


Rida Sarfraz¹, Dr. Saqib Mehmood²

1. PhD Scholar, Department of English, University of Lahore, Pakistan.

2. Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Lahore, Pakistan.

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Corresponding Author:

Rida Sarfraz

Email: sarfrazrida@gmail.com

License:



Abstract: *In this paper, the perceptions of Pakistani postgraduate students towards the use of personal pronouns as interactional metadiscourse resources in the process of writing dissertation are explored. This study draws on Interactional Metadiscourse Framework of Hyland (2005) to discuss the students' awareness and attitudes towards the use of personal pronouns and the role that personal pronouns play in the processes of constructing authorial voice and researcher identity. Interviews with postgraduate students of the private sector higher education institutions of Pakistan were conducted using semi-structured interview method and a reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data as suggested by Braun and Clarke, (2006, 2019). The results show that participants have limited knowledge of the rhetorical purposes of personal pronouns and most believe that academic writing is "objective", "impersonal", and relies on "scholarly voices." As a result, students may not use first-person pronouns and may opt for passive sentences or self-reference. The analysis additionally suggests that cultural anticipations, supervisory practices and worries regarding academic honour have an influence on students' reluctance to use a visible authorial voice. Contrary to this, the participants began to understand that the use of personal pronouns could help to create "authorial voice," to make research ownership more apparent, and to help build a scholarly self. The study points out the significance of explicit teaching of interactional metadiscourse and suggests that an increase in awareness of personal pronouns will enable postgraduate students to engage more confidently in academic discourse or knowledge production.*

Introduction

Academic writing is not only about reporting research results, but also about building the writer's profile, taking a position, communicating with readers. In this interpersonal aspect of academic discourse, metadiscourse has a significant role to play in communicating between writers and their audience. Hyland (2005), however, notes that interactional metadiscourse helps writers to express attitudes, establish their support for claims, engage readers, and establish their identity as an author. Personal pronouns have received significant interest from scholars as one of the many interactional

metadiscourse resources that can help writers make themselves present and 'own' their research (Hyland, 2002). The strategic use of personal pronouns also aids in the development of the authorial voice and embodies the positioning of the writer(s) in their disciplinary community (Tang & John, 1999). The study of academic personal pronouns has found cultural, academic and subject differences that are significant. It is found that expert writers use personal pronouns more readily in either to assert their agenda or to draw the reader's attention to their work, while novices tend not to use personal pronouns as they fear their use would compromise objectivity and academic rules (Hyland, 2002; Mur-Dueñas, 2007). Likewise, research on the writing of postgraduates has shown that this issue is common in academic writing, as postgraduates often have to deal with the tension between authorial visibility and the discipline they are writing for (Lou & Wang, 2020; Sun, 2020). By the 1990s, the importance of personal pronouns as interactional metadiscourse resources had brought a focus not just on textual features but on the relationships that writers claim with readers and on the researchers' identity through the use of personal pronouns. The results highlight the significance of comprehending students' conscious and subjective knowledge of the use of personal pronouns in academic situations.

Although there is growing body of research on the concept of metadiscourse and the concept of authorial identity, there are limited studies in the field of Pakistani postgraduates. The majority of the previous studies have focused on the examination of the completed academic texts from a corpus perspective, and less research has been conducted on students' perception and attitudes towards the personal pronouns used in writing theses. It is important to explore these perceptions because a writer's sense of conventions, as well as their beliefs, have the potential to affect a writer's writing practices and identity construction. Hence, the current research is dedicated to the perception of the personal pronoun use as interactional metadiscourse in academic texts among the postgraduates of Pakistan. The study aims to explore students' awareness, attitudes and perceived functions of personal pronouns in building up authorial voice and researcher identity and to contribute to the existing body of literature focusing on metadiscourse and academic writing in an ESL environment, through a Likert-scale questionnaire.

Literature Review

The concept of metadiscourse has emerged as a key focus of research in academic writing because it illustrates how writers interact with readers and how they assert themselves within the text. According to Hyland (2005), metadiscourse is the linguistic tools that the writer employs for organizing the discourse and conveying interpersonal messages. As part of the interactional metadiscourse theory by Hyland, self-mentions such as personal pronouns (I, we, my, our) allow the author to establish his or her own voice and to demonstrate his/her ownership of the ideas. Nowadays, academic literature is seen as a social and interactive activity in which communication between the author(s) and the reader(s) is negotiated as an important part of the text. Therefore, the application of the personal pronouns has become a major concern when creating authorial voice and engaging the reader (Hyland, 2002). It is known that good academic writers use self-mentions in a strategic manner to situate themselves in their academic field and to assert their confidence in their research. (Ivanič, 1998)

In the fields of L2 language acquisition and L2 motivation, considerable research has focused on the use of personal pronouns in identity construction in various academic settings. Tang and John (1999) studied the use of first-person pronouns in student academic writing, and found several identity roles that writers take on, such as those of representative, guide, architect, opinion-holder, and originator. In the same way, Hyland (2002) took the stand that self mentioned statements are important rhetorical elements that help the writer gain authority and visibility in academic discourse. Cross-cultural research

has also shown that there are also differences in the use of personal pronouns in the writing of different language and education backgrounds. For instance, Mur-Dueñas (2007) determined that the self-referential statements of experienced scholars were used more effectively to work on the promotion of their research and to enhance their academic profile. Similarly, Li and Xiao (2018) found that there were more personal pronouns employed by native English-speaking scholars than by Chinese scholars, indicating the impact of discipline and cultural norms on authorial identity.

In recent studies, the study of personal pronouns has expanded to explore the connection between personal pronouns and metadiscourse as well as researcher identity. Lou and Wang (2020) showed that post graduates writers tend to lack the ability to use self mentions as good sources for building authorial self, and Sun (2020) illustrated that novice writers are less proficient in the use of identity building metadiscourse resources when compared with their more experienced academic counterparts. All these studies have important contributions to make in the context of the use of personal pronouns in the text, but they are mostly corpus-based studies of finished academic writing. Thus, very little work has been done on students' attitude and perception towards the use of personal pronouns in academic writing. Knowing of such perceptions is significant as students' beliefs regarding academic conventions can affect their writing decision-making and identity building. Hence, the study of Pakistani post-graduate students' perception of personal pronouns as interactional metadiscourse can help to enrich the understanding of authorial voice and the style of academic writing in ESL context.

Research Questions

- What are Pakistani postgraduate students' attitudes on using personal pronouns in academic writing?
- What is the attitude of post-graduates students in Pakistan towards the role of personal pronouns in the construction of author's voice and identity in the writing of thesis?

Research Objectives

- To explore the awareness of the Pakistani post-graduate students about using personal pronoun in academic writing.
- To explore the postgraduate students' perceptions about the use of personal pronouns to build authorial voice and a researcher's identity in writing a thesis.

Theoretical Framework

For the theoretical framework the main theory comes from the Interactional Metadiscourse Framework put forward by Hyland (2005). According to Hyland, writers use metadiscourse to structure discourse, to state their perspective, and to involve readers in academic discourse. In this context, self-references like I, we, my, our, and our own are considered as features of interactional metadiscourse, which enable the writer to introduce their selves and set up his/her voice in the text (Hyland, 2005). The framework is of special interest for this study, because it elucidates the function of personal pronouns outside of the grammatical sphere in communicating identity and interaction between the writer and the reader. Based on the model proposed by Hyland, this study investigates the role of personal pronouns in the creation of authorial visibility, positioning and identity in writing a thesis in Pakistan. Thus, the framework offers a helpful perspective on students' attitudes to personal pronouns as an important interpersonal resource in academic discourse.

Significance of the Research

This paper is important because it adds to the existing research work in the fields of metadiscourse and authorial identity in academic writing to analyse Pakistani post graduate students' perceptions of the usage of personal pronouns. Most previous research on students' personal pronouns as interactional

metadiscourse has been based on corpus-based studies of published research articles and student theses, and few studies have taken the students' own beliefs and attitudes into account. The study explored the postgraduate students' perception of the use of personal pronouns in the creation of authorial voice and the researcher's identity, which offers insights into their academic writing awareness and practices. The results might help academic writing instructors, supervisors, and curriculum designers to develop pedagogical interventions to improve students' knowledge of the authorial presence in academic texts. Moreover, this study adds to the body of literature on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in the Pakistani context and provides a starting point for further research in the fields of metadiscourse, identity construction and development of academic writing among emerging scholars.

Research Gap

Although there have been significant studies on the use of metadiscourse and personal pronouns in the academic text, almost all of the previous studies have been corpus based on examining reference and research articles, dissertations, or theses written by novice and expert writers (e.g., Hyland, 2002; 2005; Tang & John, 1999). The frequency, functions and identity-construction role of self-references in written texts has been studied mostly in existing literature, focusing on the differences between different cultures and different disciplines. To date, however, few studies have examined the students' perceptions and attitudes on the use of personal pronouns as interactional metadiscourse in the Pakistani context of academic settings. Moreover, the previous studies have focused on textual evidence and not explored the understanding of post-graduate students on personal pronouns features in the creation of authorial voice and researcher's identity. Hence, there is a gap in the literature regarding the perception of personal pronoun usage of postgraduate students in the academic context that the present study aims to fill by investigating this perception through a questionnaire-based survey.

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature, in order to explore the awareness and perceptions of the Pakistani post-graduate students about the use of personal pronouns in academic writing as interactional metadiscourse. A qualitative approach was deemed suitable as it allows for in-depth understanding of the experiences, beliefs and interpretations of the participants in relation to linguistic choices in thesis writing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants were the post graduate students of Pakistan who were either doing thesis or had recently completed their thesis dissertation. The data was gathered by allowing open-ended responses to participants to reflect on their understanding of personal pronouns and how they see the role of personal pronouns in the expression of authorial voice and researcher identity. The theoretical framework of the study was Hyland's (2005) Interactional Metadiscourse Framework that focuses on the function of personal pronouns as interpersonal resources in the process of how writers project themselves, claim authority and establish relationships with their readers. The conceptualization of the study and the interpretation of results was shaped by Hyland's framework, but not as a prior coding scheme and therefore the results were not guided by the preconceptions of the framework. Analyses of the collected data was done using the Reflexive Thematic Analysis from Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). This approach was chosen due to its adaptability and appropriateness for exploring participants' subjective experiences and meaning making processes. In line with the six phases recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher read the data repeatedly in order to get to know the data, developed initial codes, looked for patterns within the data, revisited and developed potential themes, named and defined themes and finally wrote a textual analysis narrative. The analysis was mainly inductive, allowing the themes that emerged from the participants' responses to be the ones that were considered. However, the themes created were then reinterpreted using the interactional

metadiscourse framework of Hyland (2005) to investigate students' perceptions of personal pronouns as tools for creating the author's visibility, stance-taking and constructing identity. The analysis of the data used this type of combination because it enabled us to obtain a broad picture of the students' conception of the role of the personal pronoun in academic discourse and the formation of the scholarly identity. The analysis of the data used this type of combination because it enabled us to obtain a broad picture of the students' conception of the role of the personal pronoun in academic discourse and the formation of the scholarly identity.

Data Analysis

The Thematic Analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019) was the methodological approach used to analyse the interview data as it is widely used and is a methodologically rigorous process in identifying, analysing and interpreting meaning patterns in qualitative data sets. Thematic analysis is also appropriate for research that aims to uncover participants' perceptions, experiences and understandings of a phenomenon, since it produces themes directly from the data, and remains flexible in its analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It has been widely used in educational and applied linguistics research for its transparency, systematic procedures, and the richness and nuance it can provide from participants' narrative (Nowell et al., 2017). The Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework was followed to attain familiarity with the data, coding systematically, organizing the data into potential themes, refining through iterative analysis and interpreting the data in relation to Hyland's (2005) Interactional Metadiscourse Framework. The analysis's credibility and trustworthiness was strengthened by ongoing interaction with the data and reflexive thinking about the meanings participants gave to the personal pronouns, the voice of the writer, and the presence of the researcher..

Thematic analysis table has been created according to the six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). All interview responses were read several times to get acquainted with the data and to detect common patterns of the use of personal pronouns in academic texts. In the second phase, meaningful text portions were identified with initial codes like fear of self-promotion, dependence on citations, restricted awareness, and authorial visibility. These codes were then analysed systematically and clustered together to form the higher order themes that encompassed common themes within participants' accounts. Subsequent to this, related sub-themes were examined and further developed to develop the overarching themes: Limited Awareness of Personal Pronouns, Preference for Objectivity and Impersonality, and Personal Pronouns and Researcher Identity. Lastly, representative quotations from each of the participants were chosen to represent the themes and to achieve a balance of analysis that was realistic in terms of the participants' experiences, but also interpreted in accordance with Hyland's (2005) Interactional Metadiscourse Framework.

Table (Braun and Clarke (2005) Thematic Analysis

Sr #	Respondent	Quote	CODE	Theme	Sub-Theme
1	R16	"We were usually advised to avoid words like 'I' and 'my' because they were considered informal."	Pronouns viewed as informal	Limited Awareness of Personal Pronouns	Limited understanding of academic pronouns
2	R17	"My understanding of personal pronouns in academic writing is very limited."	Lack of awareness	Limited Awareness of Personal Pronouns	Limited knowledge of pronoun functions
3	R24	"Before beginning my	Unfamiliarity of	Limited	Lack of

		thesis, I was unaware that personal pronouns could contribute to authorial voice."	authorial function	Awareness of Personal Pronouns	metadiscourse awareness
4	R17	"Research should be objective and neutral."	Belief in objectivity	Preference for Objectivity and Impersonality	Preference for impersonal writing
5	R21	"I often replace 'I' with phrases such as 'the researcher' or 'the study'."	Avoidance of self-reference	Preference for Objectivity and Impersonality	Use of impersonal alternatives
6	R22	"I believed that academic writing should remove the writer from the text."	Writer invisibility	Preference for Objectivity and Impersonality	Detachment from text
7	R18	"I usually prefer to support my arguments through references from established scholars."	Reliance on citations	Reliance on Established Scholarly Voices	Dependence on scholarly authority
8	R19	"I often find it difficult to separate my voice from the voices of the scholars I cite."	Difficulty distinguishing voice	Reliance on Established Scholarly Voices	Merging own voice with cited voices
9	R23	"I feel more comfortable summarizing previous research than presenting my own position."	Preference for reporting	Reliance on Established Scholarly Voices	Dependence on existing literature
10	R20	"I do not want to sound overconfident."	Fear of self-promotion	Hesitation in Taking an Authorial Stance	Lack of authorial confidence
11	R25	"I often struggle to decide whether to present my own voice or remain hidden behind citations."	Uncertainty in positioning	Hesitation in Taking an Authorial Stance	Hesitation in self-positioning
12	R18	"I worry they will not consider it authentic tone."	Fear of violating conventions	Hesitation in Taking an Authorial Stance	Anxiety about appropriateness
13	R18	"I fear I will lose credibility"	Fear of violating conventions	Hesitation in Taking an Authorial Stance	Anxiety about appropriateness
14	R24	"I noticed that researchers sometimes use 'I' or 'we' strategically."	Recognition of strategic use	Developing Understanding of Authorial	Emerging awareness of voice

				Voice	construction
15	R21	"Sometimes I feel that this style makes it difficult to show my own contribution clearly."	Need for visibility	Developing Understanding of Authorial Voice	Awareness of contribution
16	R22	"This may limit the visibility of my own voice."	Realization of hidden voice	Developing Understanding of Authorial Voice	Recognition of authorial presence
17	R25	"I can see how they help writers show ownership of their research."	Ownership of research	Personal Pronouns and Researcher Identity	Pronouns as identity markers
18	R20	"Personal pronouns may help establish identity."	Identity construction	Personal Pronouns and Researcher Identity	Building researcher identity
19	R24	"Personal pronouns could contribute to authorial voice."	Voice construction	Personal Pronouns and Researcher Identity	Authorial visibility

Discussion

The results of the findings indicate that in general, Pakistani postgraduates have very little understanding of the rhetorical and interactional functions of personal pronouns in academic writing. The majority of the participants considered academic writing to be objective, formal and impersonal, which is why they avoided using first person subjective pronouns and instead used the passive form of verbs. This finding directly answers the first research question on awareness and attitudes about the use of the personal pronouns by the students. Participants often mentioned that they had learned how to write academically in previous theses, institutional norms and expectations of their supervisors, in which the identity of the writer was often obscured. These types of perceptions are related to traditional academic attitudes towards the presence of the author as subjective and/or inappropriate. Self-mentions, however, are a significant interactional metadiscourse resource in writers' ways of establishing credibility, claiming ownership of ideas, and communicating with readers, according to Hyland (2005). This reluctance to use personal pronouns, then, indicates a low level of awareness of the communicative function of the personal pronouns in academic language. Such issues have been discussed also by second-language academic writers, who tend to be faced with the dilemma of how to be objective and maintain the author's voice in their texts due to linguistic and cultural expectations (Canagarajah, 2002; Ivanič, 1998).

The second important result is that students are relying on other people's voices, rather than their own, and they are not confident in expressing themselves in a manner that is unconventional. The extent of the confidence in reporting or summarising the work of "well known" scholars was greater than in presenting their own interpretations of it. Reliance on citations, fear of self promotion, and uncertainty about academic authority suggest that the themes participants identified were more about being a

consumer of knowledge than a producer of it. The result of this study is consistent with previous studies that indicate that novice researchers often struggle to develop a scholarly identity because they lack in self-confidence and participate in the academic community on the fringes (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). In terms of Hyland's (2005) framework, the lack of self-mention provides less space for the writer to assert his or her position and to establish a dialog with readers. Students might feel that, even though they have read a lot of literature in their field, they do not know how to develop a recognisable authorial voice. The results then indicate that postgraduate students need more explicit instruction in the use of personal pronouns to help them express evaluation, interpretation and ownership of academic arguments without violating the rigorous standards of academic writing.

The last theme demonstrates a growing awareness by participants of the way personal pronouns help to establish authorial voice and researcher identity. Many of the respondents at first found it unusual to use pronouns in academic works, but they had gained exposure to foreign publications and were getting different advice from their supervisors. The answer to the second research question, which was about perceptions of personal pronouns in the creation of the authorial voice and identity, can be found here. As the use of citations became more prominent, the importance of the strategic use of pronouns in order to make their contribution more visible, present their point of view in relation to the cited authors, and enhance their academic identity was increasingly recognized by the participants. Hyland's (2005) conception of self-mentions as a way for writers to claim their own voice and identity while also positioning themselves as regular members of disciplinary communities is echoed by these perceptions. Moreover, the results corroborate Ivanič's (1998) theory of the construction of writer identity in the process of writing, and echo Wenger's (1998) view of the development of identity through participation in academic communities. In overall, the study shows that most of the post graduate students of Pakistan are still reluctant about using personal pronouns, but, as they become aware of their interactional and identity-building role in the interaction, they will be more inclined to use personal pronouns. Facilitate stronger authorial presence and more confident participation in academic discourse.

Conclusion

So to sum up this study investigated awareness and attitudes of post graduate students of Pakistan about the use of personal pronouns in academic writing and their perceptions about contribution of personal pronouns in authorial voice and researcher identity. The results suggest that the majority of the participants lack awareness of the use of personal pronouns as resources for interactional metadiscourse and that they still perceive academic writing as objective, impersonal, and characterized by the use of well-known voices in the scholarly community. As a result, many students shun first person pronouns and favor passive constructions as they deem them to be "academic" or "correct. Because of this, many students choose to avoid first person pronouns and use passive constructions instead, as they believe these are more "academic" or "correct". In addition, the thematic analysis showed that academic uncertainty and a lack of confidence in the personal pronouns were related to the cultural norms of respecting authority in academia and uncertainty about the academic authority. Further, the thematic analysis indicated that personal pronouns hesitation was related to the norms of deference to established scholars and academic uncertainty. These findings answer the first research question of this study, namely whether students' attitudes toward the personal pronouns are mostly related to their understanding of the traditional views of academic writing or their knowledge of their rhetorical and communicative functions (as described in Hyland, 2005 and Ivanič, 1998).

Simultaneously, an awareness among participants of the potential for personal pronouns to be used to

enhance authorial visibility, clarify idea ownership and aid in creating a researcher identity was revealed. Data analysis through the prism of Hyland (2005) Interactional Metadiscourse Framework view personal pronouns as self-mentions that writers use to represent stance and to communicate with readers, and that Wenger's (1998) Participation Perspective considers academic identity construction by interacting with disciplinary communities. Based on the findings it is suggested that pedagogical attention is needed in personal pronouns' strategic use in the instruction of post-graduate writing. Students might benefit from explicit instruction from supervisors and academic writing programs regarding the development of a more confident expression of their academic views, rather than a descriptive engagement with literature. Finally, awareness of personal pronouns as legitimate academic resources can help build students' authorial voice, confidence in the researcher role, and engagement in academic knowledge construct

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