

# “STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS.” AUTHOR’S PRESENCE IN HUNGARIAN STUDENTS’ MA TEFL THESES<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstrakt:** Zatiaľ čo študentom radíme, aby sa pri písaní akademických textov vyhli referencii na vlastnú osobu, výskum prác skúsených autorov dokazuje, že písanie v prvej osobe jednotného čísla je pomerne častým rétorickým nástrojom. Predkladaný článok sa sústreďuje na používanie referencie na vlastnú osobu v magisterských záverečných prácach študentov angličtiny ako cudzieho jazyka. Príspevok analyzuje jej frekvenciu, formy a účel. Výsledky ukazujú, že mladí autori používajú referenciu na seba v rozličnej miere, prevažne vo vzťahu k vlastnému výskumu a prejavu, za účelom zaradenia sa medzi autorov a aby presvedčili čitateľov o snahe rozvíjať vlastné dielo. Odporúča sa, aby sa zvyšovalo povedomie študentov o rétorických funkciách sebareferencie a zmieňovania vlastnej osoby v akademickom písaní.  
**Kľúčové slová:** anglické akademické písanie, prítomnosť autora, autorov postoj, referencia na vlastnú osobu, metadiskurz, rétorická funkcia

**Abstract:** While students are often advised to avoid self-mention in their academic writing, research into experienced writers’ published texts shows that this tool is frequently used for rhetorical purposes. The paper focuses on the use of self-mention in MA TEFL theses investigating its frequency, forms and purposes. Results show that novice writers use self-mention to varying degrees, mostly in relation to own research and discourse, with the purpose to position themselves to a junior rank and to convince readers of the effort put into thesis development. It is recommended that students’ awareness be raised as to the possible rhetorical functions of self-mention in academic writing.

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**Keywords:** English academic writing, author's presence, author's stance, self-mention, metadiscourse, rhetorical function

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The title of this paper incorporates a quote from a letter by Isaac Newton in 1676 which he wrote to Robert Hooke, a distinguished polymath in 17<sup>th</sup> century England. Newton was a highly sensitive person, and felt offended when Hooke questioned the theoretical bases of some of his scientific claims. The complete sentence is as follows: "*If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.*" An underlying message of this sentence closely relates to the focus of the present paper, because it points to the fact that advancements in science are made possible by human effort, and that it is people who carry out scientific work.

350 years after Newton's letter, there is widespread consensus in academia that stance on scientific truth renders the researcher replaceable. Indeed, the term '**science**' refers to "any system of knowledge that is concerned with the physical world and its phenomena and that entails unbiased observations and systematic experimentation... covering general truths or the operations of fundamental laws" (Encyclopaedia Britannica). In other words, scientific enquiry investigates reality in ways that are valid, reliable and independent of the researchers' subjective beliefs or feelings. It follows logically that it is not the researcher but the research findings that are important, placing heavy emphasis on the objectivity of the findings. This line of thought underscores the irrelevance of who obtains the results, indicating that other researchers can reach the same conclusions if they also use scientific (i.e. systematic and unbiased) methods (Lachowicz 1981).

The criteria of objectivity and impersonality can also be found among the guidelines of English academic writing. For example, Arnaudet and Barrett (1984) inform students that "academic writing aims at being 'objective' in its expression of ideas, and thus tries to avoid specific reference to personal opinions" (p. 73). Therefore, they suggest that students' "academic writing should imitate this style by eliminating first person pronouns as far as possible" (ibid.). Following the same line of thought, Lester (1993) advises novice writers to use "a third person voice that avoids '*I believe*' or '*it is my opinion*'" (p. 144). Mack (2018) also finds it important to point out that "scientists attempt to remove themselves from the discussion" in order to diminish their own role in the process (p. 15).

Research into academic papers published in English shows, however, that experienced researchers, regardless of their field of study, use several types

of language tools which make it possible for them to signal, implicitly and/or explicitly, their author's presence in the text, including first person voice as well (see e.g. Hu and Chao 2015). There may be two main reasons for this. One of them is that scientific truth is not uniform, and parallel paradigms, schools, approaches, models and interpretations exist in any field of study. An underlying aim of the author, then, is to present research results in a way that they become acceptable by members of the academic community (i.e. the readers). In other words, the author's purpose is to convince readers of the reliability and validity of own research findings and interpretations, as well as of the relevance and applicability of these findings in the context of the given discipline. The other reason is that experienced authors have personal aims for writing up and publishing research papers as well. While offering contributions to existing scientific knowledge, they also pursue credibility and trust in the academic community. To achieve this goal, it is essential to persuade readers of the results' significance. This can be done by displaying a credible author identity, and self-mention is often put to use to that end (Hyland and Jiang 2018).

My own experience in supervising and examining TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) theses suggests that students of the same degree programme have mixed opinions whether it is acceptable to indicate the author's presence in the text, and if so, to what extent and for what purposes. Since this uncertainty often seems to complicate the demanding task of thesis writing further, a clear understanding of the existing norms, possibilities and functions regarding the indication of the author's presence, including self-mention, is essential in any field of study. This is particularly the case in TEFL degree programmes, where students are exposed, during their studies, to relevant and dissimilar conventions in a number of fields including Cultural Studies, History, Language Pedagogy, Linguistics including Applied Linguistics and Literature. They, therefore, need awareness and skills to make informed decisions and develop their academic texts accordingly.

In line with the above argument, this paper reports on an empirical study I carried out to investigate the use of self-mention, the most explicit and controversial form of author's presence, in MA TEFL theses written by Hungarian university students. More specifically, my aim was to investigate the frequency, language forms and rhetorical functions of self-mention in the students' texts. Possible language forms as self-mention devices include personal pronouns in singular (*I, me*) and plural (*we, us*), as well as possessive determiners in singular (*my*) and plural (*our*). The term 'rhetorical function' refers to the purpose the author aims to achieve with the help of self-mention.

My research questions were the following:

1. To what extent do student writers use the tool of self-mention in their texts?
2. What self-mention devices do students use in their texts?
3. What are the rhetorical functions of self-mention in students' texts?

Below, I will provide a brief literature review in order to put my empirical study in context. This will be followed by a description of the research design, and a report and discussion on the findings.

## **2 THE ROLE OF AUTHOR'S PRESENCE IN WRITTEN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE**

Academic language variations have been widely researched and documented across the disciplines focusing on differences in terms of genre and register (see e.g. Biber and Conrad 2009; Hyland 2005; Lin and Evans 2012). Objectivity and impersonality are features that are frequently mentioned among the general characteristics of academic texts. These are the features which help the academic text fulfil its referential function (i.e. knowledge transfer), which is of paramount importance in academic genres (Halliday and Martin 1993). Also, the same features are capable of conveying messages about the author's attempts at humbleness, indicating that research writing is a modest and self-effacing task with the aim to offer the researcher's contribution to their discipline. Indicating impersonality also makes it possible for the authors to increase the credibility of their writing, thereby establishing a persuasive authority within the academic community (Hyland 2001).

Recent research has shown that there are several techniques applied by experienced researchers to indicate their author's presence in published academic texts, and that these techniques serve the role of establishing a link with the readers. Such techniques include, among others, methods of reporting and evaluation as well as implicit and explicit reference to self (Hyland 2005; McGrath 2016; Yang 2013). Findings suggest that the application of such techniques can be found across disciplines and genres of professional academic writing. Authors use them to signal their presence in order to construct a credible authorial identity, offer the portrayal of a scholar behind the text, manage the audience's awareness of the writer's role, as well as to indicate the academic position the author takes within the discipline, and seek credit for this position. Differences across disciplines can be detected in the frequency, distribution and specific rhetorical purposes of different techniques (Hyland 2011).

Based on a large-scale corpus analysis of L1 English academic texts, Biber and his colleagues developed a taxonomy of language tools which indicate the author's stance, according to its orientation, in written texts (Biber et al. 2007). Table 1 shows that the taxonomy consists of three orientations. The author's stance can be indicated in relation to the propositions put forward in the text, in reference to the author's attitudes, and regarding the text itself. In the case of each orientation, the author can take different stances, having a large number of language tools at their disposal to do so. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to notice that self-mention devices (i.e. first person personal pronouns and possessive determiners) can be found among the examples in the case of each orientation.

**Table 1** Stance markers in English academic texts according to orientation (based on Biber et al. 2007)

orientation	author's stance	examples
propositions	degree of certainty	<i>definitely, no doubt, probably, maybe, it seems</i>
	actuality, precision	<i>apparently, evidently, in fact, as a matter of fact, actually</i>
	limitation	<i>generally, in most cases, to some extent, <b>in my/our research</b></i>
	perspective	<i><b>to my/our knowledge, from my/our perspective</b></i>
	source of knowledge (implicit)	<i>this study has shown that, it was found that</i>
	source of knowledge (explicit)	<i><b>I/we argue that, in my/our view</b></i>
attitude	evaluation	<i>inevitably,</i>
	feelings	<i><b>I/we hope that</b></i>
text	style	<i>in short, briefly</i>
	metadiscourse	<i>in addition, <b>I/we conclude that</b></i>

The fact that the author's presence in general and the use of self-mention devices in particular can be detected in professional texts shows that such texts aim to fulfil referential as well as pragmatic functions. With the help of the former, it becomes possible for the writer to contribute to the knowledge in

the field, while the latter provides a means of establishing and maintaining interaction with the audience.

Károly's (2009) empirical research findings indicate that there are both quantitative and qualitative differences between the use of self-mention devices in published academic articles and theses of TEFL students. A quantitative difference is that student writers tend to use both singular and plural first person pronouns more often than experienced authors. A qualitative difference is that the purposes for using self-mention device are different too. While in published papers, the author's presence was detectable most frequently in relation to the propositions put forward in the article, novice writers tended to use such devices in order to refer to their own text.

### 3 RESEARCH DESIGN

In my empirical research, I applied the technique of random sampling when choosing ten theses written in English, within the past five years, by Hungarian MA TEFL students. I selected one chapter, the literature review, for my analysis. I based my decision on the assumption that this chapter is the part of the thesis where students may feel the most unsure as to the use of self-mention. This is because, in the literature review, students are expected to discuss knowledge and ideas that have been established by other researchers.

I analysed the selected literature review chapters using both quantitative and qualitative methods, and applied both frequency and content analysis to identify self-mention devices, to calculate their frequency of occurrence in students' texts (Research Questions 1 and 2), and to examine the rhetorical functions of self-mention at the sentence level (Research Question 3).

I identified self-mention pronouns and determiners (i.e. *I, we, me, us, my, our*) using the search function of Word. I checked the context in each case in order to make sure the identified language tools served the purpose of self-mention in the texts, and only these tools were included in my analysis. Thus, I excluded plural pronouns and determiners which were used in a generic, impersonal sense referring to an unspecified group of people, as well as those which appeared in direct quotations.

Frequency analysis was carried out using Excel 2010, calculating the mean value of the devices. Also, I calculated the standard deviation of total occurrences in the chapters.

To determine the rhetorical functions of self-mention, I used deductive coding. As a predefined set of codes, I used Hyland's (2001) categories, which were later modified and complemented in order to satisfactorily classify every self-mention

occurrence. To ensure measure consistency, I carried out the coding procedure twice, leaving three weeks between the two phases. This technique is suitable to increase inter-rater reliability if another researcher's participation is not possible (Dörnyei 2007). Altogether seven categories were created, which I divided into three larger groups depending on their orientation (i.e. proposition, attitude, text) as defined by Biber et al. (2007). In the case of the third group, I changed the category title from 'text' to 'thesis', because self-mention was used in connection with the students' own research as well as the text of their thesis itself.

The examples below illustrate the seven categories of rhetorical functions. At the end of each example, the pseudonym of the novice writers is given in parentheses. There are four categories which relate to 'propositions'. Their functions are the following: indicate writer's own claim (1); compare own claim with that of other authors' (2); explain other authors' claims (3); link own work to other authors' claims, methods, results (4).

- (1) I would argue that BL is a combination of online and face-to-face instruction where the same content is divided between the instructional modalities and where the single modalities are mutually dependent. (Dénes)
- (2) These results are similar to my hypothesis in connection with the Hungarian practice. (Henrik)
- (3) On the basis of Thompson's (cited in Harmer, 2007, p. 114) research we can see that good teachers are caring, creative, enthusiastic, patient, well-planned, respectful, have good classroom management skills and build rapport. (Gréta)
- (4) In my research, I will also apply Dorottya Holló's (2008, p. 16, based on Holló and Lázár, 2000) definition. (Cecília)

One category was created within the orientation of 'attitude'. It contains instances of self-mention which play a role in fulfilling the function of evaluation (5).

- (5) What I have found important in this issue is that an autonomous learner can construct his or her knowledge based not only on classroom work, but also on the outcomes of developmental and experiential learning outside the classroom. (Beáta)

Two categories can be found in the orientation of 'thesis'. One of them incorporates self-mention devices which are used to describe the research process (6), and the function of the other one is to provide information on the discourse in the thesis itself (7).

- (6) This change is the reason why I added my last research question to the ones already included in the piloted version. (Irma)

- (7) As we saw in the preceding section, BE is reckoned as a separate category of ESP. (Flóra)

I analysed the self-mention occurrences according to the seven categories of rhetorical functions in order to examine their distribution and qualitative features in terms of the communicative purposes they serve.

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, I will discuss frequency analysis results first, and this will be followed by those of content analysis. I included my discussion in the relevant parts of the subsections.

### 4.1 Frequency of self-mention devices in the Literature review chapters

The average number of words is 19320 in the theses, and 5709 in the literature review chapters, indicating that the literature review takes up approximately 30 percent of the complete text. Altogether 206 first person pronouns and determiners were identified in the literature reviews, out of which 112 function as self-mention devices. In 91 cases, the first person plural forms were used in a general sense referring to a not clearly identifiable group of people, and three pronouns were used in direct quotes. These instances were excluded from the analysis.

The average number of self-mention devices (i.e. the mean value) is 11.2 in the literature reviews, while standard deviation is 9.57. The latter result signifies a high dispersion of self-mention use in the corpus relative to the mean. Indeed, two out of the ten texts do not contain any instances of self-mention. Thus the total number of 112 devices was used by eight writers, where the highest number of self-mention within a text is 32 and the lowest number is 2. These findings support the assumption that there exists a discrepancy between students' views as to the usability of self-mention devices in TEFL thesis writing.

**Table 2 Mean value of singular and plural first person pronouns and determiners**

singular			plural		
<i>I</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>my</i>	<i>we</i>	<i>us</i>	<i>our</i>
40.2%	3.6%	23.2%	25.9%	1.8%	5,3%
67%			33%		

In line with the requirements, all students authored their thesis individually. Despite this fact, both singular and plural first person pronouns and determiners can be found in the corpus, where the former outnumber the latter (see Table 2). Nonetheless, one third (33 percent) of these language tools are used in plural, which seems a relatively large proportion in the case of individually authored texts. We can also see that subject pronouns *I* and *we* take up two thirds (66.1 percent) of the self-mention devices, while object pronouns *me* and *us* comprise only of 5.4 percent of the tools in the corpus. The remaining 28.5 percent belong to the category of possessive determiners which are most often linked to the following nouns: *'thesis'*, *'paper'*, *'chapter'*, *'section'* and *'study'*. This technique is suitable to create a distance between the writer and their research and text, this way creating a more abstract and objective context.

Table 3 shows the mean value of rhetorical functions according to their categories and orientation. The total value exceeds 100 percent, because some self-mention devices could be sorted into two categories, and these were taken into account in both places. The highest proportion of self-mention occurrences (67.8 percent) refers to the theses. One third of the devices (32.1 percent) were used in connection with propositions, while the lowest rate (7.1 %) can be found in sentences which convey the authors' attitude, more specifically their evaluation.

**Table 3 Mean value of rhetorical functions**

orientation	rhetorical function	mean according to rhetorical function	mean according to orientation	total
proposition	own claim	8,9	32,1	107,0
	comparison	2,7		
	explanation	8,9		
	link	11,6		
attitude	evaluation	7,1	7,1	
thesis	own research	33	67,8	
	metadiscourse	34,8		

The high rate of thesis-related self-mention devices may indicate that this is the orientation where students can most strongly feel that they are in charge. Since it is a requirement towards thesis writers to demonstrate their ability to successfully carry out and report on a research project, students may also

regard it necessary to signify their competence by directly referring to their authorship. This finding is in line with Károly's (2009) results. This is followed, in descending rank order, by references to propositions, while self-mention least often referred to evaluative comments in the literature review chapters. These results suggest that students were less prepared to explicitly signal their author's presence in connection with disciplinary ideas and their evaluation. Nonetheless, there are some examples where they were willing to do just that, and this finding differs from those reported in Károly (2009), because no indication was found as to the linkage between first person pronouns and either propositions or evaluation in the corpus of the latter study.

## 4.2 Content Analysis Results

The results of content analysis relate to the rhetorical messages of the sentences which include self-mention devices. I divided my findings into five groups depending on the rhetorical message of such sentences. These characteristics are described and discussed below.

### 4.2.1 *The use of first person plural: 'we' = 'I'*

In the corpus, there are sentences where the first person plural pronoun 'we' refers exclusively to the novice writer (8 and 9).

- (8) What we consider interesting is a question of individual preferences, however, its importance has been discussed in the previous section. (Erika)
- (9) This is a reason why we must differentiate between L2 and L3 learners of a language. (Henrik)

From the point of view of clarity, this decision is debatable, because it does not state, in an unambiguous way, that the writer refers solely to themselves. Indeed, the American Psychological Association style guide, which thesis writers are asked to consult in language pedagogy, strongly recommends that the use of the plural form be restricted to instances only when more than one person author a paper (American Psychological Association 2020, 68-70). From the point of view of the intended communicative effect of the plural pronoun, however, the choice of 'we' makes it possible for the novice writer to create some distance between themselves and the claims put forward in the text, this way decreasing their role. This technique can indicate modesty and the students' perceived place in the academic hierarchy. At the same time, the application of

this technique also hints at an attempt to take less responsibility for the ideas presented in the text.

#### 4.2.2 *The use of first person plural: ‘we’ = ‘you and I’*

In some cases, the use of the first person plural subject pronoun served the purpose of involving the reader in the process of becoming familiar with and making sense of the ideas put forward in the text. This purpose becomes visible in sentences where comments are made about what the sentence and/or other parts of the text are about (i.e. metadiscourse) (10 and 11).

- (10) As we have seen the notion of culture is broad. (Cecília)
- (11) Having explored the definition of English for Business Purposes, we may now look at where BE courses are held and what characteristics they bear. (Flóra)

In such cases, a motive for applying plural pronouns may be to underplay the writer’s own role in the research and the thesis writing process. This is why phrases such as ‘*we have seen*’ and ‘*we may look at*’ are used instead of ‘*I have shown*’ and ‘*I will show*’. In addition, this choice can also signify the writer’s awareness of the readers’ presence and of the requirement to guide them through the thesis.

#### 4.2.3 *Modal auxiliaries: taking responsibility*

In the corpus, modal auxiliaries accompany self-mention devices in sentences which relate either to propositions (12) or metadiscourse in the literature review (13, 14).

- (12) I would argue that BL is a combination of online and face-to-face instruction where the same content is divided between the instructional modalities and where the single modalities are mutually dependent. (Dénes)
- (13) Having identified the various BE teacher roles, we may now turn to the question of what knowledge BE teachers should possess according to BE literature sources. (Flóra)
- (14) As indicated above, first I would like to explore what the term ‘vocabulary’ is used for, what ‘lexis’ is and what they comprise. (Irma)

In the case of propositions, modal auxiliary ‘*would*’ can weaken the impact of a claim, thereby downplaying the writer’s own commitment to its truth

value (12). Also, the responsibility the writer takes in forming arguments can be reduced this way. This technique is suitable for indicating the writer's perceived rank in the hierarchy of the academic community in general and in relation to the readers of the thesis, most importantly supervisors and examiners.

The use of 'may' and 'would like' can be found in sentences with an orientation to the thesis itself. In examples (13) and (14), the joint application of self-mention devices and modals expresses politeness, as well as a request for permission. Similarly to auxiliary 'would', the choice of these modal verbs can be suitable for the writers to indicate where they position themselves in the rank order of academic writers.

#### ***4.2.4 Modal auxiliaries: giving instructions***

In addition to politeness towards and requesting permission from the audience, another function of the joint application of self-mention devices and modal auxiliaries is to express some kind of obligation and compliance to requirements (15 and 16).

(15) After focusing on the topic of what shall we teach as culture during the language lessons, we should look for some suggestions in connection with teaching those cultural elements we discussed in the previous chapters. (Cecília)

(16) To understand gamification we have to see clearly what exactly the elements of a game are that can be used in gamification. (Erika)

The examples above show that the writers form the requirements towards themselves. This way they are able to signal that they are aware of the standard requirements their thesis should adhere to, and that they have done their utmost to succeed.

#### ***4.2.5 Disclosing inside information***

In this paper, the term 'inside information' refers to disclosed details about the writer's decisions regarding thesis development. Such information normally remains covert in academic texts, because their existence is implicitly assumed by members of the academic community. In examples (17) and (18), novice writers disclose information about the issues they took into consideration when developing and writing up their thesis.

- (17) If we wish to acquire a deeper knowledge and find more specific pieces of information, we shall turn to the scholarly literature. (Cecília)
- (18) In choosing the scope of literature to be reviewed, I considered my topic and research questions as points of reference. (Irma)

In examples (19) and (20), the writers use self-mention devices in sentences which assure the readers of the prudence and care they exercised during their research, and that they have carried out work to the best of their knowledge.

- (19) Namely, I could not find such a paper that only focuses on the using of English as an L2 in the process of learning Italian as an L3 in the Hungarian public education. (Henrik)
- (20) Then I will try to find an answer why learning culture in the EFL lesson is a necessary part of learning English. (Cecília)

Examples (21) and (22) indicate that the writers are aware of the thesis writing standards and make every effort to meet them.

- (21) I would like to give a brief summary of the basic principles of Waldorf pedagogy and the philosophy providing a firm basis for it in order to make my study more comprehensible. (Gréta)
- (22) The next section will go into details concerning the construction of Mind Maps, so that our efforts could lead to the most efficient outcome. (Irma)

Information which explicitly refers to considerations that authors have taken into account to ensure the fulfilment of standard research process requirements is not necessarily part of published academic papers, because the application of such care is implicitly understood by the academic community. Examples 17-22 suggest, however, that the novice writers have found it important to overtly mention the earnest endeavours they made to work hard in order to fulfil standard thesis writing requirements. The emphasis is given to the diligent and careful nature of the writers' attempt at developing their thesis, because these qualities may compensate for the inexperience of novice researchers. This technique may be used in order to convince and propitiate the readers, including the thesis supervisors and examiners.

## 5 CONCLUSION

In this study, I have looked at the use of self-mention devices (i.e. singular and plural first person pronouns and possessive determiners) in MA TEFL

theses written by Hungarian university students, focusing on the frequency, form and rhetorical functions of these tools in literature review chapters. Below are the answers to the research questions I asked in the Introduction.

My first question focused on the extent to which student writers used self-mention tools in their texts. Frequency analysis results revealed considerable differences in the corpus in terms of the distribution of self-mention devices. While some students did not use such devices at all, others chose to frequently refer to themselves explicitly. This finding confirms the assumption that there exists a large degree of uncertainty over the acceptability of the overt indication of writer's presence in the thesis.

The second research question looked at the forms of self-mention devices in students' texts. Students used all possible types (i.e. first person singular and plural personal pronouns and possessive determiners), even if to varying degrees. A considerably large proportion of the devices was used in the singular form. Taking into account that the corpus contains single-authored studies only, however, novice writers still used a relatively large number of tools in plural. Such tools appear in both pronoun and possessive determiner forms, and refer to propositions, the writer's attitudes and the thesis as well. While the use of plural blurs clarity, it is suitable for sending subtle messages to the reader as to the writer's perceived junior rank in the academic community as well as the role and responsibility they are willing to take.

The third research question asked about the rhetorical functions of self-mention devices in students' texts. Seven categories were established, and these were further grouped into the three orientations established by Biber et al. (2007): proposition (categories: own claim, comparison, explanation, link); attitude (category: evaluation); and thesis (categories: research, text). Results show that direct indications of the writers' presence were most often used in relation to the thesis itself, while the least frequent use related to the evaluation of other authors' work and ideas.

My findings indicate that self-mention devices fulfil similar functions in published authors' and novice writers' academic texts in that they aim to persuade the reader. However, the expected outcomes of persuasion differ markedly in the case of the two groups. While experienced researchers aim at strengthening their credibility and position in the academic community, students use these tools to signal modesty, politeness and junior rank. Students tend to use self-mention devices in such a way that it sends the message that novice writers do not treat themselves and their readers as equals. As a consequence, a major rhetorical aim is to convince their audience of the great effort and care with which they developed their thesis while observing standard requirements as well. This attitude may be explained by the subordinate status perceived by

the students in a high-stakes examination situation where the decision as to the quality of their work lies in their readers', most notably supervisors' and examiners', hands.

A limitation of the research is that it focused on a small sample, so a possible future direction can be to increase the sample size by developing a larger corpus. Also, an interview with the thesis writers could provide valuable insights into students' attitude and motivation regarding the use of self-mention devices for high-stakes L2 English academic writing assessments. It would also be useful to investigate supervisors' and examiners' views about explicit author's presence in disciplinary texts.

An implication of my findings is that novice writers' awareness needs to be raised in terms of when, how and for what purposes self-mention devices are used in published TEFL papers. It may also be useful to ask students to compare published papers and theses in this respect in order to help take more informed decisions whether and how to indicate their author's presence and stance in academic writing. Since a wide range of rhetorical functions can be performed with the help of self-mention devices and their underlying effects may be different from what the writers intend, it is essential that students consciously realise these options, become more aware of their own rhetorical purposes when writing an academic paper, and make informed choices in order to reach their aims and successfully accomplish the task.

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