

Research paper

## Across Linguistics Study of Self-mentions in English and Persian Language

### Teaching Research Articles

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#### Abstract

This study is a quantitative and functional investigation on self-mention in language teaching research articles both in English and Persian. For this purpose, 40 research articles (20 in English and 20 in Persian) were randomly selected out of the valid online journals. The quantitative findings showed that the frequency of the different forms of self-mention in research articles in both languages (English and Persian) is quite different. Findings showed that "I" in English language teaching research articles and "we" ما in Persian language teaching research articles were the most frequent self-mentions. Based on Tang and John's (1999) taxonomy of the discourse functions of personal pronouns, self-mentions were functionally analyzed. The findings showed that the most frequent discourse function of self-mentions in both sets of research articles was the *recounters of the research process*, whereas the least frequent role was *the originator*. The findings of this study have some implications for both instructors of academic writings and students to determine whether self-mention in academic writing is permissible and when and for what purposes, writers should use a particular type of self-mention.

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#### Introduction

Scientific and academic discourse in research articles and researches context have been perceived as impersonal and objective style. Generally, it is because of the positivist view that science rests on empirical results that are separated from the personal beliefs or subjective insights of the individual, in academic writing often advice authors to avoid a personal style of writing. While a considerable amount of researches carried out over the last decade (Ivanic,

1998; Tang & John, 1999; Hyland, 2001, 2002a & 2002b; Harwood, 2005a & 2005b; Vázquez Orta et al., 2006) indicated that academic writing is changing from impersonality and the manifestation of the writer in the text and, use the first-person in certain contexts. Kuo (1999) claimed that the use of first-person pronouns in research articles is related to the dynamic and paradoxical nature of modern scientific research articles because the writer needs to claim significance for his/her research with humility and modesty towards the community that is necessary to obtain their agreement. In this way, Hyland (2001) asserted that showing humility is only part of the picture, as “writers must carefully balance this with a vigorous argument for the originality of their claims” (P. 209).

Self-mention resources let writers make a suitable authorial identity and to present themselves as competent and original members of their discourse communities. However, as Tang and John (1999) highlighted, the first person pronoun in academic writing is not a “homogeneous entity”, but instead it can help to project a number of different roles or identities with varying degrees of authorial presence. Also, they proposed a typology of six different identities or roles behind the first-person pronouns in academic writing and dispose of these roles along a cline in terms of authorial power. According to Kuo (1999), it is important for the author to know how to use personal pronouns, and this allows the author to emphasize his / her contribution to the text and strengthen the alliance with the reader. In fact, Self-mentions help the authors distinguish their voice from the others perspective and communicate the uniqueness of their contribution to create commitment and credibility and improve a connection with the audience (Hyland, 2008).

Hyland (2001, 2002a, 2002b) explained that authors' use of self-mention sources to construct their authorship varies according to their social and epistemological practices in each discipline. Hyland (2001) indicated that self-mention resources are more common in research articles belonging to the soft disciplines than in researches in the hard sciences because writers tend to highlight the phenomena being studied. He showed that the appropriate degree of authorial presence constitutes an important way to signal membership to a particular community of scholars. Few studies have been done about the emergence of sources of self-mention in specific disciplines and about the different identities or roles that authors tend to take when using specific pronouns. (Carciu, 2009; Mur-Dueñas, 2007).

In the present study, the researcher addresses the issue of across language comparison in the use and discourse functions of self-mention in a corpus of language teaching research articles from two different languages (English and Persian).

### **Review of Literature**

The literature on the use of self-mentions in academic texts has revealed that they are an influential source for building an authorial identity (Kuo, 1999; Tang & John, 1999). Since first-person pronouns revealed the way writers place themselves in academic communities, a number of theological scholars (e.g., Tang & John, 1999; Hyland, 2001) have emphasized the

importance of the first-person pronouns in constructing identity. They claim that first-person pronouns support the creation of the author's identity by emphasizing the author's contributions while conveying implications of authority.

Kuo (1999) stated that this use of the first-person narrative in research studies showed the personal honesty and humility of researchers at the time. In the nineteenth century, scientific articles were mostly in the form of experimental reports. Methods of investigation, results, and findings of research studies became important. This developing tendency was reflected by textual changes in academic discourse. Separating the article into units and giving references to other researches became the dominant part of academic discourse. Generally, description and narration changed to explanation and analysis. Corresponding to this kind of change, impersonality was accepted as a distinctive feature of academic reports.

Today, with the increasing professionalism, there is a dynamic style of academic discourse that causes linking and relating the research findings to the previous larger research context gained importance. So, writers would like to show the significance and contribution of their research to the community on the one hand, but also have to request to editors and readers for their approval and acceptance (Kuo, 1999). According to Liu (2011), self-mentions are a powerful rhetorical strategy for emphasizing a writer's contribution and constructing the author identity, which includes the first personal pronouns "I, me", "we, us", possessive pronouns "my, our", nominal subject pronouns "mine, ours", the second personal pronoun "you", possessive pronouns "your, yours", the third personal noun phrases "the writer/researcher" and non-personal words "the paper/study/article".

Writer's identity in academic discourse has come into play in recent decades. Cherry (1988) highlighted this issue and distinguished between ethos & persona in writing, with ethos referring to the personal characteristics attributed to the writer by the reader based on textual evidence, and persona referring to the various roles of the writer when writing a particular text.

Tang and John (1999) recommended three levels for acceptance and performance of roles; the social level, the discourse level and the genre level. According to these researchers, social roles are the identities that are inherent to a person. Tang and John (1999) divide the author's identity into six roles: the author as a "representative of a group", "article guide", "article architect", "research process narrator", "the opinion-holder" and "the originator" of an idea (P. 27-29). They believed that these identities of the author show an ascending order of position: first, "author as the representative", the least power, and last, "author as originator", the most power. The participants of the study were first-year students at the National University of Singapore, who found that they had the most difficulty using the first person pronoun to play the two last roles: "author as an expert" and "author as an idea". So, the implications of Tang and John's study are clear: the avoidance of the first-person conscience stems from the need to reduce the inherent power of academic authorship (Chen, 2020). Discourses roles are the

identities that a person acquires within a particular discourse community (e.g. a teacher in a school context, a doctor in medical discourse). Genre roles are the identities that are specific to a particular genre within a particular discourse community. Roles, genres, and identities are discussed when talking about the author in a particular text. These roles create the problem of self-representation in writing (Karahan, 2013).

Hyland (2002) examines this issue from another perspective, that of a threat to the author. He divides the author's identity into a set of purposes: expressing personal interests, stating the purpose/goal, explaining the method, explaining the argument, and stating the results/claims. Because these actions carry authority and put the author's authority entirely in a position of responsibility and accountability, these actions are inherently threatening to the writers' faces. In addition, he claimed these threats vary in degree. The order shown above indicates an ascending order of threat (Chen, 2020). In addition, he analyzed student papers at the University of Hong Kong and compared the use of with the published data. This comparison showed a high contrast. While "expert writers" use "I" when expressing results and in the argument, that are two risky actions for a writer that cause student writers to deviate from conscience while doing the same thing (Chen, 2020).

Using Hyland's findings, Harwood (2005a) reviewed published academic papers on promotional functions of the personal pronouns "I and We". Harwood investigated ten articles in leading journals representing four different disciplines and presented a total of forty articles. The findings showed that personal pronouns work for different purposes, but at the end, they act as a way for the writer to promote themselves.

Rezvani and Mansouri (2013) analyzed the scholars' authorial presence in 30 research articles from three journals of applied linguistics published in Iran. The Findings showed that the 77% of authored markers was first-person plural "we" and other self-mentions such as "I, me, and my". The researcher were not presented noticeably in the research articles. In this study the researchers didn't examine the writers' views on identity construction.

Uysal (2014) examined the effect of cross-cultural differences on frequency of indirectness and hedging devices used by Turkish, Indians, and Japanese (NNS) and Anglo-American (NS) authors. She investigated 120 conference proposals and found that Turkish and Japanese academics used indirectness and hedging devices much more than Indian and NS writers. Also, she claimed that being supposed as too direct or indirect in academic writing would decrease the chance of scholars' works being accepted and disseminated in international conferences.

Although much work has been done to date (e.g., Afsari & Kuhi, 2016; Hyland, 2002; Karahan, 2013; Uysal, 2014; Rezvani and Mansouri, 2013; Chen, 2020), further studies are needed to show the role of self-mention in academic writing. From the researchers' point of

view, little research has been done on the use of self-mention in language teaching research articles written in Persian and English. This study aims to explore the frequency and discourse functions of self-mention in language teaching research articles written in Persian and English.

## Methodology

### Corpus

The corpus of this study consists of 20 language teaching research articles in English and 20 language teaching research articles in Persian. To compile the corpus, 40 research articles were randomly selected out of research articles available in the valid online sources. This study only investigated research articles written in Persian and English to investigate the frequency of use and discourse functions of self-mention in texts.

### Procedure

To achieve the goal of this study, the corpus was scanned by the researcher for the realizations and functions of self-mention (I, we, my, our, me, us for English and من، ما، م، یم، مان in Persian). Frequency analysis was performed to provide quantitative data of self-mention realization in the language teaching research articles. Because it was not possible to have texts of exactly the same length, the results were commonly standardized using a 1000-word approach (elements per 1000 words) to compare the frequency of occurrence. Also, the researcher obtained the percentage of digits using the following formula as used in the research of Afsari and Kuhi (2016) on functional investigation of self-mention in soft science.

$$F \text{ per } 1000 \text{ words} = \frac{\text{number of self-mention}}{\text{word count based on the topic on the section}} \times 1000$$

$$\text{percent} = \frac{\text{number of self-mention}}{\text{word count based on the topic on the section}} \times 1000$$

The researcher then functionally analyzed the self-mention sources in the language teaching research articles using the classification of self-mention functions suggested by Tang and John (1999) including the functions of “representative, guide, architect, recounter of the research process, opinion holder, and originator”. The whole text was read carefully to determine the discourse functions of self-mention many times. The findings were re-examined by the second researcher to ensure that the functional roles were properly analyzed.

### Data analysis

The language teaching research articles were carefully read to find the frequencies and the discourse functions of the self-mentions. The results were then reviewed by two other raters to ensure that discourse functions were properly explored. Finally, results were tabulated and discussed.

## Result

The corpus was analyzed for the realizations and discourse functions of self-mentions and results are presented and compared with findings in literature. The results are presented in the following order: first the frequency of self-mention and then the results concerning the functional analysis are presented.

### The quantitative results of self-mention in English language teaching research articles

All self-mentions including (I, we, my, our, me, us) were counted in the 20 research article of language teaching in English by PDF Reader. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

*Frequency of self-mention in English Language Teaching Research Articles (per 1000 words)*

Self-mention Types	I	We	My	Our	Me	Us	Total
Frequency per 1000 words	19.5	15.3	5.8	7.7	2.6	0.9	51.8
Percent	38	29	11	15	5	2	100

The results in Table 1 show that self-mention pronouns happened about 51.8 per 1000 words. The most common writer reference was "I" that comprised 38% of the total realizations of self-mention. Experienced writers use rhetorical preferences to show authority and interact with readers, exposing assumptions to the cognition and social practices of their fields through explicit participation in educational research (Hyland, 2002). Since the measures of acceptability for analysis are less clear and variables less exactly assessable, the writer's self-presence and authority is a significant verbal resource for achievement agreement for writer (Hyland, 2000).

### Functional analysis of self-mention markers in English language teaching research articles

The English language teaching research articles were analyzed for the discourse functions of self-mention suggested by Tang and John (1999). Their model includes functions of "representative, guide, architect, recounter of the research process, opinion-holder, and originator". The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table. 2**

*Frequency of Discourse Functions of Self-mention in English Language Teaching Research Articles*

Category	Representative	Guide	Architect	Recounter of research Process	Opinion holder	Originator	Total
Frequency	18	25	12	62	24	4	145
percent	12.4	17.2	8.2	42.8	16.6	2.8	100

As the table above shows, after the analysis, the most frequent discourse function was recounter of the research (62 times making 42.8%) in English language teaching research articles while the least frequent discourse function was the originator with frequency rate of 4 (2.8%). The results are presented in figure 1.

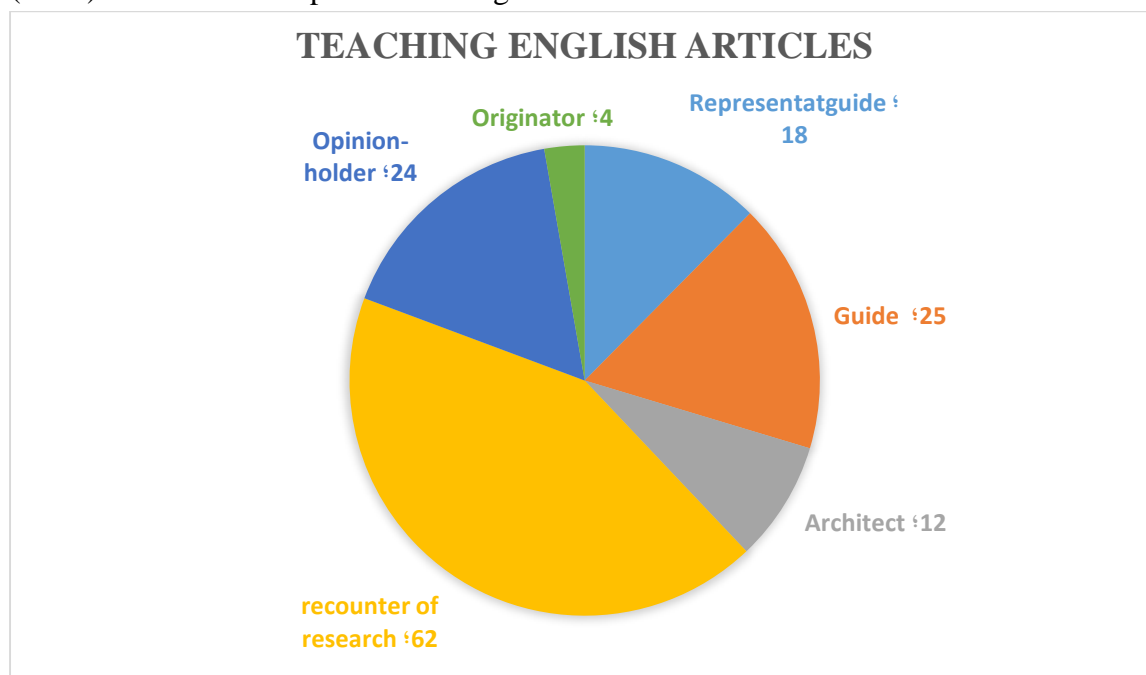


Figure 1. Frequency of functions of self-mention markers in English language teaching research articles

### The quantitative results of realizations of self-mention in Persian English Language Teaching research articles

The researcher investigated Persian language teaching research articles in order to find out how Iranian writers refer to themselves when they write research article in Farsi. The self-mention expressions in all research articles were identified and tabulated. Table 4 presents the results of self-mention frequency in Persian language teaching research articles. As Table 4 indicates the preference of Iranian academic writers in their use of pronouns is plural (we، ما).

**Table 3.**  
*The Results of Self-mention Frequency in Persian Research Articles*

Self-mention types	ما we	هم our	من my	من I	Total
Frequency per 1000 words	24.7	3	18.5	10	56.2
percent	44	5	33	18	100%

The findings revealed that authors in Persian research articles employed different types of self-mentions, especially the first-person plural pronouns " we ما" and " I من" which were the

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most commonly used. This result is in line with Rezvani and Mansouri's (2015) study in which the existence of first-person were less in comparison with English language teaching research articles.

### Functional analysis of self-mention in Persian research articles

The Persian language teaching research articles were analyzed for the functions of self-mention following the model proposed by Tang and John (1999). The results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.**

*Frequency of Discourse Functions of Self-mention in Persian Research Articles*

Functions	Representative	Guide	Architect	Recountor of research Process	Opinion holder	Originator	Total
Frequency	16	35	18	74	15	3	161
Percentage	10	22	11	46	9	2	100

The results in Table 4 shows that “recountor of research process” is the most frequent discourse function. This result is in line with the results found in the analysis of English language teaching research articles. The least discourse function in realization was “originator”. This is also found in English language teaching research articles.

### Discussion

This study tried to investigate the frequency and functions of self-mention on language teaching research articles in English and Persian. The results of this study proved that the frequency of the several forms of self-mention in research articles is completely different. The results of analyzed indicated that, “I” was the most frequent first person pronouns in English researches and “we ما” in the Persian research articles. It can be said that general way in the use of first person pronoun by teaching language writers of English and Persian is toward ‘I’. This study is in the line of the findings of Hyland (2001), Harwood (2005b), Afsari and Kuhi (2016) and, Chen (2020). Hyland (2001) stated that the pronouns “I” and “We” were the most pronoun of self-representation that used in academic writing (p. 212). And Harwood (2005b) also, claimed that “how “I” and “We” can help authors produce a sense of newsworthiness and novelty about their research, display how they are working disciplinary knowledge gaps” (p. 365). Afsari and Kuhi (2016) claimed that the authorial pronoun is an important devices of supporting a competent scholarly identity and achievement approval for one’s ideas.

The findings from this study showed that self-mention is considered to permit writers to claim authority by stating their opinions, highlighting their role to the field, and looking for respect for their work (Kuo, 1999; Hyland, 2001). The use of self-mention induces a different



attitude to the reader that distinguishes the author's work from others. In fact, it provides an opportunity for writers to emphasize their work and agree on their contributions. Hence, the use of the first person is a powerful tool by which authors express their identity by allowing themselves to be claimed as a reference, which has been successful in the form of academic writing.

In addition these findings is in line with the Hyland (2009) who claimed that “Presenting a discorsal self is central to the writing process, and we cannot avoid projecting an impression of ourselves and how we stand in relation to our arguments, discipline, and readers”(p.14).

Concerning the discourse functions of self-mention in English language teaching research articles, this study showed that the most frequent function was the “recounted of research process” (42.8 %) and the least frequent role was originator (2.8%). This finding is in line with Hyland's (2001, 2002), Harwood's (2005a), and Chavez Munoz's (2013) studies. The outcomes of the study conducted by Chavez Munoz (2013) support this finding. They stated that recounter of research process was the most common and important role in all units of research article in both Spanish and English languages. He claimed that the writers who used recounter of research process clearly present themselves in terms of the procedures followed in their research” (p.55). Harwood (2005a) also argued that “I and we” used in telling procedure and they can help to make a research methodology of effort and accuracy, and an image of a researcher who is so curious to know about knowledge” (p. 19). Here are some examples:

Example 1: -In this section at the first, I will investigate a quantitative analysis of the results of the post-test of each participant, after which I will present a qualitative analysis.

Example 2: After I identified discourse errors and coded them according to the research constructs, to promote the reliability of the findings two more raters were asked to re-code some parts of the data.

Example 3: Therefore, in this paper, **we** aim to investigate the multimodal teaching strategies for the enhancement of reading comprehension levels of EFL students.

Example 4: **We** believe that for further studies it is a need for a semi-structured interview with non-native teachers since there is not any consensus about this issue.

Example 5: For such a small change, **we** do not think that a pilot study needed more sources.

It is believed that the researcher's identity is the core of the author's professional identity. As finding indicated in academic English studies, most of self-mentions that show researcher's identity were with the verbs including “analyze, examine, calculate, etc.” The results showed that most Iranian writers use "we" significantly instead of "I". Also, in single-author articles,

the author uses the pronoun "we" instead of the pronoun "I", which is a priority for Iranian writers in terms of culture. In cultural differences, Hyland (2003) stated that cultural factors have a significant impact on how an author writes in a second language. Hyland also argued that the use of the plural pronoun instead of the singular pronoun is a tool used by authors to reduce personal characteristics (2001).

### Conclusion

This study intended to shed the light on the frequencies and functions of self-mention in teaching research articles in Persian and English. The corpus of the study included 40 research articles on language teaching extracted from English and Persian journals on language teaching and it was analyzed based on the functional model of self-mentions proposed by Tang and John (1999).

The results showed that in English research articles, "I" was the most frequent self-mention marker and in Persian research articles, "ما we" was the most frequent self-mention marker. Based on these findings, it could be concluded that realizations of self-mention markers are highly affected by the nature of the research article's language. Language could determine the realizations of self-mention markers.

As to the functions of self-mention, the functions of "recounting of research processes" were the most frequent function in English and Persian language teaching research articles. These findings could help concluding that the functions of self-mentions are highly recommended by the nature of research article rhetorical functions. Generally, it could be concluded that self-mention are among markers that should be considered while teaching writing research articles in both Persian and English context.

The findings of this study have some implications for both teachers of academic writing and students. For students, a good understanding of the options available can help them decide how best to present themselves in writing. At present, some students may avoid using the self-mention simply because of some vague assumption that academic writing should be impersonal. For academic writing teachers, the results of this study indicate the need to determine whether self-mention in academic writing is permissible or should not be encouraged. It also raises the question of when and for what purpose writers should use a particular type of self-mention.

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