

‘I/we focus on...’: A cross-cultural analysis of self-mentions in business management research articles [☆]

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Abstract

Although research articles (RAs) have been frequently characterised by impersonal language, which entails the use of nominalisations and passive sentences, self-mentions, that is, explicit references to the RA author(s), are found to intermingle with those impersonal constructions. These self-references can be considered a rhetorical strategy that scholars may use to present themselves as authorial selves, promoting themselves and outlining their specific, novel contribution to their discipline. This paper aims at quantitatively and qualitatively analysing the use and distribution of self-mentions—realised by self-references (i.e., first person singular and plural pronouns and possessive adjectives) and self-citations—in a comparable corpus of business management RAs written in English for an international readership by scholars based at North American universities and RAs written in Spanish for a national readership by scholars based at Spanish universities. The former were found to make greater use of self-mentions than the latter. Significant differences were also found in the distribution of self-mentions and the rhetorical functions both groups of scholars most commonly perform through the use of exclusive *we*. The different results in both sub-corpora suggest that the use of self-mentions in RAs is not only conditioned by the discipline to

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which the authors belong but also by the specific cultural context in which RAs are produced and distributed.

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1. Introduction

When scholars step into the discourse by means of self-mentions (i.e., first person singular and plural pronouns and possessive adjectives and self-citations), they manifest an authorial voice through which they can portray themselves as expert, reliable members of a given disciplinary community. Establishing a positive self-representation can be seen as a key aspect of persuasion in written academic discourse. Scholars need to construct a credible ethos in order to convince their readers of the validity, novelty and appropriateness of the research being reported. One way of attaining that credibility can be the use of self-mentions since, as stated by Hyland (2004a, p. 106), they “are related to the desire to present oneself as an informed and reliable colleague, strongly identifying oneself with a particular view to gain credit for one’s individual perspective or research decisions.”

Self-representation in writing has been exhaustively analysed by Ivanič (1998). She posits that the writer’s identity is constructed depending on the “possibilities of self-hood” available to the writer in particular contexts. In her view, three different selves interact in the construction of the writer’s identity in written discourse: (1) “the autobiographical self,” which refers to “the identity which people bring with them to any act of writing” (p. 24), as related to their life-history and own personal experiences and personalities; (2) “the discursal self,” which refers to “the impression [...] which they consciously or unconsciously convey of themselves in a particular written text” (p. 25), as they may or may not accommodate to the readers’ expectations; and (3) “the self as author,” which refers to the extent to which writers present or view themselves as authors (p. 26), that is, their explicit portrayal of an original authorial persona, which may be affected by their autobiographical selves and which may modulate their discursal self. The focus of this paper will be on this third aspect of identity, which has attracted the most attention in the study of self-representation in written academic discourse and which will be here explored cross-culturally.

In order to come up with a successful piece of research, it is not only necessary to demonstrate solidarity with the particular disciplinary community members (i.e., present oneself as a humble servant and show respect for the readers’ expectations, values and beliefs) but also to show relevance and innovation (Myers, 1989) and, by means of self-mentions, one’s novel ideas and originality can be made clear (Hyland, 2001). Therefore, by stepping forward as authorial selves, scholars can promote themselves and their research. Hence, making explicit reference to their role as authors “would seem to have significant consequences for how one’s message is received” (Hyland, 2001, p. 211), and, thereby, for the kind of relationship built up between writer(s) and readers and for how the former comes to be viewed by the latter. It should be outlined that explicit references to the scholars’ role as authors can be made not only through the use of first person pronouns

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