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Authorial identity in Turkish language and English language research articles in Sociology: The role of publication context in academic writers' discourse choices



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ABSTRACT

Few studies to date have investigated the role of publication context in shaping academic writers' linguistic choices in establishing authorial identity in different writing cultures. This study explores how authorial identity is represented through first person pronouns in 130 Sociology research articles (RAs) in Turkish and in English published in national and international journals. Both corpus-based and interview-based analyses were employed. Three sub-corpora were analyzed: (1) Turkish writers' Turkish RAs in national journals, (2) Turkish writers' English RAs in mainstream international journals, and (3) Native Speaker (NSE) writers' English RAs in mainstream international journals. The findings revealed extensive similarities in the frequency and discourse functions of first person pronouns in English RAs written by NSE and Turkish scholars in mainstream international journals. Both groups utilized first person pronouns in high-risk functions, such as expressing an opinion, to front a powerful authorial identity. In contrast to Turkish and NSE scholars publishing in international journals, Turkish writers publishing in Turkish national journals tended to avoid using first person pronouns and displaying an overt authorial presence in their RAs. The findings revealed the likely significance of the publication context in the discursive choices of academic writers.

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1. Introduction

Academic writers use various linguistic strategies to interact with their readers and to construct their authorial identity (Ivanić, 1998). Previous studies in this vein have focused on the various linguistic resources that are used to display writer identity in research articles (RAs), such as hedges (e.g., Yang, 2013) epistemic modality (e.g., Gabrielatos & McNery, 2005; Hyland & Milton, 1997), evaluative adjectives (e.g., Swales & Burke, 2003), and attitude markers (e.g., Mur-Dueñas, 2010). Among these linguistic devices, first person pronouns most overtly mark attribution of stance to the writer (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999), and, as powerful metadiscursive resources in manifesting authorial presence, their use in academic writing has been widely investigated over the past few decades.

As they become socialized into academic discourse (Duff, 2007), writers learn to create appropriate identities and incorporate linguistic conventions associated with their target disciplinary discourse communities. This process requires

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writers not only to be competent users of the target language (Belcher, 2007), i.e. write without grammatical or lexical errors (Uzuner, 2008), but also to construct a credible authorial presence in their RAs that is aligned with the identity of their disciplinary communities (Hyland, 2002).

Matters of authorial identity are particularly important given that academic evaluation systems in many countries favor publications in English-medium international journals (Curry & Lillis, 2014; Hyland, 2016; Lillis & Curry, 2010). Despite the many challenges (see, for instance, Buckingham, 2008; Canagarajah, 1996; Duzsak & Lewkowicz, 2008; Swales, 1990), pressure on non-Anglophone scholars to publish in English is increasing (e.g., Bardi, 2015; Burgess, Gea-Valor, Moreno, & Rey-Rocha, 2014; Mur-Dueñas, 2011; Olsson & Sheridan, 2012; Uzuner, 2008). As in many other countries, Turkey has imposed policies to promote publications in international journals with the goal of increasing the country's share of global research output (Uysal, 2014). While many Turkish scholars are contributing to this national goal, scholars in different universities and disciplines display various degrees of alignment (Uysal, 2014), with some opting to publish in Turkish-medium journals only and others choosing to publish primarily in English-medium journals.

These two groups of authors provide an interesting opportunity to explore how writers establish their authorial identity in relation to their target context. Through an analysis of first person pronoun use, I explore the role of publication context–mainstream international English and Turkish national–in shaping Turkish scholars' "authorial identity" (Ivanič, 1998) in RAs in the field of Sociology. To this end, I contrastively analyze the frequency and functions of first person pronouns used by three groups of writers (1) Turkish writers in Turkish national journals, (2) Turkish writers in international English journals, and (3) NSE writers in international English journals. This corpus-based analysis is complemented by interviews that explored Turkish writers' opinions about the use of first person pronouns in RAs.

2. First person pronouns in RAs

First person pronouns have been investigated in a wide range of genres in academic writing such as undergraduate student essays (Çandarlı, Bayyurt, & Marti, 2015), theses (Hyland, 2002) and conference abstracts (Yakhontova, 2006). An important line of research on first person pronouns has focused on the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural investigation of these devices in RAs. These studies have found that self-mention through first person pronouns is acceptable to different degrees across different discourse communities. Important influences on self-mentions here are writers' disciplines (Harwood, 2005; Hyland, 2001, 2002) and native writing cultures (Lorés-Sanz, 2006; Molino, 2010; Mur-Dueñas, 2011, 2007; Vassileva, 1998).

Previous studies have found that writers in soft disciplines tend use first person singular pronouns more frequently to display a more explicitly visible, authoritative and individualistic authorial identity (Harwood, 2005; Hyland, 2001, 2002). Writers in hard disciplines, on the other hand, prefer to be less visible in their texts by avoiding the use of singular first person pronouns. These variations have mainly been attributed to the different epistemological beliefs and practices of disciplinary communities (Harwood, 2005; Hyland, 2001, 2002).

Self-mention has been found to be more prevalent in English-language RAs published in international journals than in RAs in various other languages in a variety of disciplines (e.g., see, Lorés-Sanz (2006) for Linguistics RA abstracts in Spanish; Molino (2010) for Linguistics RAs in Italian; Mur-Dueñas (2007, 2011) for Business Management RAs in Spanish; and Vassileva (1998) for Linguistics RAs in German, French, Russian, and Bulgarian). The high number of first person singular pronouns in English international journals could be attributed to the competitive nature of international publishing (Mur-Dueñas, 2007, 2011), and to the need to establish ownership of one's work, which can be tied to broader efforts to distinguish the author from others in the field. A more judicious use of "I" may be more typical of academic publications in languages other than English, where the native writing cultures of the writers might favor a less personal presentation of knowledge, as revealed by avoidance of first person singular pronouns and frequent use of inclusive "we" in RAs by NNSE writers (Lorés-Sanz, 2006; Mur-Dueñas, 2011, 2007; Vassileva, 1998).

Fløttum's (2003) analysis of the use of first person pronouns in English, French and Norwegian RAs in Economics, Medicine and Linguistics highlighted the impact of both the disciplinary writing practices and the native writing conventions on writers' discursal choices. For instance, in all three disciplines, RAs written in English contained the highest number of first person singular pronouns, but Linguistics RAs in all three languages had the highest number of occurrences. Apart from these differences, the distribution and discourse functions of first person pronouns might also vary in different sections of RAs (Lorés-Sanz, 2006; Martínez, 2005). For instance, Martínez's (2005) analysis of the English-language RAs written by Spanish writers revealed instances of what can be seen as either an overuse or underuse of first person pronouns in different parts of their RAs.

In the Turkish context, very few studies to date have investigated the use of first person pronouns in RAs. These studies have revealed that compared to NSE writers, Turkish writers tended to underuse first person pronouns in RAs written in English in the field of English Language Teaching (Karahan, 2013) and RA abstracts in the field of Education written in Turkish (Çandarlı, 2012). No known studies have thus far explored metadiscoursal features of Turkish and English Sociology RAs written by Turkish scholars.

Previous studies have provided insights into rhetorical conventions regarding self-mention in English international journals in different disciplines. Moreover, they have shed light on how RA writers of different L1 backgrounds present their authorial identity in their first languages in national journals. What is also needed, however, is further research to understand how the discourse conventions of English international journals affect NNSE writers' rhetorical practices. This study aims to

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