The Construction of Identity with ‘I’: Writer Identity in EFL Writing through the First Person Pronoun

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This study investigates the construction of identity with the first person pronoun, ‘I’, in students’ essay writing, addressing the notion of writer identity behind ‘I’. The data comprises a collection of thirty-one pieces of writing produced by the students in an English composition classroom at a Korean university. In the students’ writing, six types of writer identity behind ‘I’ were examined: existentialist, guide, architect, recounter, opinion-holder, and originator. The findings indicate that twenty-seven students used ‘I’ in their writing, and a total of 92 instances of ‘I’ were counted up across all the essays. The average number of ‘I’ per writing sample was very low with the frequency of 2.97. While the role of Opinion holder was the most frequently used identity by the students with 34 instances (36.2%), the role of Existentialist recorded as the least used identity with 6 instances (6.5%). Despite the absence of the required elements for academic writing, the students exhibited the identity of Recounter in their personal essay writing. This study concludes that any writing education program at a university should include issues of writer identity, and draw the attention of students to the fact that their language choices reflect who they are in their writing.

I. INTRODUCTION

The notion of identity has served as a useful metaphor for capturing, among other things, a distinct quality in written discourse that can be discerned by readers but is not readily identifiable in terms of a single linguistic or rhetorical feature. It has played an important role in the development of writing research and instruction (Bowden, 1999) and continues to occupy a significant place in the discourse of composition studies and applied linguistics, as evidenced by a growing number of publications exploring this and other related concepts (Elbow, 1994; Johnstone, 1996; Vandenberg, 1996). However, in light of recent critiques of the notion in both composition studies (Bowden, 1999; Faigley, 1992) and
second language studies (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996), there are some issues that must be addressed before it can be appropriated as a useful theoretical tool for the investigation of L2 writing issues (Matsuda, 2001).

Recent research on writing has revealed the intersection of writing and identity construction (Cherry, 1988; Hatch, Hill & Hayes, 1993; Ivanic, 1998). It has been demonstrated that as writers represent social discourse (Bakhtin, 1986; Kress, 1989), they textually construct social identities in the sense of representing themselves in alignment, or dissonance, with those discourses. As Costley and Doncaster’s (2001) work suggests, identities are constructed not only through appropriation of social discourses but also through the ways these discourses are incorporated into writers’ texts.

However, these studies say little about EFL writers who enter the world of writing in English. They take it for granted that the writer represents certain type(s) of identities in the product written by the first or second language, but they do not say much about the presence of the identities of the writer. Consequently, the study of writer identity in EFL writing is a relatively unexplored area of research.

Considering the immediate instructional needs of L2 or EFL writers who have to become functional in unfamiliar discourse situations within a limited amount of time, efforts to describe discourse features and functions should continue as an important part of L2 writing research. Yet, the lack of attention to individual variations in discourse practices is problematic. Since users of language naturally diverge from the norm, the exclusive focus on normative aspects of discourse works against the goal of providing an accurate description of discourse practices. As Matsuda (2001) argues, understanding divergent aspects of discourse is also important for teachers and researchers of L2 writing because an insufficient understanding of individual variations within cross-linguistic and cross-cultural contexts may lead to linguistic and cultural determinism, which can be counterproductive in facilitating the development of L2 literacy.

In this study I will explore how students construct their identities with ‘I’ in their writing, in which each student creates identity, presenting different roles of ‘I’. This identity will be closely related to the process of constructing meaning that is inseparable from the construction of students’ writing products, and it might be a reflection of the students themselves. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the notion of writer identity behind the first person pronoun, ‘I’, and apply this framework to a specific examination of essay writing produced by thirty-one undergraduates at a Korean university. The reason for focusing on ‘I’ is that it is arguably the most visible manifestation of a writer’s presence in a text.
II. THEORETICAL APPROACHES

1. Identity and Written Discourse

Following Ivanic (1998), the term ‘identity’ is the everyday word for people’s sense of who they are, and the plural word ‘identities’ captures the idea of people identifying simultaneously with a variety of social groups. She believes that identities are not fixed, and individuals have a sense of unity and continuity about their identity. Ivanic continues to define the term ‘discourse’ that:

is used as shorthand for a complex concept, and is used in many different ways by different people, usually but not always involving the use of language, often including far more than language. *Discourse*, as an abstract noun with no plural, means something like ‘producing and receiving culturally recognized, ideologically shaped representations of reality’. The term refers more to the process of representing reality than to the product, but encompasses both. (p. 17)

There are certain assumptions in a situated perspective on written discourse and identity construction that have implications for the way they view students’ textual practices in their study (Abasi, Akbari & Graves, 2006). Firstly, any textual decisions that writers make as they compose are simultaneously decisions of self-representation and identity construction. Secondly, in order to explore how writers represent themselves, we need to identify the identity options, or ‘ways of being’ to use Gee’s (1996) term, that are both available and privileged in the context of writing. This requires the adoption of a research methodology that situates student texts (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2003; Prior, 1998). Lastly, for analytical purposes, if any textual decision is simultaneously a decision about representing self, then we could always ask the interpretive question of why a writer has made a particular choice out of a range of possible options.

Ivanic (1998; see also Clark & Ivanic, 1997) has developed a well-articulated framework comprising four interrelated aspects of writer identity: (i) the autobiographical self, (ii) the discoursal self, (iii) the self as author, and (iv) possibilities for self-hood in the sociocultural and institutional context. The autobiographical self is to do with the way in which writing is affected by the writer’s life-history up to the moment of writing. The discoursal self has to do with the identity that is conveyed by the writer’s discourse practice. Thus, it is ‘self-representation’ that refers to this process of conveying an impression of self to others through some form of social action. The self as author refers to the self who originates a position or stand in the writing. While the three aspects of writer identity are all concerned with actual people writing actual texts, the fourth meaning of
‘writer identity’ is concerned with prototypical possibilities for self-hood which are available to writers in the social context of writing: ‘social’ identities in the sense that they do not just belong to particular individuals. In any institutional context, there will be several socially available possibilities for self-hood: several ways of doing the same thing. Her work is particularly revealing with respect to the discoursal (or textual) selves of her participants. The four dimensions of her framework are all affected by the socio-culturally available subject-positions and patterns of privileging among them that exist in the socio-cultural context.

2. Identity and the Use of ‘I’

Following Stapleton (2002), the use of the first person is the most discussed discursive feature associated with identity. In both qualitative and quantitative studies, the first person has been identified as a key element in establishing the individual identity of an author (Hinkel, 1999; Hyland, 2001; Ivanic, 1998; Ivanic & Camp, 2001; Tang & John, 1999; Wu & Rubin, 2000). Three of these studies will be reviewed below.

Hyland (2001) searched for first person pronouns in direct reference to the authors of papers, focusing on the use of first person pronouns and self-citation in a corpus of 240 articles. The findings revealed that there was a great range of self-mention among disciplines; however, articles in the humanities and social sciences tallied many more usages of ‘I’ than those in science and engineering. He claims that the first person, ‘I’, helps writers to stake out what is their territory and thereby stamp an authorial presence on their work and gain acceptance for their claims. Hyland concludes by suggesting that teachers raise students’ consciousness about the use of ‘I’ by becoming aware themselves about the preferred patterns of expression in their writing.

Ivanic (1998) argues that the use of ‘I’ "in association with knowledge claims and beliefs acknowledges the writer’s responsibility for them and property rights over them" (p. 308). While she does recognize that claim assertions made without explicitly stating subjectivity are understood to be made by the author, those who use ‘I’ are taking a different identity-driven ideological stance. Ivanic claims that by not using ‘I’, "the writer is withdrawing from all responsibility for his or her writing" (p. 306). She concludes with a familiar refrain: voice plays a significant role in any type of writing and, therefore, should be part of writing programs.

Ivanics and Camps (2001), examined six graduate students’ lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical choices in terms of three simultaneous types of subject-positioning, i.e., ideational, interpersonal, and textual positioning. They insist that the lexical, syntactic, organizational, and even the material aspects of writing construct identity just as much as do the phonetic and prosodic aspects of speech, and thus writing always conveys a
representation of the self of the writer. In this sense, they conclude that ‘voice’ is not optional: All writing contains ‘voice’ in the Bakhtinian sense of reaccentuating "voice types," (p. 10) which locates their users culturally and historically.

All of the three studies deal with academic writing in which writers in broad domains of knowledge in the tertiary level may have very different ways of conducting research and persuading to accept their results. However, these studies imply that the use of ‘I’ can be applied to any types of writing because writers represent their identities in their writing. L2 or EFL writing pedagogy, therefore, which raises critical awareness about voice can help learners maintain control over the personal and cultural identity they are projecting in their writing.

3. Possible Identities behind ‘I’

The first person pronoun, ‘I’, may be used with the various ways in writing. Tang and John (1999) address a range of identities that may be fronted by ‘I’ which is not a homogeneous entity in writing. They propose that ‘I’ can be divided into six different identities depends on how it is used in a sentence. In writing samples from twenty-seven undergraduates, they found that occurrences of ‘I’ could be categorized into six identities: (i) representative, (ii) guide, (iii) architect, (iv) recounter, (v) opinion-holder, and (vi) originator.

The representative is usually realized as the plural form we or us as a generic first person pronoun that writers are considered as a large group of people (e.g. We have today…). The guide is the person who shows the reader through the essay, locates the reader and the writer together in the time and place of the essay, draws the reader’s attention to point, and arrives at a conclusion (e.g. I will now look at some examples…). The architect writes, organizes, structures, and outlines the material in the essay (e.g. In my essay, I will discuss…). The recounter is the one who describes or recounts the various steps of the research process. This role is often signalled with what Halliday (1994) calls material process verbs (e.g. All of the items I collected were…). The opinion-holder shares an opinion, view or attitude with regard to known information or established facts. (e.g. I would like to show that…). Lastly, the originator can create and inhabit within his or her writing. According to Tang and John (1999), it maps largely onto Ivonic’s (1998) term ‘author’, the self that ‘claims authority as the source of the content of the text’ (p. 26) (e.g. Therefore, I suggest that…).

Tang and John conclude that it is important for both students and teachers to be aware of the real presence of these different ways in which ‘I’ can be used in writing. Their study brings to light the notion of whether and when using the first pronoun is appropriate because writers need to be taught the use of the specific type of the first person pronoun in
terms of context and purpose in their writing. Although Tang and John’s framework for different ways of conceptualizing ‘I’ focuses on academic writing, it can be applied to this study in that it deals with the use of ‘I’ in personal essay writing for two reasons. One is that an essay should present the writer’s identity through the elements of facts, opinions, and ideas on a topic, which can be also included in academic writing. The other is that writing itself cannot be separated from the writer’s identity regardless of academic writing or EFL personal essay writing.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the notion of writer identity and then to apply the framework to a specific examination of the essays produced by the students in an EFL writing classroom at a university. Based on the above speculation, the present study was guided by the following research questions:

(a) What sorts of identities are constructed in Korean EFL university students’ writing?
(b) What are the characteristics of the writer’s identity behind ‘I’ in EFL writing?
(c) How can the writer identity be included in the teaching of EFL writing?

2. Participants

The participants of this study were thirty-one university students who were taught by the researcher in a writing classroom entitled ‘English Writing I’ designed for sophomores as a mandatory subject in the English department at a Korean university. Out of them, twenty-seven (81.7%) students were English major sophomores, and the rest of the four came from other disciplines such as theology, education, music, and psychology. There were twelve (38.7%) female students, and the rest of the nineteen (61.3%) were male students. The four non-English majors were attending the course for their double major programs. The age of the students ranged from nineteen to twenty-six. Five (16.1%) students of the whole class had experience in staying in an English-speaking country for more than six months. The students’ English levels varied from beginners to advanced writers, and this course was the first time for them to learn writing in English in the English department.
3. Writing Samples and Procedure

A total of three pieces of writing were asked to be submitted as the coursework throughout the semester. The first assignment was to describe one of the two with 300 words: (a) a holiday or tradition that is meaningful to you, or (b) a person you admire except family members. For the second assignment, students were required to choose one of three topics and complete a 500-word essay. The three topics were as follows:

(a) living in a dormitory or off-campus accommodation
(b) choosing a partner for marriage, and
(c) three ways of studying effectively for an exam

Out of the thirty-one students, twelve students chose the topic about (a), seventeen students chose (b), and only two students were interested in (c). The third assignment was to choose a topic out of three with 700 words: (a) Explain three types of internet connections that are currently available; (b) Choose three methods of obtaining energy. Explain these three methods; and (c) Consider management techniques. Write an essay describing three specific types. Out of the three assignments, the second one was especially used for this study, because it was about expressing writers’ own opinions in which more first pronouns might be used than any other types of writing.

The researcher made both marginal and end comments with a correction of grammatical aspects as much as she could in all the essays as feedback. All of the students’ essays were numbered from 1 to 31 so that they could be easily recognized. In order to analyze the aspects of the writer identity, all of the first person pronoun, ‘I’, shown in the 31 essays were counted and recorded with the identity type, the verbs followed by the ‘I’, and the number of occurrence in parenthesis [e.g., architect: explain(2); originator: suggest(3)] in the margins of each essay.

4. Framework for Data Analysis

All sorts of verbs accompanied by ‘I’ in the students’ texts were carefully examined, and I recognized that all of the verbs could be categorized with certain identities described in the frameworks of Ivanic (1998) and Tang and John (1999). In exploring the aspects of ‘I’ in the 31 essays, six roles of writer identity were adopted from the two frameworks: (a) existentialist, (b) guide, (c) architect, (d) recounter, (e) opinion-holder, and (f) originator. Out of these six roles, the first role, (a) existentialist, was added and entitled by the researcher, adopting Ivanic’s (1998) view on the possibilities for self-hood in the sociocultural and institutional context, since I recognized that some ‘I’s took the part of this
role in students’ essays. The existentialist is the person who takes a role in society or community the writer belongs to. This notion is related to the term what Ivanic (1998) calls "person-hood" (p. 71) that is the aspect of identity which is associated with someone’s social role in the community. This identity is socially constructed and affects a person’s literacy practices, because this can be tracked to specific discoursal choices in written language. For example, writing a sermon foregrounds the ‘person’ of the preacher, and backgrounds private aspects of self, as Besnier (1990, 1991) observed (e.g. I am both similar and dissimilar to…). The rest of the five types of identity, (b) – (f), came from Tang and John’s (1999) possible identities behind ‘I’.

These six roles of identities behind ‘I’ reflect the fact that the first person pronoun includes a variety of roles, and the nature of ‘I’ can be a basic barometer to understand writers’ intentions or purposes in their writing, which can be an important element in writing pedagogy. In this sense, these seem to be useful to determine if and how much the students use ‘I’ in their writing and to ascertain the roles that are behind ‘I’. Figure 1 shows the six aspects of the writer identity behind ‘I’.

FIGURE 1
Aspects of Writer Identity behind ‘I’

I suggest that these six aspects of the identity of a writer can be thought of as a sort of ‘clover-leaf” in which the six parts are inseparable, and are all affected by the socio-culturally available "subject-positions" (Clark & Ivanic, 1997, p. 136) and patterns of privileging among them. Following Ivanic and Clark, subject positions are possibilities for identity that exist in the socio-cultural context of writing, both the broader context of society at large, and the more specific institutional context of a particular act of writing.
IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The First Person Pronoun, ‘I’, Used by Students

Each of the thirty-one essays displayed the variety of identities behind ‘I’, and the writer identity was distributed throughout the categories of the six roles. Table 1 demonstrates the overall picture of the use of ‘I’ in each of the thirty-one essays with the verbs connected to ‘I’. A fairly large percentage of the students (87.0%), 27 students out of 31, did use the first person pronoun in their writing, though somewhat sparingly. A total of 92 instances occurred throughout the 31 essays, and the average number of ‘I’ per writing sample was just 2.97 in frequency. In terms of the actual numbers, there were two writing samples which included 12 occurrences of ‘I’ that being the highest number, and four pieces of writing had no instances of ‘I’ at all.

Out of the 92 instances of ‘I’ used across all the 31 samples, Opinion holder was the most used role with 34 instances, 37.0%. On the other hand, the identity of Architect was the second most used role, with the numbers of 17 (18.4%), and the role of Existentialist recorded as the least used by the students with 6 instances (6.5%). Now let us move the focus to the aspects of the six identities shown in the students’ writing.

2. The Aspects of the Six Identities in Students’ Writing

1) Identity of Existentialist

The role of existentialist took up the lowest percentage of using ‘I’. When students inhabit the role as existentialist, it may be an attempt on their part to signal their membership in the linguistics "discourse community" (Ivanic, 1998, P. 78). ‘Discourse community’ refers to a blend of the more abstract ‘interpretive community’ used by Fish (1980) and the more concrete ‘speech community’ used by sociolinguists such as Hymes (1974). This is seen when they display their knowledge or opinions that are generally accepted by other members of this discourse community. For example, in sentences, Like these, I am both similar and dissimilar to the opinions of my close friend, Mi-young, in deciding our spouses (essay #27), or I am pinched for money when buying daily necessaries during living in an off-campus house alone unlike the living in a dormitory (essay #29), the two underlined ‘I am’s indicate shared knowledge about the writers’ social status, i.e., as a young lady who wishes to meet a good partner in the future and a student who lives outside the campus.
### TABLE 1

**Distribution of Verbs Followed by ‘I’ in the 31 Essays**

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<td>do, have, impose,</td>
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<td><strong>92</strong></td>
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The examples in essays 27 and 29 also imply a presupposition of the writers’ acceptance.
in the linguistic discourse community in which students share their opinions and situations. These are the evidences of the view suggested by Ivanic (1995) that students identify themselves with the "interests, and beliefs which are associated with a particular discourse type" (p. 15), in a descriptive writing. In this sense, the two students create their identities of existentialist in order to help the readers associate more to their writing and understand their point of view.

In respect with the power of the writer or author in writing, the existentialist may not be a very strong or demanding role. Unlike other kinds of writer identity such as the architect who creates structure for the text, the existentialist merely positions himself or herself alongside other people in "meaning-making" (Lee, 2004, p. 87) rather than doing any actual creation at all.

2) Identity of Guide

The role of guide includes 10 instances (10.9%) of ‘I’ out of the 92. One interesting finding is that recommend was the highest frequent verb used with ‘I’, counting 4 out of the 10 instances. The rest of the example signals used in the identity of guide were see, follow, encourage, come, and notice, which are likely to require more directive actions than the verb of recommend. This can be interpreted as meaning that the students tend to be reluctant to assert their argument on the content and individuality in their writing in the category of guide, locating their role in a safe position as a writer.

Another possible reason for students’ unapparent confidence with this role is that it is, in a sense, an ‘external’ (Tang & John, 1999, p. 32) role. Although written in at the time of composing, the guide seems in some essays to be a rather fleeting presence, surfacing only at strategic moments in the essay to lead the reader through that text. In addition, as a guide, the writer appears to momentarily stand apart from the writing he or she is otherwise creating to view the direction that the text is taking, and to show the reader this direction, almost as if the text were an entity unrelated to him or her. For example, in the following sentences You should read a lot and comprehend English sentences. Here, I encourage you to read about TOEIC (Essay #7) and For all of the reasons, I certainly recommend them to choose dormitories rather than living outside campus (Essay #21), the writers are totally in a external position as the writer provide directions in their writing, using the verbs encourage and recommend. This indicates that the guide is a fairly ‘non-threatening identity’ (Tang & John, 1999, p. 32) to inhabit.

3) Identity of Architect

A total number of instances of 18 out of 92 fall into the identity of architect. This
number of occurrence takes up 19.1% out of the total frequency. Considering the duty of an architect of signposting and drawing an overall outline of the essay for the reader, this role is very significant. Returning to the example verbs followed by ‘I’ in students’ scripts, we can discover that explain was the most frequently used verb, taking up nearly a-third, 5 instances (29.0%) out of 17. In addition, students particularly adopted specific type of lexis what I call ‘speech verbs’ such as explain (Essays #5, 19, 20, and 22), mention (Essays #3 and 31), introduce (Essays #12 and 31), talk (Essay #6), speak (Essay #16), and tell (Essay #24). The percentage of these verbs reaches to 12 instances out of the 17 instances, occupying 71.0%.

These speech verbs can be associated with what Bakhtin (1986) calls "social languages" (p. 49) which mean a unique role in shaping the discourse. This can be interpreted as meaning that students attempt to their own strategies in order to write and structure their writing, choosing particular lexis, as shown in the following examples:

Now, I introduce about how to effectively study for increasing your remembrance by observing the following three examples. (Essay #12)

I compare the differences between living in a dormitory and living out of university, and I explain the strong points of the dorm. (Essay #22)

In the above examples, different verbs (i.e. introduce, compare, and explain) connected to ‘I’ enable the writer as an architect to establish effective meaning-making about the topic, the process of writing, and the characteristics of the content. This represents students’ particular stances toward topics, because their preferences are carried by choice of the classificatory lexis. That is, these data contain verbs that carry the writers’ value judgements on the topic they are discussing.

4) Identity of Recounter

There were 11 instances of the identity of recounter out of 92, counting out 12%. Two most frequently used verbs were find and choose, taking up 2 instances, respectively, out of the 11. Eight students (26.0%) used this signal for the identity of recounter. Overall, the total frequency in the role of recounter is not high, and this can be attributed to the nature of the assignments that were set for students. The assignments called for students to express their own opinions about one of the authentic topics directly related to their lives as university students, which might not be necessary for them to engage in a large scale research project, such as collection of data, interviewing with participants, discussion of the findings, and so on. According to Tang and John (1999), this role is prevalent when the
writer has to conduct an experiment or study of some sort, and wishes to detail the various steps undertaken during the course of research. Some examples of *recount* used in the students’ writing are demonstrated below:

I often *find* it helpful to spend a week or two, just collecting all the information that I could use for exams. (Essay #1)

According to the recommendation of the subject, *I research* over the three technologies of internet connections such as cable, ISDN, and DSL. (Essay #3)

The writers in the two essays adopt fairly appropriate lexis that can be used in doing research. This can be associated with the results in a study on students’ purposes for writing in English conducted by Younghwa Lee (2005), in which Korean EFL students wished to experience in learning academic writing such as reports, essays, and even dissertation in English composition classrooms at university.

5) Identity of Opinion-holder

Out of a total of 92 instances of the first person pronoun, 34 instances of *opinion-holder* fall into this category. This reaches 37% of the total number of occurrences, the highest percentage taken up by a single role. When we look at the 34 instances shown in students’ writing, we can recognize what the most particularly used verbs with ‘I’ in the category of identity of opinion-holder are. It is very interesting to observe that some specific lexis what I call the ‘favorable verbs’ such as *want, hope, like, prefer, delight,* and *satisfy* are the most frequently used signals with the frequency of 21 (61.8%), and *think* is the next one with the frequency of 7 (20.6%). Table 2 outlines all the instances of the signal verb to be the role of opinion-holder.

The role of opinion-holder is to express the writer’s own opinion freely about his or her topic. In this sense, the high occurrence of the ‘favorable verbs’ could stem from the fact that students’ topics were extremely connected to their day-to-day lives or interests such as living in a dormitory or off-campus, the methods of effective studying, and types of marriage, etc. These topics involve the students’ expressing their wishes and their reasons for choosing to do something. Two students’ phrases are evidence of this:

I *want* my spouse to fall in love with Jesus. And I *like* him to understand my interests such as music, performance, and art. (Essay #17)

I *believe* the issue whether living in a dorm or living outside school is crucial to a university student. I *prefer* to live in the university dormitory because of
accessibility and active social life. (Essay #21)

These samples are particularly interesting for the evidence of how students reveal their wishes or ideas about the topics, using the ‘favorable verbs’. These findings are related to the case of the identity of Recounter, in which students show low occurrence of the instances because of the nature of the non-academical topics of their writing.

| TABLE 2 |
| Aspects of Verbs Used in the Identity of Opinion-holder |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Used verb</th>
<th>Frequency (Percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>want</td>
<td>12 (35.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hope</td>
<td>3 (8.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like</td>
<td>2 (5.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prefer</td>
<td>2 (5.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>delight</td>
<td>1 (2.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>satisfy</td>
<td>1 (2.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think</td>
<td>7 (20.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>believe</td>
<td>3 (8.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consider</td>
<td>1 (2.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feel</td>
<td>1 (2.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mind</td>
<td>1 (2.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6) Identity of Originator

There were 13 instances of ‘I’ used in conjunction with the identity of originator out of 92. This accounts for 14.1% of the total, showing somewhat low percentage. The verb suggest appear 4 times as the highest frequency out of the 14 instances.

The category of originator is the most powerful authorial presence among their five possible roles behind the first person pronoun because it involves the writer’s conception of the idea or knowledge claims as Tang and John (1999) argue. The identity of originator has strongly to do with what Ivanic and Clark (1997) call ‘the self as author’ (p. 152) that is the writer’s sense of authority in having their ‘own voice’ to express their own ideas and beliefs. The two excerpts came from students’ writing can be the visible evidence of writers’ feeling of authoritativeness and sense of themselves as authors.

Therefore, I suggest you to precede to set up a foundation of English sufficiently such as vocabulary, reading, listening, and grammar. (Essay #7)

As a result of the comparison, I argue that living in the dorm is better than living out of university in case of a student. But I suggest you to use A4 papers, not index cards. (Essay #22)
In the above two examples, writers put themselves at the center of the writing, exerting control over it and establishing a presence within it, using the authoritative verbs, suggest and argue. That is, the two students are likely to feel themselves to be not just ‘writers’ but also ‘authors’ who give their own arguments with authority.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study firstly has shown a detailed notion of six types of writer identity behind the first person pronoun, ‘I’, and then examined the nature of 31 pieces of students’ writing, applying the framework of the writer identity. Out of the six roles of identity, the category of opinion-holder was the most frequently used one, taking 34 (36.2%). On the other hand, the role of existentialist was the least used writer identity with just 6 instances (6.4%). From these findings, all of the six types of writer identity are constructed with ‘I’, and they affect a person’s literacy practices. This connects to Besnier’s (1990, 1991) contribution: that different forms of literacy foreground different aspects of identity, and that these can be tracked to specific discoursal choices in written language.

This study has explored the wide-ranging nature of the identities that ‘I’ can represent. I, as both a teacher and researcher, suggest that it is vital for students and teachers alike to be aware of the very real presence of these different ways in which the first person pronoun, ‘I’, can be used in writing. An adequate approach to the teaching of writing needs to pay attention to all the six meanings of writer identity: existentialist, guide, architect, recounter, opinion-holder, and originator. It is useful both to distinguish between these six aspects of writer identity, and to discuss the ways in which they are interrelated in writing. For example, a discussion of subject positioning would focus on socially available possibilities for person-hood (existentialist), and would also include attention to the writer’s sense of how s/he is leading the reader (guide) by structuring his or her writing (architect), of being positioned as describing writing process (recount) and/or sharing his or her opinions (opinion-holder), and normally having ideas or knowledge claims (originator) in the last part of writing.

For students, an understanding of the choices available to them may help them in deciding how best to present themselves in their writing. Four students who avoided using ‘I’ maybe did so for a certain purpose, although the reasons could not be found here. For teachers, the findings of this study imply the need to recognize that the question is not simply whether or not the first person pronoun, ‘I’, should be allowed or encouraged in writing. Rather, the issue is about which specific type of identity, if any, writers should use, when, and for what purpose. In order to help students learn how to negotiate their identities through writing, as Ivanic (1998) suggest, it is necessary to build the teaching of writing
around writing tasks with real communicative purposes for real readers. This can include "writing for teachers, but it must be writing which will be read and assessed, on the grounds of content not just accuracy" (p. 339). Just as this study was based around personal essays which were part of coursework in a university classroom, rather than tasks which were set up specifically for the purpose of the research, so the teaching of writing needs to be socially situated (see Ivanic, 1998). This may also involve recognizing that the writer in a text is seen less in the presence versus the absence of ‘I’ per se than in the presence of ‘I’.

I suggest that any writing education program at the university, in particular to EFL writing program, should include issues of writer identity and draw the attention of students because their language choices reflect who they are in their writing in an EFL context. In EFL writing classrooms, students need to discuss the writer-reader relationship explicitly from the point of view of self-representation, because too often an understanding of ‘the reader’ is limited to issues of background knowledge and expectations. Thus, as Ivanic (1998) believes, it is worth both mentioning this as an element in the writing process, and focusing on it during writing conferences and written feedback.

We as teachers need to find approaches to teaching identity in which we are ‘leading students to a fuller awareness of the repertoire of identities they already own.’ (p. 145), as Woodworth (1994) suggests. While the teaching of identity entails far more than creating such awareness, I hope this study is a helpful starting point that can contribute to identity pedagogy. If we, as writing teachers, improve the understanding of identities in students’ written texts it will be helpful to alert and to sensitize the complexities of student writing in our own teaching contexts.

Of course, this study does not say that other students would use ‘I’ in the same way that the students in this particular study did so. It might be difficult to generalize a result with respect to identity from the thirty-one Korean EFL students, because they bring different backgrounds to the identity equation. The present study, therefore, suggests the need for a further study on how writer identities differ in other written discourse context such as an academic journal article in order to reveal certain types of relations between the writer identity in non-academic and academic writing, dealing with large numbers of participants.

REFERENCES


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