Promotion of Self in an Other-Oriented Academic Sub-Genre: The Case of Self-mention in Acknowledgments

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Abstract

Although sometimes considered to act only as a means of recognizing debts, acknowledgments give the opportunity for writers to display a self-conscious and reflective representation of self. Following this assumption and to reveal some of the ways this is achieved, a corpus of 80 textbook acknowledgments in the field of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics were analyzed in order to show what "self" does in an other-oriented academic sub-genre. The findings of the study revealed that acknowledgments is composed of a sequence of moves, through which the writer must mainly and primarily acknowledge the others who have a share in the process of the development of an academic enterprise. However, within this manifest presence of others, the readers also find implicit and explicit traces of self which carry the writers' desires for promotion. This study clearly indicates that self-promotion is an inherent and integral quality of all academic discourses and even an "other" oriented academic genre can be seen to carry a self-promotional flavour.

Keywords: Acknowledgments, Self, Other, Self-mention, Self-promotion, Academic Discourse, and Genre

Introduction

In recent years, the view of written texts as embodying interaction between the writer and reader is well established, (see, for example, Nystrand, 1986; Grab and Kaplan, 1996; Thompson, 2001; Hyland, 1994; Hoey, 1983, 2001; Myers, 1999). Such a view argues that writers do not simply produce a text to convey information and to represent an external reality. Rather, they use language to acknowledge, construct and negotiate social relations (Hyland, 2005). In fact, the study of social interactions expressed through academic writing reveals that persuasion in various genres is not only accomplished through the representation of ideas, but also by the construction of an appropriate authorial self and the negotiation of accepted particular relationships. Different scholars have employed different terms to refer to different aspects of writer-reader interaction in academic communication: attitude (Halliday, 1994), epistemic modality (Hyland, 1998), appraisal (Martin, 2000; White, 2003), stance (Biber & Finegan, 1989; Hyland, 1999), and metadiscourse (Crismore, 1989; Hyland & Tse, 2004a). Despite the plethora of researches, Hyland (2005) argued that there was not a model of interpersonal discourse that unites and integrates all these features. In order to address this gap, Hyland (2005) proposed a model which provides a comprehensive and integrated way of examining the means by which such interaction is achieved in academic argument and how academic writers use language to express a stance and relate to their readers. Hyland (2005) maintains that interactions are accomplished in academic writing by making choices from the interpersonal systems of stance and engagements. In fact, stance and engagement are important elements that bring writers into a text as a player in an interactive game with their audiences. Moreover, stance and engagement are two sides of the same coin and they both contribute to the interpersonal dimension of discourse (Hyland, 2005). Thus, striking a balance between them (claiming authorship and engaging with readers) forms an important part of disciplinary conventions or expectation associated with those texts (Herrando-Rodrigo, 2010). Stance concerns writer oriented features of interaction and his or her textual voice and community recognized personality. It is comprised of four elements: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mention. On the other hand, engagement is the reverse side of interaction. This is an alignment dimension where writers acknowledge others and are required to bring the potential readers into their text. In Hyland's model of metadiscourse, engagement is achieved through five main elements: reader pronouns, personal asides, appeals to shared knowledge, directives, and questions.

Self-mention as an interpersonal feature

The interpersonal features which are the focus of this paper are self-mentions. Self-mentions refer to the use of first person pronouns and possessive adjectives to present propositional, affective and interpersonal information (Hyland, 2001). They perform a number of functions when used by the academic writers. Several taxonomies have been proposed for the functional classification of self-mention pronouns (see, for example, Tarone, et al. 1998; Bernhardt, 1985; Vassileva, 1998; Ivanič, 1998; Kuo, 1999; Tang & John, 1999; Hyland, 2001, 2002; Harwood 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c); Ivanič (1998) categorized the function of personal pronouns 'I' with verbs associated with the process of structuring writing, 'I' in associating with the research process, and 'I' in associated with cognitive acts. Following Ivanič's (1998) categorizations of first person pronouns, Tang &

John (1999) labeled their categories: 'I' as the representative, I' as the guide through the essay, 'I' as the architect of the essay, 'I' as the reencounter of the research process, 'I' as opinion holder, and 'I' as the originator. In a genre-based study, Hyland (2002) examined the abstracts and a sample of ten articles from eight disciplines to identify the activities with which self-mention was associated. This revealed five main purposes which can be summarized as stating a goal or outlining the structure of the paper, explaining a procedure, stating results or making a claim, elaborating an argument, and expressing self-benefit. Harwood (2005a, p.1210) made a list of the functions of first person pronouns (particularly I and We) as helping the writer to organize the text and guide the reader through the argument (e.g., First I will discuss x and then y), stating personal opinions and knowledge claims (On the basis of my data I would claim), recounting experimental procedure and methodology (I interviewed 60 subjects over the space of several months), and acknowledging funding bodies, institutions and individuals that contributed to the study in some way (I thank Professor X for his help with the calculations). Harwood (2005a, p.1211) also identified three important ways of using I and We for self-promotion. These three ways can be summarized as personalizing claims: the writer as authority and originator, procedural soundness and uniqueness and self-citation, respectively. Furthermore, Harwood (2005a, p.1226) claimed that although pronouns which help the writer to describe their methodology and procedure may seem unlikely tools for self-promotion, procedural pronouns can promote writers in three distinctive ways. These pronouns can stress the writers' procedural innovations, highlight how methodological pitfalls were successfully circumvented, and record how the writers were more rigorous in their quest for sound data than was strictly necessary. The functions discussed above have been summarized in Table 1:

Table1.Functions of self-mention in academic discourse

Functions of self-mention in academic discourse						
Tang & John (1999)	'I' as representative	'I' as guide	'I' as architect	'I' as recounter of research process	'I' as opinion-holder	'I' as originator
Hyland (2002)	stating a goal or outlining the structure of the paper	Explaining a procedure		Stating results or making a claim	Elaborating an argument	expressing self-benefit
Harwood (2005a)	helping the writer organize the text	stating personal opinions and knowledge claims		recounting experimental procedure and methodology		acknowledging funding bodies, institutions and individuals

Acknowledgments as an integral subgenre in modern academic communication

Acknowledgments are one of the widespread written forms of gratitude, and acknowledging the contribution of others is an established scholarly convention in academic communication. In fact, acknowledgments are universal features of academic writing commonly used in dissertations and textbooks and have increasing presence as a part genre of published research articles (Giannoni, 2002). This sub-genre not only plays the role of reciprocal gift-giving in academic practice (Hyland, 2004) but also reflects

important values of the academic community and provides a space for writers to signify interpersonal relationships.

Previous studies on acknowledgments have mainly focused on the expressions of gratitude and their generic structures used by a single ethnic group in one social context across disciplines (e.g. Hyland, 2004; Hyland & Tse, 2004b; Giannoni, 2006) or the comparisons of acknowledgments written by Native Speakers of English (NSE) and non-native speakers of English in two different social contexts (e.g. Giannoni, 2002; Lasaky, 2011; Al-Ali, 2010; Cheng, 2012; Kuhi & Rezaei, 2014). Giannoni (2002) studied the difference between English and Italian research article acknowledgements and identified two moves, an optional 'introductory move' and an obligatory 'credit mapping' move comprising three possible steps; allocating credit to institutions, to individuals, and claiming responsibility. His research revealed the fact that acknowledgments are pragmatically elaborate texts which are not purely informational but also interactive in the sense that they always accomplish a reader sensitive interpersonal meaning. Following Giannoni (2002), Hyland (2004) explored thanks expressing in the genre of acknowledgements in PhD and MA dissertations written by 240 Hong Kong English speakers from 6 different broad academic disciplines. He identified three moves in those acknowledgements: a reflecting move, a thanking move and an announcing move. The results of that study also demonstrated that students use this channel not only to recognize assistance and support, but also to construct a particular persona. The most recent research on generic structures of acknowledgments was done by Kuhi & Rezaei (2014). This study which examined generic features of acknowledgments of various academic genres (textbooks, research articles, MA & PhD theses) revealed that this sub-genre is constituted of a main 'thanking' move framed by two optional "reflecting" and "announcing" moves in theses, two optional "framing" and "announcing" moves in textbooks, and one optional "framing" move in research articles. This study also revealed that in textbook acknowledgments writers display their expert authority to multiple audiences and it is mostly with peer audience that credibility is gained. Unlike other researchers, Cheng & Kuo (2012) studied acknowledgments from a pragmatic perspective to explore the use of thanking strategies for different addressees in 20 MA thesis acknowledgements. The results of their study highlighted the status of thesis acknowledgements as the socio-pragmatic embodiment of the graduates' professional as well as interpersonal supporting networks.

What the previous literature tells on the discoursal value of this sub-genre is that acknowledgements are more than a simple catalogue of indebtedness, and the expression of thanks is not an entirely altruistic business (Hyland, 2011). In other words, while acknowledgements can act as a means of recognizing debts, they give the opportunity for writers to display a self-conscious and reflective representation of self. Following this assumption and to reveal some of the ways this is achieved, the present study attempted to show what "self" does in an "other" oriented academic sub-genre, textbook acknowledgments, through manipulation of self-mention pronouns.

Method

Corpus and procedure of analysis

The corpus of this study consisted of a total of 80 textbook acknowledgments collected randomly from online Google Books published between 1980 and 2013. Full bibliographical details are given in the Appendix. The disciplinary focus of the corpus was

limited to Linguistics and Applied Linguistics. In order to meet the objectives of this study, the whole texts were carefully read word by word to identify writer's self-mentions (I, we, me, us, my, and our) in the corpora. Then, we focused on identifying the discoursal functions which self-mentions were used to perform in acknowledgment texts. To ensure that there was a consensus in categorization of the functions, the analysis initially was carried out by one of the researchers and the findings were double-checked by the second researcher. It is worth mentioning that we did not follow a quantitative objective in the present research and the major objective was a qualitative identification of some of the functions which self-mentions fulfill in the acknowledgment section of textbooks.

Results and Discussion

The results of qualitative analysis of textbook acknowledgments with regard to discoursal acts with which self-mentions associatedly reveal the fact that although the main use of self-mentions in acknowledgment texts is considered to be only expressing gratitude and acknowledging others, there were other uses such as when they help the writer to outline the books' ancestry, refer to the research processes, express his/her responsiveness, positive attitude, feeling, and evaluation, and mention prestigious peers. Thus, on the basis of my analysis, the discoursal functions of self-mentions in textbook acknowledgments can be categorized in two main groups: Acknowledging self-mentions and promoting self-mentions.

Acknowledging self-mentions

This is the main function of self-mentions which seems to commensurate with the major function of acknowledgments: describing and defining the values received by the writer from acknowledged contributors. It can be classified in four groups: Acknowledging individual contributions, Acknowledging resources, Acknowledging moral support, and Acknowledging copyright holders.

Acknowledging individual contributions and prestigious peers

Through this function of self-mentions, writers show their gratefulness for any kind of intellectual help they received from members in the academic community by mentioning key figures and colleagues who have been helpful in shaping the book through their ideas, insights, and feedback. Although the presence of academics, providers, and friends is almost an unvarying tradition of acknowledgments, there is another participant which is called (peer collages) that were involved in textbooks. (Kuhi & Rezaei, 2014). The reason for this might be that, the main motivation from writers' point of view is to gain recognition and prestige among the other expert members of the discourse community in today's competitive academic world and it is only with peer audience that this credibility is gained (Hyland, 2000).

*1. **We** are grateful to the contributors to this volume for allowing us to include their papers in this anthology (61).*

*2. **We** wish to express our gratitude to professor John Lyons for extremely careful and detailed critical comments (63).*

*3. **I** want to express my deepest thanks to Fiona for her cooperation (34).*

*4. Thanks to Michel Greogy and Michel Halliday for introducing **me** to a social and functional view of language (16).*

*5. **I** would like to thank the following for their helpful comments on individual chapters in this book: Kathlen Bardovi-Harling, David Block, Zoltan Dornyei, Willis Mackey, Loures Ortega, Dennis Preston, John Schumann, Merrill* Swain *(51).*

Acknowledging resources

By using self-mentions, a number of writers acknowledge the support in areas such as routine data capture, entry and analysis received from colleagues. It also includes acknowledgements of grants, and scholarships received by the writer either from universities, agencies, or family members.

*6. **We** would like to thank the series editors, Chris and Ron. For their timely feedback on drafts of this manuscript, and their constant encouragement and help (26).*

*7. Thanks also go to **my** Colleague Bob Borsley for helpful comments, and to Michel Vincent for preparing the index (60).*

*8. **I** would like to thank the University of Auckland for awarding me a research fellowship grant to complete the work on the book (20).*

*9. **I** am also indebted to the University of Auckland for the sabbatical leave that made it possible to finish the book (19).*

*10. At Routledge **we** would also like to thank Louisa Semlyen and Nadia Seemungal for their help, advice and efficiency (26).*

Acknowledging moral support

This function of self-mention pronouns is used by writers to thank family members for their patience, understanding, sympathy and care. In fact, the writers here provide a picture of an individual with a life affected by a commitment to research which has had consequences for his or her private life.

*11. **We** would say a big thanks to **our** families for their long suffering patience while **we** were engaged in the editing of this volume (12).*

*12. **We** wish to thank **our** families. **We** hope they will regard the results as worth the effort (67).*

*13. **We** wish to thank our perspective families for suffering through the birth pages of this book (67).*

*14. **We** would say a big thanks to our families for their long suffering patience while we were engaged in the editing of this volume (12).*

*15. Above all, to **my** wife and children for their patience with **my** absences from them (19).*

Acknowledging copyright holders

In this function of self-mentions, writers acknowledge copyright holders for permission that they get for the use of copyright material identified in their book.

16. The authors and publishers wish to thank the following for permission to use copyright material (51).

17. The publishers wish to express gratitude for permission to include extracts from the following copyright sources in the book (59).

18. The publishers and I are grateful to the authors, publishers and others who have given permission for the use of copyright material identified in the text (31).

Promoting self-mentions

As it is mentioned, in addition to perform acts of acknowledging others, self-mentions help writers to display a representation of self and to express a textual voice and community-recognized personality. This section focuses specifically on promoting self-mentions, identifying four distinct ways in which they can be used in a self-promotional fashion.

Outlining the book's ancestry and its underlying theory: the writer as authority and originator

The first way in which pronouns can be used in a self-promotional fashion is when writers outline the book's ancestry, in terms of earlier texts or event from which it developed and states a theory or approach that they put forward in their book. In fact, the self-mentions help writers to be identified as an ''Opinion-Holder'' and ''Originator'' of new ideas and to stamp their personal authority. That is to say, by constructing such a solid disciplinary identity, the writer wants to be viewed as an important player in the field and be taken seriously.

*19. In relation to the approach to cognitive genre that **I** put forward in this book. This theory is significant element in the genre model that **I** propose (8).*

*20. **My** past has also woven its way through the chapters, as **I** have returned to my early research to integrate the present state of the field with its foundation (70).*

*21. Teaching and learning in the language classroom has developed out of the courses **I** have taught over twenty-five years to student teachers and practicing teachers on Bed, Diploma, MA courses at Ealing College of Higher Education, Temple University Tokyo, and the center for English language teacher at the University of Warwick (30).*

*22. As **I** state in the preface, this book has its origins in a number of papers which **I** have written over recent years (79).*

*23. The students on **my** master's and undergraduate courses at king's college London over recent years have shown a lively interest in the project, asking probing questions which enabled me to refine **my** core proposals (39).*

*24. Many of ideas in course design have come through **our** individual experiences gained from teaching in master's degree and workshop programs for people both in ESL and EFL setting (55).*

Referring to the research processes & its rigor: advertising their worth as researcher

The second type of self-promotional pronoun occurs when writers refer to the research processes such as data collection, presentation of data and participants' contributions. These self-mentions help to communicate the authenticity and plausibility of the research and the

skill of the writer. But in addition to a demonstration of writers' abilities, self-mentions here reflect an appropriate degree of the writer's professional credentials and his/her familiarity with disciplinary research practices. Furthermore, by helping the writers to describe the tensions and hardships of research, self-mentions also construct an image of the ultra-conscientious researcher.

25. *In **my** freelance travels around the world, especially in Nigeria, Jordan, and Brazil **I** have met wonderful teachers and students who have inspired **me** and helped **me** formulate ideas (17).*

14. ***We** must recognize and thank the hundred graduate students who have tolerated **us** in class experimentation (14).*

15. ***We** can claim that our way of looking at things derives from close contact with the data. **we** have developed a squint. (4)*

16. ***We** are indebted to the students who worked with us to its completion, who have taken part in **our** research method courses at the university of Sydney, Their critical questioning of what **we** taught them has helped us refine our thinking in the area as well as improve **our** actual practice (57).*

17. *As **we** tried to translate the theoretical of the categories of the planers' blackboard into a coding scheme that responded to the data, we not only expanded the theory, but in our own generative disagreement, we saw the need for a more complex strategic analysis (25).*

18. *Some of the data cited here and some research finding which **we** discuss derive from a series of research projects, spread over nine years (7).*

Expressing writers' responsiveness, positive attitude, feeling, and evaluation: readership confidence and

promoting their book as products

The third way in which pronouns can be used in a self-promotional fashion is when writers give the readership confidence by expressing their strict responsibility in all writing processes such as choosing a publisher, accomplishing the book's objectives, finding new ways of research, and representing scholars' ideas. In fact, pronouns can help writers to advertise their worth as researchers by highlighting their contribution to the work.

19. ***I** hope they are not too disappointed by how their views are borrowed in these pages (34).*

20. ***We** could not have asked for better editors with whom to work (26).*

21. ***We** apologize for any apparent infringement of copyright (30).*

22. *Over the last twenty-five years, **I** have ventured into a number of fields and paradigms, searching for a way of studying languages that would preserve the richness of communication as we live it and know it, every day encounters (18).*

23. ***I** am unable to mention any of their names and I hope they realize (68).*

24. *In the few cases where **we** have not followed his advice, **we** fear that we may regret it (63).*

25. *It is **our** hope that this collection illustrates the potential for broadening the horizons of linguistic politeness (43).*

Moreover, pronouns underscore the uniqueness of the writers' work by specifying their positive attitudes, evaluations and feelings. These pronouns usually combine with verbs of thinking and emotion like feel and hope. Hence, pronouns can help the writers to market themselves and their work and assess the value and usefulness of their books in order to promote them as products.

26. ***We** have done our best to take into the account (4).*

27. ***I** am very glad to answer queries on the material covered in this book (73).*

28. ***I** must admit that, when **I** set out to write what is intended as an introductory text on an extremely well-designed language, **I** did not except to learn anything new myself, but **I** have enjoyed discovery and rediscovering both new and old questions that arise from the study of morphology (11).*

29. *It is **my** sincere hope that **we** accomplish in partnership will be of use to the peoples who enriched my life and never asking in return. (11)*

30. *... hope they enjoy the process as much as **we** did (35).*

Announcing an academic self: academic recognition

Finally, the last type of self-promotional pronoun occurs when writers demonstrate their academic positions, conference presentation ..., to announce an academic self.

31. ***I** have used later drafts of the book in teaching this course myself for postgraduate students of the department of applied linguistics at the University of Edinburgh (46).*

32. *The students in **my** discourse analysis seminars allowed me to try out many ideas, so that **I** could cite much of the work there in (45).*

33. *Further feedback was given to me by **my** MA English students in the department of English at city university of Hong Kong (24).*

34. *I wish to thank colleagues of the Hong Kong Polytechnology University where **I** was employed part time over several years (13).*

35. ***I** am very proud of the automodular papers I have written with other scholars. **I** have to recognize the forty- year long honor I have had to serve a faculty member at university (64).*

Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to show what "self" does in an "other" oriented academic subgenre, textbook acknowledgments, through manipulation of self-mention pronouns. The result of qualitative analysis with regard to the activities with which self-mention pronouns were associated revealed that although the main use of these pronouns is considered to be only expressing gratitude and acknowledging others, within this manifest presence of others, I also found implicit and explicit traces of self which carry the writers' desires for promotion. Whitley (2000, p.25) clearly refers to this aspiration when he says today's academics are less occupied with the philanthropic advancement of knowledge and more

with the aim of "... convincing fellow researchers of the importance and significance of the results and enhancing [their] own reputations." In fact, in the essentially conflictual and competitive atmosphere of academy in which science has become part of a promotional and consumer culture (Harwood, 2005b), the academic writer's desire for promotion can be studied from an institutional perspective of producing symbolic capital (see Bourdieu, 1991; Everett, 2002; Fairclough, 2002; Putnam, 2009) —whose notion places a premium on non-material resources that move beyond economic wealth.To conclude, the findings of this study indicate that self-promotion and academic recognition have become an inherent quality of all academic writers regardless of the genre they are producing (Kuhi & Behnam, 2010) and even an '"other" oriented academic genre can be seen to carry a self-promotional flavour with the help of personal pronouns. That is, manipulation of self-mention allows the writer to intrude into the text with an authorial authority that is needed for reflecting an appropriate degree of confidence that is needed for producing symbolic capital in academy, marketing the research, underscoring its novelty, and showing that the work deserves to be taken seriously.It could be suggested that one should be able to study the self-mention pronouns of acknowledgments of various academic genres between Native Speakers of English and Non-natives in order to explore cross-generic and cross-cultural differences in academic setting.

Acknowledgments:

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Appendixes

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