Authorial Identity Presence in Academic Articles: the Case of Iranian Scholars

Zahra Zarei[1] and *Hossein Saadabadi M[1*]*

[1]Department of English, Bushehr Branch, Islamic Azad University, Bushehr, Iran

saadabadimh@gmail.com

Abstract

This article reports an analysis of the authorial identity presence in the academic papers written by Iranian EFL speakers of Farsi. To this end, a corpus of 20 papers was gathered from different journals. The papers were written by Iranian EFL speakers of Farsi. To this end, Hyland's (2004) identity categorization was chosen as the model of analysis which considers five types of stance for representing identity, namely, hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers and self-mention markers. The content of the corpus was analyzed for instances of authorial markers Iranian writers utilized to manifest themselves in their works. The major findings of the study revealed that the Iranians' tendency was toward using attitude markers as a representation of authorial identity in their academic papers while engagement markers were the most salient authorial identity markers.

1. Introduction

Writing is one the four language skills which seems to be fundamental for the students in higher education and especially for the graduate ones. Academic writing, according to Irvin (2010), refers to any writing task which is done in order to fulfill a requirement of a college or university including research papers. Academic writing, according to Steinke (2012), uses formal style, well organized to present objective analysis by using clear precise language while avoids using emotive language. Ivanic (1998) argues that writing demands not only conveying content but also representing self as the writer. He emphasizes that people find writing difficult since the

'me' they are illustrating in their writing is alien to them. Accordingly, identity presence in academic writing is a conflict for students in higher education, because the inscribed self in academic discourse is strange to them.

Burke (2010) clarifies that non-native speakers of English seem to be less efficient and more limited than native speakers in writing academic papers which is rooted in depicting their identity in their writing products. Ferris and Hedgcock (1998) also points out that non-native writers of English are not deficient but simply developing writers. (cited in Burke, 2010, p. 21).

There is no doubt regarding the crucial significance of writing skill especially in the higher education in which students need to handle the academic papers. The review of literature shows that most studies view the solution for this challenging skill in linguistic features and especially through changing instructional models.

However, considering the Ivanic's (1998) statement which considers writing as an act of identity in which people line themselves up with socio-culturally shaped subject positions, and thus they get engaged in reproducing or challenging significant practices and discourses, and the values, beliefs and interests which they embody represent; it is stipulated that it may be the role of identity in the writing tasks made writing so challenging (Hedgcock, 1998).

In effect, Iranian students seem to be instructed not to use the first person pronouns because of the fact that academic writing needs to be impersonal. In other words, the students may be taught to avoid using first person pronouns since academic writing demands an objective exploration of ideas. Considering the fact that not many studies tried to investigate the academic papers written by Iranian in terms of frequency and the role of identity in their published academic papers, this study was conducted to investigate this issue in order to introduce some fundamental bases for teaching writing skill. The main objective of this study was to clarify the relationship between the construction of Iranian writer identities and their writing. It is worth mentioning that however many researchers tried to depict the role of identity in the academic

writing, few, tried to investigate the way identity is utilized by non-native speakers including Iranian EFL speakers in their academic writing. Furthermore, most studies tried to focus just on one type of identity, especially first person pronoun; however, this study tried to provide a more comprehensive perspective by investigating different strategies through which identity is represented. The aforementioned issues highlight the difference between this study and the similar ones. Hence, the importance of conducting this study is rooted in its pedagogical implications especially in teaching professional writing skill. Generally, this study is beneficial for Iranian EFL writing educators in the sense that it will open some positive doors for them to demonstrate how their writer identities can be constructed under the impacts of social and academic factors. In effect, one of the main significances of this study may be rooted in the difficulty of Iranian Writers in depicting and constructing their identities in the way they write.

2. Review of literature

Several studies have been conducted on the use of identity markers in academic writings (Hyland 2010; Muñoz, 2013; Razmjoo, 2012;Rezvani & Mansouri, 2013). Muñoz (2013) investigated the discourse functions of personal pronouns and verb forms which refer to the interaction between the writer and the reader in a corpus of 60 English and Spanish research articles in the fields of psychology, linguistics and educational research. To this end, he, by elaborating on Tang and John's (1999) taxonomy, suggested that the pronoun "I" as the interpreter that has a new role in the continuum of writers' authorial presence. His study showed that English writers utilized pronominal discourse functions extensively as their Spanish counterparts did. He also showed that Spanish writers use pronominal discourse functions "more slightly and use different functions when indicating their presence. Spanish writers addressed their role as data interpreters rather than narrators of the research process or innovators of an original contribution to the field.

Rezvani and Mansouri (2013) studied the research papers written by Iranian writers in terms of authorial markers presence. In effect, their study followed two objectives, namely, exclusive instances of authorial identity markers and the frequency of each authorial instance. Their study showed that Iranian writers utilized different ways for depicting their authorial

identity (e.g. personal pronouns, self-citations). They also showed that authorial markers vary concerning frequency in single-authored papers and multiple-authored ones. Hence, they showed that personal pronoun is the most frequent type of authorial markers utilized by the Iranian writers for depicting their identity in their academic writing.

Razmjoo (2012) made a study so that he determined the impact of identity aspects on the Iranian learners' English language achievements as well as the effect of demographic factors on language achievement and aspects of identity among the Iranian EFL learners. A questionnaire composed of 45 items in the form of Likert Scale was filled out by 180 language learners. The research findings showed no significant correlation between language achievement and the aspects of identity. In other words, he showed that identity is not considered as a predicting criterion of language competence in the Iranian EFL context. His study also revealed that gender is an influential factor for identity.

Burke (2010) conducted a qualitative case study and explored how six Korean university students in the US constructed their academic writer identities ideationally, interpersonally, and textually. Burke (2010) utilized a map of social influences two interviews, three academic papers and process logs from each student as his instruments. His study revealed that the Korean students used different ways to make their writer identities due to their earlier Korean writing practices. He argues that these students resorted heavily to the textual meta-discourse markers like transitions, code glosses, and evidential, while tried to lessen using interpersonal meta-discourse markers like writer-oriented markers, hedges, and boosters.

Generally, there is a close correlation between writing and the author's identity construction (Ivanič, 1998; Hyland, 2010). According to Hyland (2011) what constructs identity are texts that are engaged in and the linguistic choices which are made. Therefore, with regard to Hyland (2011) identity can be constructed through relocating it from hidden processes of cognition and putting in its social construction in discourse. Hyland (2011) also argues that identity construction is the result of the rhetorical options the communities provide us with; therefore, we

align our language choices with those of our social groups in order to gain credibility as members and approval for our performances. From the literature reviewed, it could be concluded that there is still a gap which could be filled by this study. Thus, this study reports on the presence of the authorial identity in the academic papers written by Iranian EFL speakers of Farsi.

3. Method

3.1. Corpus

This study is based on a corpus of 20 English Language Teaching articles written by Iranian writers which were selected randomly from several well-known journals among Iranian EFL scholars.

3.2. Design of the Study

This study followed a qualitative design to select and categorize the types of utilized identities and a quantitative one to numerate the frequency of each type of the identity.

3.3. Model of the Study

In conducting this study, an adopted model was utilized in which features of writer stance-marking were extracted based on the following categorization extracted from Hyland (2004) categorization. In fact, in this study, using Hyland's (2004) categorization, five types of stance for representing identity were considered, namely, hedges, attitude markers, boosters, engagement markers and self-mention. Since, these five categories are fundamental for conducting this study; their definitions are stated here in order to clarify the model:

Hyland (2004) introduces another terminology instead of stance, or writer identity, namely interactional resources. Hyland (2004) argues that these resources are a focus on the participants of the interaction and intend to depict the writer's persona and a tenor fit in the norms of the community of that discipline. The interactional resources, in Hyland's (2004) classification include boosters, hedges, attitude markers, self-mention markers and engagement markers.

1. Hedges show the author's reluctance to provide propositional information (e.g. perhaps).

2.   Boosters refer to devices through which certainty is expressed (e.g. certainly, indeed, definitely).

3.   Attitude markers shed light on author's assessment of propositional information (e.g. I agree, actually).

4.   Engagement markers address the readers specifically, or construct a relationship with the reader (e.g. you can see that, note that, discuss)

5.   Self-mentions markers indicate to use first person pronouns and possessives—singular or plural which highlight the presence of the writer (e.g. I, we, our, my).

3.4. Procedures

In conducting this study, 20 papers written by Iranian speakers of Farsi were selected randomly which were appropriate for the purposes of the study. The papers were coded in terms of different procedures for representing identity based on Hyland's (2004) categorization. Each type of identity representation was numerated in each group. In fact, the frequency of occurrence of each type of identity representation, namely, boosters, hedges, attitude markers, self-mention markers, and engagement markers was numerated. Then, the corpus was analyzed a second time using Word Pilot 2000 software in order to calculate the frequency of each authorial marker. It could be pointed that the frequency of different types of identity was calculated in terms of every 1000 words of the selected papers since the articles vary in terms of size. Percentages were calculated in relation to the different types of authorial identity markers. In order to increase and validate the intra-rater reliability of the analyses, one of the current researchers reviewed the articles for a second time after a two-week interval. Phi coefficient of correlation was then calculated. To ensure the inter-rater reliability, 10 percent of the corpus was selected randomly and the researchers and an assistant (holding an M.A. in Applied Linguistics), coded it independently. The comparisons revealed that there is a quite high Phi coefficient correlation between the main researchers' coding and that of the assistant.

4. Results

In the first step, different forms of identity representation were recognized and coded. In fact, different forms of identity were recognized in terms of five groups of boosters, hedges, attitude markers, self-mention markers, and engagement markers. Hence, the identity markers were numerated, summarized and tabulated as table 1 shows.

As the table shows, the identity markers were recognized in the five groups of boosters, hedges, attitude markers, self-mention markers, and engagement markers. It is worth mentioning that the frequency of each type was expressed per 1000 words in order to make it possible to compare the frequency of each type of identity markers. Furthermore, the table shows the percent of each identity marker.

Table 1 Frequency of Identity Markers

Identity Markers	Items per 1000 words	% of total
Hedges	81	33.75
Boosters	35	14.58
Attitude Markers	108	45.00
Engagement Markers	5	2.08
Self-mention	11	4.58
Total	240	100.00

Overall, there were 240 cases of authorial markers. We see from the table that the papers written by Iranian EFL researchers are loaded with a high percent of identity markers. The table shows that the percent of the attitude markers was the vast majority of the identity markers utilized by Iranian EFL writers which was just under a half.

Considering the information in table 1 , Iranian writers have utilized the engagement markers in a tiny minority. Moreover, they have utilized hedges as the second most frequent identity markers. In fact, nearly one third of the identity markers in the papers were devoted to the hedges. The table also indicates that engagement markers were the salient markers which composed less than 5 per cent for the papers written by Iranian writers. Table 2 shows the hedges which have been used by Iranian speakers in their academic writings:

Table 2: Hedges in Iranian's Academic Papers

Hedges in the Academic Papers written by Iranians
Based on, Appear, Aforementioned, According to, As far as, Due to, Above points, Can be, Implies, In light of, Indicate, Indicative, It is doubted, Likely, May, Perhaps, Plausible, Probably, Seemingly, Seems, Since, Tend, Tended, Unlike, Unlikely

Table 2 illustrates that the range of the hedges used by the Iranian speakers is very limited which may indicate to the limited language proficiency of Iranian EFL writers. Table 3 shows the boosters which have been used by Iranian speakers:

Table 3. Boosters in Iranians' Academic Papers

Boosters in the Academic Papers written by Iranians
Certainly, In effect, Fully aware, All, Beyond a shadow, Clearly, Certainly, In fact, Indeed, It is evident, Mainly, No doubt, Nonetheless, Obviously, Only, Quite promising, Surely, Surely, Truly, Undoubtedly

The information in table 3 illustrates that the range of the utilized boosters is limited which indicated to the limited language proficiency of Iranian speakers. Table 4 sheds light on the attitude markers as the third investigated identity markers which were used by Iranian speakers of Farsi.

Table 4. Attitude markers in Iranians' Academic Papers

Attitude Markers in the Academic Papers written by Iranians
Actually, All in all, Appropriately, Aptly, As an influential, At large, At the most, At the very least, Broadly, Cognitively, Comparatively, Consciously, Constantly, Contextually, Critically, Currently, Deeply, Deeply considered, Easily, Equally, Essentially, Even lexically, Exclusively, Extensively, Fairly, Finally, Frequently, From its very inception, Fully, Generally, Hardly, Highly, Historically, Hopefully, Ideologically, In particular, In terms of, Inexorably, Initially, Innocently, Largely, Necessarily, Notwithstanding, Particularly, Primarily, Representatively, Significantly, Similarly, Specifically, Statistically, Substantially, Systematically, Tacitly, Theoretically, To sum up, Utmost, Virtually, Widely, Worthy

The attitude markers, as one of the identity representations, in a totally different manner, seem to be utilized more in the academic papers written by Iranian speakers. Hence, investigating attitude markers revealed that the academic papers written by Iranian speakers were heavily loaded by this type of identity representation. Table 5 illustrates the range of the engagement markers in the academic papers written by Iranian speakers.

Table 5. Engagement Markers in Iranians' Academic Papers

Engagement Markers in the Academic Papers written by Iranians
Consider   Discuss

The information in table 5 shows us that Iranian EFL speakers have used the informal engagement markers in their academic writings which seem not to be appropriate for the formal context of the academic papers. Considering the information provided in table 6 indicated that the tendency of Iranian speakers is to utilize plural pronouns as the self-mention markers to depict their identity.

Table 6. Self-mention markers in Iranians' academic papers

Self-mention Markers in the Academic Papers written by Iranians
Our   Us   We

The findings show that the Iranian speakers performed differently in utilizing the five types of authorial identity markers in their writings, among which the engagement ones received the least portion.

5. Discussion

This study tried to make a comparison in terms of the representation of authorial identity in the academic writings of Iranian speakers of Farsi. To this end, Hyland's (2004) categorization was utilized and five types of stance for representing authorial identity were investigated, namely, boosters, hedges, attitude markers, self-mention markers, and engagement markers. The results of the present study indicated that the most utilized type of identity markers for Iranian speakers

were attitude markers. Moreover, the engagement markers were the least utilized identity markers in the academic papers.

Considering the cross tabulation information shows that Iranian speakers have mainly utilized attitude markers as the authorial identity. Furthermore, investigating the engagement markers showed that Iranian speakers have used these markers in a small proportion while academic writing, according to Cadman (1997), demands the writers to implement their own positioning and adopt their own way in their academic papers. Bartholomae's (1986) statement in which the writers construct the atypical ways to know, select, evaluate, report, conclude and argue in order to define the discourse of the community justifies the results of the study.

The findings of the study also showed that Iranian speakers seem to be failed in adopting another's voice and code, while lessening the influence of their own culture as well as their own discourse to implement the principles, norms and language of discourse community, which according to Johns (1997) is crucial due to their failure in utilizing self-mention markers as it should be used.

In a nutshell, academic writing, which according to Hyland (2002) is one of the forms of communication "in which social positioning are constructed" (p. 1095) seems to bring different sense of self due to its amalgamation with multitude of discourses, culture, or beliefs which apparently at the same time resulted into varied "sense of dislocation and uncertainty" (Hyland, 2002, p. 1095). Considering the fact that people have their own choices for negotiations of the identity to be implemented in their writing; the observed differences in depicting their authorial identities are justifiable.

6. Conclusions

There are a great number of strategies and linguistic markers for the researchers to declare authority in their works. Different academic authors may take different sets of options at their disposal. The choices and why they are made have been a focus of attention in the literature. This paper similarly attempted to investigate the Iranian researchers' use of authorial identity markers.

The study concluded that the most utilized type of identity markers for Iranian speakers were attitude markers. Moreover, the engagement markers were the least utilized identity markers in Iranians' academic papers. The findings of the study also showed that Iranian speakers seem to be failed in adopting another's voice and code, while lessening the influence of their own culture as well as their own discourses to implement the principles, norms and language of discourse community which according to Johns (1997) is crucial due to their failure in utilizing self-mention markers as it should be used.

The study seems to play a transformative role, with potential implications for three educational groups: (i) language institutes, universities and other English instructional centers, (ii) language teachers, language learners as well as teachers' trainers, and (iii) curriculum designers. In fact, the findings of the study revealed that the way a writer designs and conceives his/her academic paper is not solely related to proficiency level or language sources. Hyland (2002) declares that language learners need to receive some instruction in terms of identity markers in order to be equipped to write their academic papers; so that taking on the identity of a member of that community, they use the appropriate discourses. Hence, language teachers or even teachers' trainers need to consider this issue in their writing instruction especially in higher education. This issue is also fundamental for curriculum designers as well as syllabus designers to devote some section to identity instruction which seems to influence the quality of the academic papers due to the authoritative stance it gives to the researchers.

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Appendix

Selected Academic Papers Written by Iranian Writers

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