE". *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 61(1), 77-79.
- Brown, R. (1958). How shall a *thing* be called? *Psychological Review*, 65(1), 14–21.
- Channell, J. (1994). *Vague Language*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, D., & Davy, D. (1975). *Advanced conversational English*. London: Longman.
- Fronek, J. (1982). *Thing* as a function word. *Linguistics*, 20(9-10), 633-654.
- Granger, S. (1998). *Learner English on Computer*. London: Longman.
- Holbraad, H. A. M., & Wastell, S. (2007). 'Introduction'. In *Thinking Through Things: Theorising artefacts ethnographically*, Wenare et al (eds.). London: Routledge, 1-31.
- Jones, S. S. (1996). What does Durkheim mean by "*thing*"?. *Durkheimian Studies/Etudes Durkheimiennes*, 2, 43-59.
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Thing-language*. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved October 28, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/thing-language>
- Oxford-Learners. (n. d.) *Thing*. In *Oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com* Retrieved October 27, 2020, from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/thing>
- Raffman, D. (2014). *Unruly Words: A Study of Vague Language*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sabet, P. G. P., & Zhang, G. Q. (2015). *Communicating Through Vague Language*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Swales, J. M. (2001). Metatalk in American Academic Talk. *Journal of English Linguistics*, 29(1), 34–54.
- Zuoxiong, L., & Lei, D. (2014). Corpus-based Study on the Use of Delexicalized Word “*Thing*” by Chinese English Learners. *Journal of Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics Social Sciences Edition*, 27(5), 98.