



# THE "I" IN INTERACTION: AUTHORIAL PRESENCE IN ACADEMIC WRITING

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Abstract: This study explores the discourse functions of personal pronouns and verb forms referring to writer and reader interaction in a corpus of 60 research articles in the fields of linguistics, psychology and educational research in English and Spanish. Drawing on Tang and John's (1999) taxonomy I elaborate and refine their categories, and propose I as the Interpreter as a new role in the continuum of writers' authorial presence. The analysis reveals that both English and Spanish writers make extensive use of pronominal discourse functions. However, Spanish writers use them more sparingly and prefer different functions when signalling their presence such as pointing to their role as interpreters of data rather than recounters of the research process or originators of an original contribution to the field.

Keywords: research articles, personal pronouns, contrastive linguistics.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the last three decades there has been an increasing interest in the study of interaction in written texts (Coulthard, 1977; Nystrand, 1986, 1989;; Bakhtin, 1981; McCarthy, 1993; McCarthy and Carter, 1994; Davies, 1994; Bolivar, 1986, 2001; Thompson and Thetela, 1995; Hoey, 2001; Gea-Valor,2010). Drawing on earlier classifications of writer and reader interactions (Crismore, 1983, 1989, 1990; Vande Kopple, 1985; Thompson and Thetela, 1995), Hyland (2005) created one of the most complete models for the study of interaction in written texts: the metadiscourse model. This model includes a series of linguistic resources that are divided into two major categories: interactive and interactional. On the interactive side, metadiscourse signals include: *transition markers, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidential and code glosses*. On the interactional side, they include: *hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mention*, and *engagement markers* (*reader pronouns, personal asides, shared knowledge, directives and questions*).

The linguistic features which are the focus of this paper are *self-mentions*. Self-mentions perform a number of functions when used by the academic writers. They include: organising the text, guiding the reader and acknowledging funding bodies. Several taxonomies have been proposed for the classification of writer pronouns (Tarone, *et al.* 1998; Bernhardt, 1985; Vassileva, 1998; Ivanič, 1998; Kuo, 1999; Tang and John, 1999; Hyland, 2001, 2002; Harwood 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Starfield and Ravelli, 2006; Sheldon, 2009). Additionally, pronominal signals have been analysed across languages (Vassileva, 1998; Sheldon, 2009; Molino, 2010) and across sections of the research article (Harwood, 2005a; Martinez, 2005; Mur-Duenas, 2007). Ivanič's (1998) seminal study of writing and identity has been influential in the study of how the writer positions him/herself in the text when writing in academic settings. Based on the analysis of student writing Ivanič suggested the existence of a continuum ranging from the use of no *l* at all to the use of *l* to indicate the organisation of the text, the research and the writer's cognitive processes in the text (Ivanič, 1998).

Along with Ivanic's (1998) taxonomy, a seminal influence on the development of more recent taxonomies has been the classification of pronominal discourse functions in academic writing made by Tang and John (1999). The authors developed their framework relating to the functionality of first person pronouns based on the concept of "creating identities", as proposed by the Systemic Functional Linguistics tradition. Tang and John proposed a continuum of authorial "I" and the degrees of power embedded in the use of first person pronouns. The roles are: 1. I as representative; 2. I as the guide; 3. I as the architect; 4. I as the recounter of the research processes; 5. I as the opinion holder and 6. I as the originator. See Figure 1.



Least powerful authorial presence

Most powerful authorial presence

\*I refers to all forms of first and second person pronouns (my, we, our etc)

Figure 1. Tang and John's (1999) continuum of authorial presence in academic writing.



There are degrees of the writer's presence in this continuum, where the most authorial presence stands at the right end of the scale. For this study Tang and John's (1999) taxonomy has been taken as a starting point for the development of the categories.

Similarly to this study, Tang and John's categories have been modified and adapted in other taxonomies, such as in Starfield and Ravelli (2006), and Sheldon (2009) taxonomies. However, Starfield and Ravelli (2006) omit the function of Representative and merge the Guide and the Architect roles, making it the least powerful of authorial roles. They also propose a new authorial role Reflexive I. Finally, Sheldon's (2009) taxonomy has been shaped by the typologies of Ivanič (1998), modified by Tang and John (1999) and Starfield and Ravelli (2006). Sheldon's contribution has been the inclusion of degrees of narrativity and reflexivity in the role of Reflexive I.

In this paper I will explore the patterns of pronominal discourse functions (PDFs henceforth) in English and Spanish RAs using a modified version of Tang and John's (1999) taxonomy. The analysis of PDFs is performed in RAs of three disciplines: Linguistics, Education and Psychology. Particularly, I will analyse how PDFs enable interaction between the writer and the reader by means of pronouns and verb forms referring to 1st person pronouns and 1st person reference.

#### 2. METHODOLOGY

The PDFs categories in the data are represented by pronominal signals such as our, us, ourselves, nuestros etc and verb forms referring to 1st person pronouns and 1st person reference. For the classification of pronominal signals in Spanish I used an explicit/implicit categorisation, in which the explicit category is represented by personal pronouns forms (e.g. nuestro-our), whereas the implicit signals were identified according to the form of the verb. For the analysis of items, Tang and John's categories have been kept with some changes occurring in the sub-functions. Also, a new role has been identified in the continuum of authorial presence: I as the Interpreter. This is one of the most powerful of the functions along the continuum of authorial presence, occurring immediately below I as the Originator (OR) on the scale. See Figure 2.



Figure 2. A new continuum of authorial presence in academic writing.

The Interpreter positions the researcher as a powerful and experienced member of the scientific community, whose ability to provide meaning and build knowledge by interpreting the results is put forward in the text. The Interpreter explains and constructs knowledge according to the researcher's experience of the particular research process carried out, their expertise, and general knowledge and understanding of the field. Three sub functions have been identified: (i) comparing, (ii) assessing, and (iii) interpreting. Comparing refers to the comparison of the study's results and contributions to either their own work or other researchers' work. On the other hand, assessing refers to the evaluation of the study's methodological strengths and weaknesses and the impact of these features on the findings. Finally, when interpreting writers rule out possible interpretations by discussing and "philosophising" about the meaning of the results, raise questions associated with the outcome of their research, or encourage further action or research about the topic being discussed.

# 2.1. Corpus

A total of 60 research articles (RAs) in 3 different disciplines (Linguistics (LI), Psychology (PSY), and Education (EDU) were collected for the analysis. The chosen disciplines belong to the soft fields (see Becher and Trowler (2001) for a classification of the academic disciplines into soft and hard fields). The criteria for the selection of texts were as follows:

- 1. The journals in both languages are from the same academic discipline.
- The selected RAs from each journal are empirical studies and include the following sections: introduction, methodology, results and discussion/conclusion,
- The RAs were all published between 2005 and 2007.
- The articles have been published in leading journals of each discipline, according to the Impact Factor made by the Thompson Institute of Scientific Information, for English articles; and to the Latindex (Scientific Serial Publications Latin American Index) and the Red de Revistas Científicas de América Latina



y el Caribe, España y Portugal (Redalyc) for the Spanish articles. A complete list of the articles selected from each journal can be found in Appendix A. The selected texts in both languages were obtained in PDF format from the journals and then converted into plain text format. Only the main sections of the RA has been the focus of this study (Swales', 1990 model IMRD), thus all footnotes, endnotes, reference lists, acknowledgements, quotations and citations were deleted to build the corpus. The exact number of words analysed can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of words in the data.

	English		Spa	Spanish	
	Texts	Words	Texts	Words	
Linguistics	10	111 492	10	76 301	
Education and Educational Research	10	95 574	10	73 546	
Psychology	10	70 986	10	55 537	
Total		278 052		205 384	

## 3. RESULTS

The number of PDFs found in both corpora, including their corresponding sub-functions in each category the data is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of PDFs in English and Spanish.

Roles	English		Spanish	
	No.	%	No.	%
Representative	231	15	150	14
General	102		78	
Researchers	129		72	
Guide	57	4	38	5
Prospective	-		4	
Current	38		21	
Retrospective	19		13	
Architect	224	14	169	21
Prospective	123		74	
Current	75		64	
Retrospective	25		31	
Recounter of the research process	823	51	271	39
Methods	581		183	
Hypothesis	140		33	
Findings	102		55	
Opinion holder	60	4	70	9
Interpreter	46	3	52	7
Comparing	19		3	
Assessing	21		13	
Interpreting	6		36	
Originator	148	9	42	5
Total	1598		792	

It could be suggested from the observed pattern of frequency of PDFs that mainly RRP, which is, of course, an exclusive use of the pronouns, stands for the self-promotional nature of the RA, whereas R, an inclusive use, represents the inclusion of the discourse community into the discourse. Both discourse strategies are pivotal for the persuasive nature of the genre, as RRP explains the methodological procedures followed by the researchers and R creates a communal relationship with the reader, who is a fellow member of the discourse community.

In order to compare the usage of PDFs between the ERAs and SRAs, normalisation of data per 10,000 words was carried out, due to the 72,668 words difference between the ERAs and the SRAs corpora. A detailed illustration of the occurrence of each PDF is presented below.

#### 3.1. The Representative

The main function of the Representative (R) is to voice the presence of the writers as part of (i) everyone and (ii) the research community. There is no real difference between ERAs and SRAs (R-ERAs=8.3 > SRAs=7.3 items per 10,000 words). Both languages show similar usage patterns of frequency of sub-functions, except for researchers representative in the ERAs, which is slightly higher than in the SRAs.

- (1) From the construction of the error dictionaries we may expect that incompleteness/underproduction is mainly caused by
  - missing patterns for spelling errors and OCR errors, and
  - the fact that we do not seriously damage words when constructing the error dictionaries. (LIE.RA1)

# 3.2. The Guide: prospective, current, retrospective

In the exploration of the data, three sub-functions were identified: (i) prospective (only in Spanish), (ii) current macro and micro (only in Spanish) and (iii) retrospective. Overall, there is no real difference between English and Spanish Guide (G-ERAs=2.0 > SRAs=1.8 items per 10,000 words). This means that both English and Spanish writers interact and include the reader in particular points of the text. This is the only difference between English and Spanish, suggesting that Spanish writers include and guide the reader to a subsequent point in the text in order to attract the reader's attention to a particular and important point in the text.

(2)... Volveremos sobre estos recursos más adelante, cuando se describan las funciones metadiscursivas del MMc que corresponden a cada perspectiva de conceptualización. (.. We will come back to these resources later, when the MMc metadiscursive functions that belong to each perspective of conceptualisation are described) (LIS.RA8)

Example 2 occurs at the end of the Introduction section and then the writers move on the Methodology section, where they introduce a description of metadiscursive functions as announced in the Introduction. This signal takes the reader prospectively in the text. The writers then, show and involve the reader into the methodological choices of their research, possibly aiming to promote these choices with their reader and persuade him/her about these. Example 3 and 4 signal the AR at current micro and macro levels respectively. The latter one occurs only in Spanish.

- (3) In Table 4 below, we find the number of times that the learner used help (activations by the learner of the metacognitive help) (EDUE.RA4)
- (4) Al analizar si es significativa la relación entre pertenecer a la categoría de puntajes altos o bajos en la MRS e inclinarse hacia un tipo particular de opción en torno a los derechos de la inmigración, nos encontramos con un vínculo claro entre ambas variables (x2 (3) = 23.65; p < .001; Phi = 0.44). (When analysing if this the relationship between belonging to the categories of low or high scores in the MRS and the tendency towards a particular option about immigration rights is significant, we find a clear link between both variables (x2 (3) = 23.65; p < .001; Phi = 0.44). (PSYS.RA5)

There were nil cases of prospective quide in English, whereas the SRAs' frequency is .19 items per 10,000 words

(5) Tal como se indicó, en la Tabla 3, podemos observar la cifra total alcanzada a través de los procedimientos indicados más arriba de recolección del Corpus Académico PUCV-2006. (As indicated in Table 3, we can observe the total amount reached through the procedures shown above in terms of the collection of Academic Corpus PUCV-2006) (LIS.RA7)

In example 5 the reader is taken back to a table in order to discuss some results of the research and possibly agree with the writers' propositions and arguments. The reader seems to be 'softened up' by being involved in looking at the data, before an interpretation of the data is put forward.

## 3.3. The Architect: prospective, current, retrospective

The Architect (AR) role gives structure and organisation to the text and the discourse. Three sub-functions have been identified in the analysis of data (i) prospective, (ii) current and (iii) retrospective. There is no real difference in



the frequency of AR between English and Spanish: AR-ERAs=8.0 < SRAs=8.2 items per 10,000 words. This result suggests that both English and Spanish writers use interactive pronouns to emphasise the organisation of the text to the same extent. The similarity that is shown in my results may be explained in terms of the generic conventions imposed by the RA, as the role of the AR seems to be associated with the specific features of scientific discourse rather than with cultural differences or similarities. There is a slight difference in the SRAs in terms of how writers organise the text retrospectively. Thus, Spanish writers tend to refer back to a previous point in the text to signal its organisation more often than English writers.

(6) Our aim in this article is accordingly to propose a new theory ... (PSYE.RA4)

Example 6 shows how writers prospectively state the overall goal of the paper. Prospective AR may also signal the overall organisation of the text or the organisation of each section of the RA (example 7).

(7) In Section 5, we estimate the number of orthographic errors in the corpora that remain undetected because they do not occur in the error dictionaries (LIE.RA10)

Examples 8 signal the structure of the current discourse as it unfolds. In this sub-function writers can also signal at a macro and micro level respectively.

(8) ... For random and hierarchical initialization, we cite both the evaluation scores for the k-means initial cluster analysis (i.e., the output clustering from the random assignment or the pre processing hierarchical analysis), and for the k-means result. (LIE.RA2)

The micro level is used only in Spanish: it signals what is coming in the discourse within the sentence (example 9).

(9) Para explicar el concepto de poder desde el punto de vista de la acción social como actividad intersubjetiva, seguiré una definición propuesta por Watts (1991), la cual modificaré ligeramente:.. (In order to explain the concept of power from the social action as an intersubjective activity point of view, I will follow a definition proposed by Watts (1991), which I will modify slightly..) (LIS.RA5)

Retrospective items in the AR may refer to a point made in another section of the paper (e.g. in the Introduction) (example 10), or signal a point made earlier in the same section or within the same paragraph to express the same idea (example 11). The latter occurs only in Spanish.

- (10)... As we mentioned in Section 2.1, the conversion of the German PDF documents to ASCII is very error prone. (LIE.RA1)
- (11) Una de las estrategias más estudiada es sin duda la organización, a la que nos hemos referido más arriba.. (One of the most studied strategies is organisation, to which we have referred above.) (PSYS.RA9)
- 3.4. The recounter of the research process: methods, hypothesis, results

Three sub-functions were identified in the Recounter of the research process (RRP) role: (i) methods, (ii) hypothesis, (iii findings. RRP is twice as frequent in the ERAs compared to the SRAs (RRP-ERAs=29.5 > SRAs=13.1 items per 10,000 words). This suggests English writers present themselves as performers of the research process more overtly than Spanish writers. English writers seem to be more persuasive about their methodological choices compared to Spanish writers. Thus, English writers "appear to be more systematic in showing their professional credentials" (Sheldon, 2009: 258).

(12)... To allow appropriate statistical comparisons between the original and new groups of listeners, we used only a portion of the original listener data by randomly selecting a subset of 10 listeners 7 female, 3 male. (LIE.RA8)

In the example, the writers explain how they carried out a particular procedure and their ability to select an appropriate method that justifies their procedure and dealt with the difficulty of a small number of subjects in their study.

The writers also express the observations and hypothesis and possible results of the research carried out in the RRP (example 13), and explain the findings of their analysis, after the steps have been followed (example 14).

(13) We expected that important insights into vocabulary usage will be obtained through analysis of the distribution of lexical sets across the genre types identified in the second factor analysis. (EDUE.RA9)



(14) ... Finally, we showed that the intact network exhibits standard risk-aversion and risk-seeking decision-making patterns that are classically observed in human participants. (PSYE.RA7)

# 3.5. The Opinion Holder

This function refers to the writers' expression of opinion related to either an approach or theory related to the writers' work, or to the research process and methods applied in their study. In the comparative analysis there is a difference between English and Spanish frequency: OH-ERAs=2.1 and SRAs=3.4 items per 10,000 words. There are similar patterns of distribution in both the ERAs and SRAs.

(15) ... I agree that the interaction in an online discussion offers us a "gold mine of information concerning the psycho-social dynamics" among participants ... (EDUE.RA1)

## 3.6. The Interpreter: comparing, assessing, interpreting

There is only a slight difference between ERAs and SRAs frequency of IN: ERAs=1.6 < SRAs=2.5 items per 10,000 words. Spanish writers overtly appear in the interpretation of the results of their study a little more often than English writers. However, the sub-functions of the Interpreter show some striking differences between English and Spanish. Assessing and comparing (examples 16 and 17 respectively) are the most frequently used sub-functions in the ERAs, with interpreting (example 18) infrequently used. On the other hand, the SRAs show interpreting as the most frequently used sub-function, followed by assessing and comparing.

(16)... On the one hand, results related to our first research question are consistent with both Farley's and Benati's findings; in all four studies, both PI and MOBI have a significant effect on linguistic performance. (LIE.RA9)

In example 16 writers compare their results to previous findings, interpreting in this way the outcome of their research. This interpretative strategy may suggest that writers contextualise their novel results in order to promote their work within the already existent results or models of members of the discourse community. Example 17 shows how writers assess the value of their findings.

(17)Because our stress reactivity measures included the interaction between stressor and emotional response, the indication demonstration of a small genetic influence on this dynamic relationship is indicative of gene- environment interaction... (PSYE.RA1)

In this example writers consider the influence of their appropriate methodological selection on their results and contribution and positively assess aspects of the methodology to show value and justify their results. Finally, interpreting findings are presented in examples 18.

(18) ... , the findings of this study give us no reason to suggest that they are any less meaningful than those of the other groups either. (LIE.RA8)

In example 18 the writers display their critical thinking and awareness of arguments that might undermine their results. In this way writers display their knowledge and competence as researchers to achieve a novel result by ruling out possible interpretations. The most salient difference between English and Spanish occurs in the ruling out function.

# 3.7. The Originator

In the role of the Originator (OR) the writer represents him/herself as an authority to state results (example 19). There is a difference in the frequency of OR items between English and Spanish. The ERAs OR items are more than twice as frequent compared to the SRAs (OR-ERAs=5.3 > SRAs=2.0 items per 10,000 words). This result suggests that English writers present themselves explicitly as originators of ideas and contributions to the field more often than Spanish writers.

(19) ... We propose that the criteria for psychological illnesses in the DSM-IV-TR are culture bound in that they often reflect factors unique to Western culture. (PSYE.RA4)



## 4. CONCLUSION

RRP was the most frequent main role in all sections in both languages, expect for the Results section in Spanish in which AR is the most frequent. It could be argued that English writers overtly present themselves in terms of the steps and procedures followed in their research process, and that they also prefer to elaborate arguments and present ideas that portray them as confident, competent and knowledgeable researchers. Spanish writers, on the other hand, show differences in their rhetorical choices since they are more evaluative of facts and information, and when interpreting their results and outcomes, claiming in this way authority and power to do so (IN is slightly more frequent in SRAs). Most of the time the ERAs show a higher frequency of items; however, this does not necessarily mean that Spanish writers do not state the steps in the research process (RRP), organise the text (AR) or show their contributions to the field. These differences in the use of PDFs across sections may have three possible explanations: a) the collectivistic tendency of Spanish speaking cultures to emphasise group relationships, b) the Spanish writers' emphasis on giving direction to the reader when outlining results due to a more cooperative sense of knowledge building and c) the issue of "national" (SRAs) vs international (ERAs) discourse communities in which the latter one has a higher pressure to make their research more credible and claim more authority and competence in order to compete in such an international environment.

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# APPENDIX I- SAMPLE LIST OF RESEARCH ARTICLES IN THE DATA

Linquistics

**English** 

### LIE .RA1 to LIE.RA5

- Ringlstetter, C. & Mihov, S. (2005). "Orthographic errors in web pages: toward cleaner web corpora". Computational Linguistics, 28, 295-340.
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Spanish

### LIS.RA1 TO LIS.RA5

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