

## THE 'I' IDENTITY IN ACADEMIC WRITING

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## Abstract

Most of the time, academic writing has been thought as a kind of impersonal and faceless discourse. However, there is a tendency that now writers willingly show their identity in the writing as supported by recent researches by Tang and John (1999), Tang (2006) and Hyland (2002a, 2002b) that demonstrate that there is a room for negotiation to show the writer's identity. The most visible identity that can be shown by the writer is by using the use of the first personal pronoun. This expression of self is an important way of creating of one's own voice, of speaking with authority, and of securing reader support (Hyland, 2002b). This study aims to analyze the identities constructed by Barbara Fox and Jessica Robbles in one of their academic research articles, in terms of the frequency and the functions of the use of the first personal pronoun. In investigating the use of the first personal pronoun based on Tang and John's typology (1999). Out of total 37 occurrences of first person pronoun occur in the article, 40.85% occurrence belong in the role of '1st person' as the originator, the most powerful role that a writer may have showing the writers authority and ownership of the writing.

**Keywords:** Academic writing, Identity, pronoun

## Introduction

Academic writing is now not considered anymore as impersonal. Recent researches demonstrate that there is a room for negotiation to show the writer's identity in the writing. Hyland (2011) mentions that identity is said to be created from the text we engage in and the linguistic choice we make. Identities are constructed out of the rhetorical options as a means of seeing how language can represent people in particular ways and how it can be used to negotiate new positions (Hyland, 2011). The most visible identity shown by the writer is by using first personal pronoun. The use of first personal pronoun has been extensively studied and it is found that first person pronoun may be used in academic writings such as proposed by Tang and John (1999), Tang (2006) and Hyland (2002a, 2002b). This expression of self is an important way of creating of one's own voice, of speaking with authority, and of securing reader support (Hyland, 2002a). It is a powerful means by which writers express an identity by asserting their claim to speak as an authority and this is a key element of successful academic writing (Hyland, 2002b).

However, the objects of previous research were mostly students while this current research is analyzing the use of personal pronoun by professional writers. It is of interest to explore writers' identity expressed by the use of 'I' or first personal pronoun (I, me, we, and us) in an academic research article. In this analysis, I analyzed an academic research article entitled *It's like mmm: Enactment s with It's like* by Barbara Fox and Jessica Robbles based on Tang and John's typology (1999). The central analysis will be the usage of the first personal pronoun and the role behind the usage.

## Literature Review

Each writer is different with each other in the way they represent themselves as authors with authority they bring in their writing. Hyland (2011) mentions that identity is said to be created from the text we engage in and the linguistic choice we make as a means of seeing how language can represent people in particular ways and how it can be used to negotiate new positions. Identity means constructing credibility which involved negotiating s self which is coherent and meaningful (Hyland, 2011). The most visible identity shown by the writer is by using first personal pronoun (Hyland, 2001, 2002b; Tang and John, 1999 ). Kuo (1999 in Hyland, 2001) mentions that the strategic use of personal pronouns allow writers to emphasize their own contribution to the field and to seek agreement for it.

Hyland (2001), Kuo (1999), and Tang and John (1999) point to the use of *I* as as critical to meaning and credibility, helping to establish the commitment of writers to their words and setting up a relationship with their readers (Hyland, 2002b). The use of first person allows these writers to emphasize, and to seek agreement for, their own contributions. Several views in which the first person pronoun may be used in academic writings such as proposed by Tang and John (1999), Tang (2006) and Hyland (2002a, 2002b).

In 1999, Tang and John, set up s typology of 6 (six) identities behind the first person pronoun in academic writing. They include all the forms of first person pronoun, namely I, we, us, our, my, me, ours, and mine. The six categories in presenting the 'I' identity of the writer are:

The 'I' as the representative can be realized as the plural we or us which is used as proxy for a larger group of people. The first person pronoun 'we' does not give the writer any identity and effectively reduces the writer to a non-entity. Thus, it is the least powerful role that can be held by the writer;

1. The 'I' as the Guide shows the writer's role as guide to the readers through the essay whether to locate the reader in time and place, present the readers the main point of the essay, or arrive at the conclusion;
2. The role of 'I' as the architect usually foregrounds the person who writes, organizes, structures, and outlines the material in the essay;
3. The role of 'I' as the recounter of the research procedures shows that the writer is the research doer.
4. The role of 'I' as the opinion-holder suggests the idea that the writer shares an opinion, view, or attitude toward the information or the established facts.
5. The role of 'I' as the originator involves the writer's conception of the ideas or knowledge claims and the most powerful role that a writer may have. It shows the writer authority and ownership of the writing.

#### Source of the Data and Method

The text used in the study is a 24 pages article entitled *It's like mmm: Enactments with it's like* by Barbara Fox and Jessica Robbles. I will analyze the writers' identity in the mentioned above article employing the use of 6 (six) categories in presenting the 'I' identity of the writers proposed by Tang and John (1999). Here, the data is 37 (thirty seven) occurrences of the use of 'I' identity in the article. It is important to mention the limitations of the research. The data samples are relatively small. The research is not meant to be seen as general analysis and description of the use of first personal pronoun by professional writers.

#### Findings and Discussion

I have identified the occurrences of writer identity through the use of first person pronoun in the article using the method explained above as presented below:

Role	Occurrences	Percentage
'I' as the Representative	4	10.8%
'I' as the Guide	6	16.2%
'I' as the Architect	3	8.1%
'I' as the Recounter of the research process	8	21.6%
'I' as The Opinion-holder	1	2.7%
'I' as the Originator	15	40.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100%</b>

##### 1. 'I' as the representative

Out of total 37 occurrences of the use of first personal pronoun, 10.8% occurrence can be categorized in the role of 'I' as the representative.

Examples:

- As scholars of language use **we often explore** the grammatical resources provided by a language and the uses to which those resources are put in interaction. (p735 par. 2) 35
- However, **we rarely have a chance** to observe new syntactic forms as they come into a language. (p735 par. 2) 37

Here, the writers do not mean to be in the weakest position they may use. Instead, they use it to signal the shared knowledge (*...their comment that the words are not directly attributed to any particular speaker captures something of what we mean by impersonal syntax*) and the common membership that they and their readers have (*As scholars of language use we often explore the grammatical resources provided by a language...*).

##### 2. 'I' as the guide

In this research, I found 5 occurrences the role of 'I' as the guide. Here, the writers use this role to guide the readers to locate the reader in time and place, and present the readers the main point of the essay.

#### a. Locating the reader

In the role of 'I' as the guide, the writers try to create direction that the essay will take or what the reader face in the next session of the essay.

Example:

In the next section **we explore** the interactional work of *it's like*-enactments in building a 'world known in common' (Goodwin, personal communication). (p732 par. 3) 26

Interestingly, I also find that the reader also omit themselves in guiding the reader, but actually implicitly the writers is accompanying the reader to locate the direction.

Example:

Section 4 **looks at** the complex work that speakers do with *it's like*-enactments to create a world known in common (Goodwin, personal communication). (p718 par. 1) 8

#### b. Presenting the readers the main point

In this role, the writers accompanying to reader to come to some points that are important.

Examples:

And, as **we will see** in section 4, the deeply contextual nature of these utterances is one of the resources participants use to create a 'world known in common' (Goodwin, personal communication). (p728 par. 2) 23

### 3. 'I' as the architect

The role of 'I' as the architect has the responsibility to organizing and outlining the material in the writing. In the article, I find 3 occurrences or only 8.1% from the role of 'I' occur in the article.

Interestingly also, the writer is also omit themselves. They do not use the first person singular to occur in the text, they passivize their presence there.

Examples:

- Section 3 **outlines** a characterization of the functions of *it's like*-enactments... (p718 par. 1) 6
- ... [Section 3]and **presents** examples illustrating each. (p718 par. 1) 7

In the omission, they use inanimate object (e.g Section 3) as the doer of the performed action (outlines and presents). Interestingly, this type of 'I', I suppose to have the highest occurrence in the introduction section because in the section the writers have to build the structure of the whole writing.

### 4. 'I' as the Recounter of the research process

Out of total 37 occurrences of the use of first personal pronoun, 21.6% occurrence can be categorized in the role of 'I' as the Recounter of the research process.

Examples:

- In our exploration of *it's like*-enactments, **we have found** that this new collocation enacts an affect-laden internal response to an event, action, or utterance. (p717 par. 2) 3

This high occurrences of this role is quiet obvious because the article is based on their research. Mostly they use the verb *find* to show the findings of the research. Another verb used by the writers is note.

### 5. 'I' as Opinion-holder

In this role, the writers try to express others' view.

- Charles and Marjorie Goodwin's research has served as an important resource for **us** in understanding the work that speakers and recipients do with *it's like*-enactments. (p732 par. 5) 28

This low number of this *I* could explain that the writers are quiet cautioned when raising ideas.

### 6. 'I' as the Originator

Here we come to the most powerful role that a writer may have. It shows the writer authority and ownership of the writing.

Examples:

- **We propose** that *it's like* utterances are used to enact thoughts, feelings and attitudes which are internal and affect-laden assessments of a prior utterance or event, produced as assessments that anyone in the same situation might have had. Abstract. 1

Out of total 37 occurrences of the use of first personal pronoun, 40.83% occurrence can be categorized in the role of 'I' as the originator. This high occurrence is mostly because this article is based on a research. In this role, the writers express their ideas or view to the readers. I agree with Tang and John (1999), that this role involves the writers conception of the ideas and knowledge claim.

#### Conclusion

Out of total 37 occurrences of first person pronoun occur in the article, 40.85% occurrence belong in the role of 'I' as the originator, the most powerful role that a writer may have showing the writers authority and ownership of the writing. Besides that role, in the article also can be seen other role of 'I' employed by Barbara Fox and Jessica Robbles are 'I' as the Representative, as the Guide, as the Architect, as the Recounter of the research process, and as The Opinion-holder. Since the data samples are relatively small, the research is not meant to be seen as general analysis and description of the use of first personal pronoun by professional writers. I can concluded that the writers are aware of the power they hold in their writing by showing authority and ownership of the writing through via the role of 'I' as the originator of the research.

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