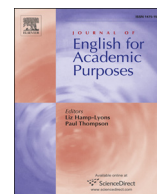


Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

# Journal of English for Academic Purposes

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jeap](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jeap)

## Self-mentions in anthropology and history research articles: Variation between and within disciplines



Lisa McGrath

TESOL Centre, Sheffield Institute of Education, City Campus, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, S1 1WB, UK

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 10 March 2015

Received in revised form 19 November 2015

Accepted 25 November 2015

Available online 5 January 2016

#### Keywords:

Self-mentions

Genre

Research articles

Variation

History

Anthropology

### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the deployment of self-mentions in 18 history and 18 anthropology published research articles. 'I' was used more frequently in the anthropology articles than in history articles, a finding that can be traced to the knowledge-making practices of the disciplines. However, considerable intra-disciplinary variation was also observed, both in terms of frequency of self-mentions per article and the author roles adopted via the use of the first-person subject pronoun. Based on the results, I argue that there is a need to raise students' awareness of intra-as well as interdisciplinary variation in academic discourse, particularly in the humanities.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

### 1. Introduction

EAP studies have contrasted disciplinary genre conventions at either end of the hard versus soft domain continuum (Becher & Trowler, 2001), revealing variation on the macro and micro levels of text. For example, Hyland's work (e.g. 2001; 2004; 2005) has been particularly influential in identifying disciplinary textual patterns, such as his corpus investigation into personal pronoun usage across a range of fields (Hyland, 2002a). The view that differences across academic genres can be drawn along disciplinary lines has been integral to our understanding of academic discourse, and has provided a rationale for discursive patterns observed in genre analyses and guidance for students of academic writing.

However, disciplinary discursive norms or conventions can be overstated. For example, considerable intra-disciplinary variation has been observed in the rhetorical structure of RAs in some disciplines (e.g. Ozturk, 2007; Kuteeva & McGrath, 2015), and in the use of self-mentions in political science RAs (Harwood, 2006). Based on his findings, Harwood advises caution when making generalizations along disciplinary lines.

As Bondi (2007, p. 50) observes, more "finer grained studies of closer disciplines" are needed, particularly as "students are often exposed to the discourse of a variety of disciplines addressing similar problems, and thus need to develop literacy in neighbouring disciplinary fields". Postmodernism, the dismantling of disciplinary boundaries and the creation of interdisciplinary degrees (Hyland, 2009) adds another dimension, rendering investigations into the genre conventions of disciplines with theoretical and epistemological overlaps more pertinent; for example, Starfield and Ravelli's (2006) exploration of self-mentions focuses on sociology and history PhD thesis introductory sections, and in particular, those which fall under the umbrella of the "new humanities". New humanities theses are typically "inter or trans-disciplinary", "adopt a critical

E-mail address: [L.McGrath@shu.ac.uk](mailto:L.McGrath@shu.ac.uk).

perspective”, are “self-reflexive” and “informed by an awareness of the role of discourse in constructing knowledge” (p. 223). Their study develops a taxonomy of author roles adopted via first-person subject pronouns, and again reveals some of the complexity of drawing disciplinary lines.

Disciplinarity has been extensively revisited in a recent article by Trowler (2014), in which he questions the strong essentialism of existing taxonomies (e.g. Becher & Trowler, 2001; Bernstein, 1999) which inform EAP genre analyses (e.g. Hyland, 2005; McGrath & Kuteeva, 2012). Trowler argues that given the reduction in the generative power of disciplines in postmodern, interdisciplinary academia, disciplinary practices should not be viewed in terms of defining core characteristics, but rather facets of “family resemblance” (Wittgenstein, 1953). In other words, a discipline will display various characteristics, but none of these characteristics are defining or necessary. ‘Families’ share clusters of features which make them recognizable, even though each member may not share all features. History is used to illustrate: “[A]cademic historians [ ... ] may display very different characteristics in different universities, though there are still some common features between them which render them recognizable as historians” (Trowler, 2014, p. 1723).

The explanatory potential of family resemblance for ESP genre theory has also been discussed (e.g. Paltridge, 1997; Swales, 1990). As Swales observes with reference to prototype theory (Rosch, 1975), genres vary in their typicality: some texts are more representative of a genre in terms of macro and micro features than others. Nonetheless, instantiations of genres display sufficient common textual features to enable the discourse community (Swales, 1990) to recognize disciplinary membership. However, a family resemblance approach implies that no particular rhetorical or textual (structural or lexico-grammatical) feature or patterning would be defining or necessary.

The aim of the present study is to explore disciplinary genre conventions by building on previous research into self-mentions. The roles authors adopt via the first-person subject pronoun are investigated in RAs from two closely related disciplines: anthropology and history. First-person pronouns were selected for investigation, as previous research has suggested that disciplinary preferences are apparent both in the frequency of ‘I’ (e.g. Hyland, 2005), and the roles authors adopt via the subject pronoun (e.g. Fløttum, Dahl, & Kinn, 2006). Furthermore, the view that frequent use of “I” in academic texts is stylistically inappropriate continues to be held by some novice academic writers across fields. More specifically, my study poses the following research questions:

- RQ 1 Which roles do authors of the history and anthropology RAs in the study adopt via the first-person subject pronoun?  
 RQ 2 What (if any) disciplinary genre conventions in terms of first-person subject pronoun use emerge?

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on self-mentions in various disciplinary, generic and linguistic contexts. Section 3 describes how the RAs in the study were compiled and presents Starfield and Ravelli’s (2006) taxonomy of author roles as the analytical framework. Section 4, fleshes out and problematizes my interpretation of the framework, and in Section 5, the results of the analysis are presented. Drawing on family resemblance, I argue that in less discursively “rigid” (Gnutzmann & Rabe, 2014, p. 24) disciplines such as history and anthropology, deviation from textual ‘norms’ is to be expected, if indeed these norms can be identified in the first place. Therefore, a focus on intra-rather than interdisciplinary variation to identify the range of discursive options open to our students may be more pertinent.

## 2. Review of the literature

Following Ivanič’s (1998) seminal work on the discursive construction of “self” in writing, author presence (and absence) in academic texts has been widely studied. While an author’s textual presence manifests itself through a variety of linguistic resources – for example, Anderson, Hargeaves, and Owtram (2009) investigated possessive determiners, as well as more implicit stance adverbials – many investigations have focused on personal subject pronouns, the most overt signal of a writer’s “intrusion” into the discourse (Fløttum et al. 2006; Hyland, 2001, p.211). In various quantitative and qualitative studies (e.g. Harwood, 2005a; Hyland, 2002b; Kuo, 1999; Zareva, 2013), frequency counts have been reported, and functional or metaphorical labels assigned to instances of self-mentions in learner and research genres, predominantly in the sciences and linguistics.

While Fløttum et al. (2006) found discipline to be more influential than language background in terms of self-mentions, several analyses have adopted a contrastive-linguistic approach, such as Carter-Thomas and Chambers (2012) on economics (contrasting English/French RAs), Mur Deñas (2007) on business management (English/Spanish RAs), Sheldon (2009) on applied linguistics and language teaching (English/Spanish RAs), and Molino (2010) on linguistics (Italian/English RAs). These studies provide some evidence that an author’s native language can influence the deployment of first-person pronouns (e.g. Mur Deñas, 2007; Vergaro, 2011). However, considering the increasingly global character of academia, determining with any certainty an author’s L1 based on name and home institution is problematic.

A key interest of many of the studies cited above is how authors adopt various “roles” (Ivanič, 1998; Tang & John, 1999, p. 25) such as a meta-textual guide, who directs the reader through the text, and a conductor of research, who outlines methodological procedures (e.g. Harwood, 2005b; Hyland, 2001, 2002a; Starfield & Ravelli, 2006). The use of the subject pronoun in conjunction with these roles is considered a rhetorical strategy to present the authorial self in the text (e.g. Mur Deñas, 2007). Likewise, authors can absent themselves from the text through impersonal language, which would represent a different rhetorical strategy. Nonetheless, my focus is on author presence as signalled by the use ‘I’. Categories are assigned

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/360164>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/360164>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)