

In the name of God

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Faculty of Literature & Humanities
Department of English Language & Literature

M. Sc. Thesis

A Study of Writer Identity in Persian MA Theses

Supervisor:

Dr. Mostafa Hasrati

Advisor:

Amer Gheitury

By:

Marzieh Rahimi Chegeni

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استاد راهنما:

دکتر مصطفی حسرتی

استاد مشاور:

دکتر عامر قیطوری

نام دانشجو:

مرضیه رحیمی چکنی

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By:

Marzieh Rahimi Chegeni

Evaluated and approved by the thesis committee as: *Excellent*.....

Supervisor: Assistant Professor Dr. Mostafa Hasrati: *M. Hasrati*.....

Advisor: Assistant Professor Dr. Amer Gheitury: *A. Gheitury*.....

Internal Examiner: Assistant Professor Dr. Khosrow Gholamalizadeh: *Khosrow*

External Examiner: Associate Professor Dr. Vida Shaghghi: *M. Hasrati*.....

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To my family

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Abstract

Discoursal self as an aspect of identity can be constructed in three ways: address, attribution and/or affiliation (Ivanic, 2006). The discoursal self of a writer is the image they present in their own text (Ivanic, 1998) which may be formed just through the third way, i.e., affiliation. Affiliation is concerned with how a writer writes like others. This thesis aims at exploring the affiliation at work in the identity construction of Persian student writers of Razi university of Kermanshah. We want to see whether MA students present themselves textually as the senior members of the academic community do.

Analyzing Persian MA theses, in addition to identifying the linguistic devices of self-presentation available to Persian academic writers, we explored the rhetorical functions they accomplished in the theses. In order to both gender and disciplinary comparisons in terms of writers' self-reference, theses were selected from two disciplines, i.e., linguistics and religion, written by male and female writers. We found that our student writers avoided some forms of self-mention and overused some others to write like others. In particular they precluded different realizations of the singular first person pronoun (FFP), which, according to Tang and John (1999), is the most visible realization of a writer presence in the text. There were hardly any singular FPP in the theses. Interviews were conducted with MA student writers and it was found that they made certain selections of linguistic features rather than FPPs to align themselves with their supervisors- what we call conscious affiliation- and identify with other members of the academic discourse community- sub-conscious affiliation.

Key words: Writer identity, Identity construction, Academic writing, Authority power.

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Abbreviation

Arc	<i>Architect</i>
F	<i>Female</i>
FP	<i>First Person</i>
FPP	<i>First Person Pronoun</i>
FPV	<i>First Person Verb-ending</i>
Ling	<i>Linguistics</i>
Rel	<i>Religion</i>
R-expression	<i>Referring expression</i>
Stu	<i>Student</i>
Sup	<i>Supervisor</i>

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Among numerous works examining different aspects of academic writing in general (Blaxter et al., 1998; Bloch, 2003; Bloxham and West, 2007; Grant, 2006; Harwood and Hadley, 2004; Morss, 2001; Misak et al., 2005; Mackan and Banker, 2004; Helms-Park and Stapleton, 2003), and student academic writing in particular (Hewings and Hewings 2002; Li, 2006; Boscolo et al., 2007; Caffarella and Barnett, 2000; Cortes, 2004; Ding, 2007; Jackson and Parkinson, 2006; Kelly and Bazerman, 2003; Kwan, 2006; Winter et al., 2000; Lea, 2004; Lee and Street, 1998; Zhu, 2004 and Cadman, 1997), the notion of identity has come to attract significant attention. It has been suggested that academic writers, including student writers, leave traces of themselves in their writing. These cases of self-presentation are assumed to provide writers with the opportunities not only to show their unique role as the originators of the text but also to construct an impression of themselves, which, in linguistic literature, is known as *writer identity*. The other terms used to capture the sense of identity in written discourse are 'discoursal self' (Ivañic, 1998; Ivañic and Camps, 2001), 'voice' (Matsuda and Tardy, 2001; Martinez, 2005, Hyland, 2002) and 'ethos and persona' (Cherry, 1988).

"Academic writing, like all forms of communication, is an act of identity", Hyland (2002) says, "it not only conveys disciplinary 'content' but also carries a representation of the writer" (1092). 'The discoursal self' of a writer is the image they presents in their own text which, as Ivañic (2006) argues, can be constructed in three ways: address, attribution and/or affiliation. We will see in the following chapters that it is the last way which plays a role in the construction of student writers' identities.

Some researchers have suggested that writer identity may be linked to various factors such as national and disciplinary culture (Dahl, 2004), the writer's social and political histories (Casanave, 2003) or their experience in writing activity (Ivanic, 2006 and Samraj, 2000). While some other scholars have focused on the possible consequences of the writers' discursive construction of themselves such as political consequences, argued by Casanave (2003). Identifying the position of academic writer in the academic discourse community may be the main effect of the way a writer constructs themselves in their writing. As Hyland (2004) in a study on the structure of dissertation acknowledgement asserts:

Acknowledgements are not simply random checklists of useful people or institutions. They also allow writers to portray some of the procedures and practices which have gone into the dissertation and so present a competent professional identity...this is a site where writers can textualize themselves as autonomous intellectuals worthy of respect and describing of the qualification sought. (319)

He believes that the way we, as academic writers, textually present ourselves will affect our status in the academic discourse community as professionals.

Various linguistic resources have been found to be useful instruments for textual self-mention among which the first personal pronoun has received more attention. As the most visible realization of writer identity, several researchers including Tang and John (1999), Hyland (2001, 2002) and Harwood (2005) have tried to identify a range of functions that *we* and *I* play in academic writing such as organizing text, guiding readers through the text, stating personal ideas and making claims...Considering the linguistic devices for self-presenting in addition to the FPPs (Charles, 2006), I take the Tang and John's (1999) model of the *T* roles as the basis for my categorization of the various rhetorical functions accomplished by these structures.

Taking a doubly reader-writer perspective, in this study we seek to examine writer identity construction and realization in Persian academic writing and aim at revealing the affiliation at work in representation of student identity in MA theses written in Persian. Specifically I want to explore whether and how voice plays a role in student academic writing. I am also concerned with how newcomers found their way into the community of academic writers by means of their engagements with the self-representation forms. In addition, selecting theses from two different disciplines, i.e., linguistics and religion, written by both male and female students, we will see that both discipline and gender of the writer may affect the construction of their textual identity. Text analysis along with interviews with the MA student writers and their supervisors revealed that the student writers obscured their identities because they had been asked to do so. They sought to be a member of the academic discourse community and, hence needed to use the linguistic forms and patterns which senior members of the academic community use to organize their texts. They made certain selections of linguistic features, and of course avoid others, to align themselves with their supervisors and identify with other members of the academic *discourse community* (for some definitions of discourse community see Swales (1990) and Beaufort (1997)).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Writer identity, its construction and presentation in academic writing, have drawn attention of many researchers in the field. There are many controversies around the problems of the forms of writer textual presence- through which the writer self is both constructed and presented- their rhetorical functions, and the factors which may influence the extent and quality of their use. This work tries to explore these issues in Persian academic writing with an especial focus on student writing properties.

1.3. Research Questions

In this study my main objective is to answer the following questions:

1. How do Persian native students present their identities in their own texts?
2. Why do they use the self-reference forms?
3. Do various disciplines allow different ways of writer self-presentation?
4. Does the gender of the writer contribute to the way they textually represent themselves?
5. Why do Persian student writers avoid singular first person to refer to themselves?
6. Is there any general process controlling academic student writers' self-presentation?

1.4. Significance of the Study

To the best of my knowledge, no work has been done on Persian academic writing regarding the way student writers present themselves through their writing. Exploring writer presence in MA theses written in Persian may have theoretical and practical/ pedagogical contributions to the field.

Theoretically, the findings of this study will shed light on the strategic use of the self-reference forms in Persian academic works. The rhetorical functions introduced in this thesis as well as the model of affiliation suggested in Chapter 7 will also be useful to analyze the academic texts written in languages other than Persian.

The functions that the writers' self-reference forms perform in academic writing make these structures an important topic to the teaching of academic writing. Even though students might have frequently encountered these structures in their academic reading, simple exposure to the frequent use of the forms of writer self-presentation in published academic writing does not result in the acquisition of these expressions by university students. The role of unconscious learning does not help students master the use of these