

A Comparative Analysis of Writer's Identity in Pakistani Research Theses of English and Psychology

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Abstract

Authorial presence is the prominent feature of personal metadiscourse. The most significant representation of the writer's visibility can be represented by using personal pronouns. It helps to establish a direct link between the writer and reader through text. Conversely, writer's persona in research theses has not received much attention, especially in the field of English and Psychology in Pakistani context. Viewing academic discourse as an interaction, this paper investigates the use of writers' visibility markers in Pakistani research theses of English and Psychology. Drawing on Karahan's (2012) classification, the frequency and discourse functions of personal pronouns were explored. The results of this investigation exhibit significant variation in the exploitation of self-mentioning pronouns across two disciplines.

Keywords: metadiscourse, academic writing, self-mentions, research theses

1. Introduction

The voice of author in textual discourse is a contentious matter. The impersonal reporting of academic genre had been in vogue for many years. The writers of all discourse communities are not following the same tradition whereas the readers of different disciplines have different expectations. Presently, this opinion has been confuted based on investigations of more recent corpora. Consequently, the use of self-mention markers has increased rapidly in academic genre. In current researches, academic writing is considered as social engagement in which authors earn credibility through manifestation of self projection. In fact, academic writing has become a source of identity and recognition. Writers endeavor to present a stance towards their proposition in order to construct identity in academic discourse. There are several ways for writers to show their visibility in the text. They construct their identities by employing a combination of rhetorical patterns such as using first person pronouns in the text.

Personal pronouns facilitate the authors to distinguish their voice from the perspective of other writers and establish a liaison with the readers. It has become a crucial source for publicizing one's identity and getting recognition.

Kuo (1999) elaborates that the use of first person pronouns allows authors to exhibit their input in academic discourse. Hyland (1998) states that effective writing in academic discourse relies on interactional components instead of impersonal or factual elements. The role of first person pronoun is not homogeneous in academic discourse (Tang & John, 1999). Various roles are performed by the members of different discourse communities. Researchers have explored different aspects of writers' identity. Clark & Ivancic (1997) emphasized the importance of authors' visibility and distinguished three aspects of writers' identity: autobiographical self, discursive self and authorial self.

Conventions of self-persona are governed by rhetorical patterns of academic discourse. Novice researchers often face problems regarding how much they have to project themselves in the discourse. Many scholars have addressed the issue of authorial presence markers only in various genres and cultural communities. However, the researches to investigate the disciplinary variation in using personal pronouns have gone astray, particularly in our Pakistani context. This study is an attempt to fill this gap. The major purpose of the current study is to investigate disciplinary variation in using personal pronouns by analyzing the corpus of Pakistani research theses of two disciplines: English and Psychology. This research is significant as it has pedagogical implication as well.

It will assist the language teachers to know about the patterns of writing, enabling them make the text dialogic or visible. The concept of authorial presences is explored in this paper by using person pronouns in the research theses of Pakistani students. Objectives of the study are given below:

- This research aims to find out frequency differences in personal pronouns used by Pakistani writers of English and Psychology.
- It also intends to find out the discourse functions performed by the first person pronoun, “I” by Pakistani writers of English and Psychology.

2. Literature Review

Authorial visibility is an extensively researched area across different disciplines in academic discourse. The findings of these researches have revealed that person pronouns perform a significant role in authors’ communication with their readers.

The studies on person pronouns have yielded various taxonomies of writers’ visibility in academic writing. The most significant taxonomies for the analysis of academic writing were expounded by Clark & Ivanic (1997), Tang & John (1999) and Hyland (2002). The comparison of these taxonomies in the table 1 represents the discourse functions of authorial visibility in the text. In Hyland’s (2002) taxonomy of metadiscourse, self-mentions can only be represented by the first person pronouns “I” and “we” as metadiscourse elements. Tang & John (1999) developed a classification of following discourse functions of self-mentioning pronouns: the author as text organizer, as a guide, personal opinion holder, originator of knowledge and recounter of experimental procedure and methodology. Karahan (2012) explored the semantic role of “I” and “we” in the corpus of research articles.

Table 1. Taxonomies regarding discourse functions of person pronouns

Clark & Ivanic (1997)	Tang & John (1999).	Hyland’s (2002)	Karahan (2012)
Structuring the discourse	Representative of People	Stating a purpose	Sole conductor of research
Presenting personal experience	Guide	Explicating a process	Describer of research
Making statement	Architect	Expressing results	Expressing an opinion
	Recounter of research process	Stating self-benefits	Expressing personal experience
	Opinion holder	Elaborating an argument	Showing commitment to claims
	Originator of knowledge		

2.1 Self-mentioning Pronouns in Academic Writing

The question of writers’ identity has become an increasingly popular area for linguists and researchers. Hyland (2002) investigated the notion of identity by comparing 64 project reports of undergraduate L2 students. The results of the study revealed underuse of first person pronouns by L2 learners for making claims or arguments.

Harwood (2005) carried out an analysis of research papers in the discipline of economics, physics, business management and computing science to examine the self promotional use of personal pronouns. The results revealed that the self promotional strategy of personal pronouns was employed by the authors of hard sciences. Martin (2004) carried out a study to explore the writer’s persona in the abstracts of research articles of two disciplines i.e., Spanish and English writing. Findings of the study exhibited that Spanish and English academic writing preferred the strategies of depersonalization by using agentless passive and impersonal constructions.

The distribution and frequency of self mentioning pronouns vary due to rhetorical conventions of various disciplines. Adel (2006) has given a distinction between personal and impersonal metadiscourse. Personal metadiscourse explicitly refers to the writer in the current text while impersonal metadiscourse does not refer to the participants of the discourse explicitly. Self-mention denotes the author’s overt presence in the written discourse. Isik Tas (2008) evaluated research articles along with theses of Ph.D in order to determine the use and functions of personal pronouns by novice and expert authors. Findings revealed that experienced authors used personal pronouns significantly in the introduction of research articles.

Karahan (2012) examined the frequency as well as the distribution of personal pronouns and “we” perspective in the research articles of science written by Turkish and foreign authors. The outcomes of this investigation exhibited that both Turkish and foreign authors preferred inclusive “we” perspective in their academic writings. However depersonalization strategies were also prevalent in Turkish research articles. Muñoz (2014) investigated the differences of inclusive and exclusive pronominal signals in 60 research articles of Spanish and

English. The findings exhibited that there were more instances of exclusive pronouns in the articles of English and Spanish. However, the personal pronouns were overused in the research articles of English. Hashemi (2014) examined these features in the corpus of linguistic, sociology and education. Findings showed that person pronouns were rarely used in the three areas under investigation for strengthening the author's stance and establishing writer-reader interaction. Results revealed that there were significant dissimilarities in use of interactive and interactional resources in the corpora of research articles across various disciplines. Besides performing a number of discourse functions, self-mentioning pronouns facilitate authors to establish a relationship with their discourse community and readers.

Unfortunately, there is dearth of research studies regarding use of self-mentions in research theses of English and Psychology in Pakistani context. Therefore, the objective of this study is to appraise the writer's presence by focusing on the frequencies and functions of "I" in the research theses of English and Psychology written by Pakistani writers. This research will be helpful for us to ascertain how Pakistani research scholars structured their academic writing.

2.2 Research Questions

This research work explores the answers of succeeding research questions:

- 1) Is there any difference in the use of personal pronouns in the Pakistani research theses of English and Psychology?
- 2) What are the discourse functions performed by the first person singular pronoun, "I" in the Pakistani research theses of English and Psychology?

3. Method

3.1 The Corpus

The corpus comprises of 30 M.Phil research theses from two disciplines: English and Psychology. These two disciplines represent two major academic fields: Social sciences and Humanities. Complete research theses were selected to find out the instances of self-mentions in the corpora. Abstracts, Tables, footnotes and captions were not included to form an electronic corpus of almost 2,515,012 words. The Corpus of Psychology comprises of 675198 word tokens whereas that of English 1839814 word tokens.

3.2 Procedure

At the first stage, data was tagged with the help of POS tagger to carry out the analysis. The frequencies of personal pronouns were explored by using Ant Conc software. In each corpus, the percentages of separate frequencies for words listed by Hyland (2005) were explored. Then these frequencies and percentages were calculated and compared to see the differences in the use of self-mentioning pronouns in research theses written by Pakistani writers in the discipline of Psychology and English. In the second phase, the functions of personal pronouns were explored. Drawing on the classification developed by Karahan (2012), instances of first singular pronoun "I" were observed.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 2. Individual percentages of self-mentioning pronouns in corpora

Personal Pronouns	English	Psychology
I	43.8%	63.44%
Me	4.08%	5.54%
We	21.54%	7.43%
Myself	0.40%	1.27%
My	8.01%	10.40%
Our	10.59%	8.58%
Us	8.94%	2.69%
Ourselves	0.53%	0.03%
The author's	0.075%	0%
The author	0.39%	0.46%
The writer's	0.16%	0%
The writer	1.37%	0%

Table 2 demonstrates the percentages of frequencies (in percentages for easy comparison among corpora of different lengths) of person pronouns, in the Pakistani corpus of Psychology and English.

Table 3. Total % of personal pronouns in corpora

Figures/Percentages	English	Psychology
Raw figures	11922	3228
Percentages	0.64%	0.47%

The table 3 exhibits the percentages of self-mentioning pronouns in Pakistani research theses of English and psychology. This indicates that writers of both disciplines represent their authorial selves in academic discourse. The first person singular pronoun “I” was the most frequent marker of writers’ visibility in the corpora. In these two disciplines, the word “our” is employed to indicate the writer’s ownership of reported data. Data exposed that there are more instances of self-mentioning pronouns in the corpora of English with 0.64% in comparison with psychology (0.47%). The writers espoused an independent stance towards their proposition in the discipline of English. The results of this study correspond to Muñoz (2014) study on inclusive and exclusive pronouns in English, psychology and Education. Muñoz’s (ibid) study reflected more frequent use of personal pronouns by native writers.

Pakistani writers in the discipline of Psychology are indirect and polite while making their claims. Writers in the field of English have shown more tendencies towards self- presence in their academic writings being more assertive and confident while making their arguments. The findings of the study also coincide with Hyland’s (2003) study on authorial presence in which higher frequencies of first person pronouns are used in soft fields.

4.1 Discourse Functions and Self-mentions

The current study also investigated the discourse functions denoted by “I” because it was the most recurrent personal pronoun in both disciplines. All the instances of singular pronoun “I” were qualitatively observed by the researcher. The high frequency of authorial presences can be interpreted in terms as writer’s self-confidence and competencies in their respective fields in rhetorical terms.

Table 4. Percentages of discourse functions in research theses of English and psychology

Functions	English	Psychology
The writer as the sole conductor of research	57%	46%
The writer as the describer of research	19%	19%
The writer as expressing an opinion	15%	17%
The writer as expressing his personal experiences	9%	18%

4.1.1 Sole Conductor of Research

It is the most powerful role demonstrated in the writings of Pakistani researchers. This role displays “I” as the sole exclusive conductor of research. In this way, the writers sell their research by creating an image of their uniqueness. This function is frequently employed by the researchers of both disciplines. Examples from Pakistani corpora of English are given below:

I decided to evaluate the 40 scripts of experimental class first, hence I had to code...

I have used triangulation of data and methods in research because...

I calculated percentage for the highest frequency...

I compared the results of these three groups...

I will investigate whether the proposed constraints on constructions... (Eng text)

In all these cases, researchers involve themselves in the research activities which instill an element of subjectivity in their work. Highest degree of authorial presence preformed by the authors is presented through this role. Research cannot be conducted in a vacuum as it needs contextualization grounded in the norms of relevant disciplines.

4.1.2 Expressing Personal Experiences

The writer uses the first person singular pronoun to talk about his or her own experiences.

I have developed a closer personal relationship...

I have witnessed growing tendency..... (Eng text)

4.1.3 Describer of Research

The authors use “I” to elucidate the different phases of research enquiry i.e., data collection and presentation. The succeeding two cases can be considered as instances of this category:

I will see in the next chapter there are six bars....

I will now move on to discuss what happens once.....(Psy text)

The writer acts as a guide to inform the reader of the text.

4.1.4 Opinion Holder

The writer uses “I” to state views or present his approach towards already known facts. This function reveals itself by using verbs of cognition. The instances given below are taken from Pakistani corpora.

As I believe that dreams are the way towards unconscious....

I believe that economic condition directly influence.....(Psy text)

The use of self-mentions is an important element which accentuates writer’s integrity and credibility in his/her work. This personal voice helps the writers to interact with their readers, assuring certainty.

5. Conclusions and Implications

In academic discourse, the creation of writer’s persona by using pronominal resources is crucial for writers to present themselves as knowledgeable and proficient members of their respective discipline. The current study intended to reveal the frequencies and referential functions of self-mentioning pronouns in the research theses of Psychology and English written by Pakistani writers. Findings of the quantitative data revealed substantial differences in using strategies of authorial presence between Pakistani writers of English and Psychology. The results suggest that use of personal pronouns vary according to the norms and conventions of the particular disciplines. This study might be helpful for academic writing of EFL learners. Pakistani writers in the field of psychology may typically evade the use of self-mentioning strategies due to the predetermined notions of objective and impersonal discourse. It is pertinent for teachers and research scholars to be aware of the functions performed by first person pronouns. In this regard, programs of academic writing in Pakistan should encourage critical language awareness by emphasizing authors’ identity and different acceptable rhetorical choices in academic writing of theses genre. Despite of the significant insights presented by the current studies on authors’ visibility, more research studies are required to investigate the variation in the sub disciplines of broader fields of knowledge.

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