

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTION IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH SCIENTIFIC TEXTS

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Scientific discourse is usually thought to be impersonal. In fact, most style manuals encourage academics to use impersonal constructions in order to avoid making explicit their authorial presence in the texts. However, recent research has shown that in scientific writing the choice to announce the writer's presence in the discourse, mainly by means of the use of first person pronouns, is a rhetorical strategy frequently used by the members of the international English-speaking community for promotion and gaining accreditation for research claims. In this study, I have analysed the distribution and frequency of occurrence of first person pronouns in research article abstracts written in English and Spanish in the social sciences disciplines, in an attempt to reveal whether there is cross-linguistic variation in the use of personal attribution in the texts. I have also examined the possible semantic references and different socio-pragmatic functions that these pronouns may perform. The results showed a high tendency to impersonality in both languages. This indicates that most academics in English and Spanish favour strategies of depersonalisation: the use of agentless passive and impersonal constructions, which function as hedging devices that diminish the author's presence in the texts, avoiding personal responsibility for their claims.

1. Introduction

The traditional position on scientific or academic writing has regarded that researchers should report their knowledge claims in an objective manner, avoiding the use of personal involvement, in order to gain acceptance for their work. As Hyland (2001) has noted, the use of impersonality has been proposed by most manuals and textbooks as a means of demonstrating a grasp of scholarly persuasion and allowing the research to speak directly to the reader in an unmediated way.

However, from the point of view of exploring interaction in academic texts, a great deal of recent research (e.g. Ivanič 1998; Tang & John 1999; Kuo 1999; Hyland 2001) has suggested a growing trend away from the traditional notion of scientific writing as distant and impersonal, towards a recognition that this type of writing need not be totally devoid of the writer's presence. In fact, the choice of announcing the writer's presence in academic discourse is seen as a rhetorical strategy increasingly used by the members of the international English-speaking community for promoting and gaining accreditation for research claims. Cherry (1998) acknowledges the important role of self-representation in written discourse. This author argues that self-representation in writing is a subtle and complex multidimensional phenomenon that skilled writers control and manipulate to their rhetorical advantage, and that decisions about self-portrayal vary according to the way in which writers characterise their audience and other factors in the rhetorical situation. Cherry traces the origins of self-portrayal in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1954). For Aristotle, *ethos* is one of the three means of persuasion (*pathos*, *logos* and *ethos*), which refers to the need for rhetors to portray themselves in their speeches as having a good moral character, and a concern for the audience in order to achieve credibility and thereby secure persuasion. Thus, an important aspect of *ethos* involves assessing the characteristics of an audience and constructing the discourse in such a way as to portray oneself as embodying those same characteristics (Cherry, 1998: 388). Recent work in the social construction of knowledge and the sociology of science (e.g. Gilbert & Mulkay 1984) have helped to establish the view that scientific and technical discourse are inherently rhetorical. The basic idea of this perspective is that scientific facts or knowledge are not discovered by individuals in isolation but established through consensus-building discourse in scientific communities. Therefore, self-representation is expected to play a significant role in this type of discourse. Groom (2000), in his analysis of manifest intertextuality in academic writing, shows the importance of making explicit the textual voice of the writer him/herself, and encourages writers to clearly signal when they are reporting the voice of an antecedent author or when they are expressing their own views. Kuo (1999), in his empirical study of personal pronouns in scientific journal articles, investigates

how the use of personal pronouns may reveal writers' perceptions of their own role in research and their relationship with expected readers as well as the scientific-academic community. The author points out that a knowledge of the strategic use of personal pronouns is of great value to writers as it allows them to emphasise their personal contributions to their field or research and to seek cooperation and stress solidarity with expected readers and their disciplines. This view is reinforced by Hyland (2001). In his study of personal attribution in research articles in eight different disciplines ranging from hard to soft sciences, Hyland reports a high proportion of personal pronouns in social sciences and humanities (soft-knowledge disciplines). The author concludes that the high proportion of personal pronouns in scientific texts seems to be a valuable rhetorical strategy which can help construct a credible academic by presenting an authorial self firmly established in the norms of the discipline and reflecting an appropriate degree of confidence and authority. Tang & John (1999) also recognise that a writer's identity in academic texts is created by and revealed through a combination of his/her many discursal choices, mainly the writer's use of first person pronouns. These authors consider that it is vital for students and teachers to be aware of the very real presence of the different ways in which the first person pronoun can be used in academic writing, and that there is an alternative to the traditional position, while still leaving to writers the ultimate decision of which position to subscribe to.

Thus, in order to establish themselves as competent and credible members of the discourse community, writers may choose to strongly make explicit their authorial presence in the text by taking full responsibility for their claims (mainly with the use of first person pronouns) or to use an impersonal style, which shows that they are, in Myers' (1989, 4) terms, 'humble servants of the discipline'. These two opposing views often cause confusion both to novice English-speaking academics and learners of English as a second language, regarding which decision to adopt. What seems to be clear is that writer's decisions are related to social practices of a specific disciplinary community, and these rhetorical conventions may vary cross-culturally.

With a primary pedagogical purpose in mind, in this study I have carried out a comparative analysis of the distribution and frequency of occurrence of first person pronouns in research article abstracts written in English and Spanish in the social sciences. I have also examined the possible semantic references and the different socio-pragmatic functions that the first person pronouns may perform and have presented a scheme showing the various degrees of authorial presence linked to the discourse functions. The ultimate aim of the study has been an attempt to reveal whether this rhetorical strategy is preferred over the use of an impersonal style, and whether there is cross-linguistic variation in the use of personal attribution in the English and Spanish texts.

2. Text Corpus

A total number of 160 RA (research article) abstracts written in English and Spanish were selected at random for the present study. Since the literature on academic research has reported the existence of generic variation across disciplinary fields, the sample here was restricted to two related disciplines representative of the experimental social sciences: Phonetics and Psychology. I have focused this study on the particular field of the social sciences (a soft knowledge domain) due to the fact that most genre analysts have largely concentrated their research on abstracts from the hard or applied sciences. In contrastive studies of this type it is important to have a similar amount of corpus in order to validate findings. With the purpose of verifying the equivalence of both groups of abstracts in terms of the average number of words, sentences and paragraphs, I carried out a preliminary quantitative analysis of the texts in both languages. The results of these analyses showed that the average length and mean number of sentences are slightly higher in the English texts, although this difference is not significant enough across the two groups as to consider it a relevant factor to be taken into account in this study.

2. 1. The English corpus

The overall corpus in English is made up of 80 abstracts selected at random from publications in international journals in a period of 15 years (1985 - 1999) to control for rapid changes

within any of the disciplines. In order to have a high-quality representation of texts, the sample in this study was drawn from highly prestigious journals of the social sciences: 40 abstracts were selected from two leading international journals in the field of Phonetics: *Phonetica* and *Journal of Phonetics*. Likewise, the other 40 abstracts were selected from two international journals in the field of Psychology: *British Journal of Psychology* and *Applied Psycholinguistics*. For the selection of these particular journals I primarily considered their importance for the disciplinary community by following the recommendation of specialist informants. I also took into account the frequency of use of these journals in the library of my Faculty. Another approach that I could have considered was the ranking listing of journals by impact factor in the Journal Citation Report (Social Science edition). Although this approach seems to be adequate for the selection of the international journals in English, I ultimately decided that it is not appropriate in a cross-linguistic study as the one reported here, considering that the Spanish journals are not indexed in this list. As for the representativeness of the texts, I took for granted that all the writers, whether native speakers of the English language or not, totally conformed to the rhetorical practices of the international English-speaking academic community, as the abstracts (and associated research papers) had been accepted for publication by the English-speaking editorial board.

In a preliminary stage of this study, I considered the possibility of analysing the two disciplines (Phonetics and Psychology) as different groups of texts. However, a survey analysis of the pragmatic feature under study revealed that there was no significant variation between the two disciplines in English as to consider them as separate groups. Consequently, in this study, both disciplines are regarded as a single group for the purposes of the analysis.

2. 2. The Spanish corpus

Another total of 80 abstracts, which constitutes the Spanish corpus, was similarly selected from leading Spanish journals in the disciplines of Phonetics and Psychology. As regards the selection of the Spanish journals some limitations arose mainly in the process of selection of the Phonetics texts: There are only two existing journals in this discipline in Spain. The first is *Folia Fonética*, which only published one issue in 1984. From it I drew the five abstracts that accompanied the only five research articles written in Spanish (the remaining abstracts and the associated papers were written in Catalan). The second journal is *Estudios de Fonética Experimental*, which published its first issue in 1985. Since then it has been regularly publishing one volume per year, with the exception of the years 1987, 1989, 1991 and 1992. However, I should note that the first volumes (I, II, III and IV), corresponding to 1985, 1986, 1988 and 1990 respectively, did not have an abstract accompanying the articles. It was volume V, corresponding to 1993 which firstly contained abstracts together with the articles. Therefore, the other 35 abstracts out of the total of 40 that make up the sample of Phonetics texts were drawn at random from this second journal, covering the years of publication 1993 - 1999.

As the scientific community of Spanish academics doing research on Psychology is relatively larger than the Spanish scientific community of Phonetics, it was not surprising to find a greater variety of journals specialised in publishing psychological articles with their respective abstracts. Following the selection criteria described above for the selection of the journals in English, the other 40 abstracts that constitute the corpus in Spanish were also randomly selected from two of the most prestigious Spanish journals in the discipline of Psychology: *Psicológica* and *Análisis y Modificación de la Conducta*, published in the period of time comprising the years 1985-1999.

As preliminary analyses suggested that there were no significant differences between the results found in each of the disciplines, all the Spanish abstracts were also considered to belong to a single group representing the area of experimental social sciences, thus providing a Spanish corpus of a total of 80 abstracts drawn from four different journals. Although there is no exact equivalence between the English and Spanish Phonetics texts regarding the years of publication and number of instances drawn from each journal, in my view, this aspect is not significant enough to indicate that we do not have an analogous corpus in English and Spanish.

3. Frequencies of Occurrence and Forms of First Person Pronouns

The results of the analysis showed that both in English and Spanish the use of first person pronouns does not seem to be a predominant feature of abstract writing in the social sciences disciplines, although the findings also revealed that abstracts are not totally devoid of authorial presence: The total number of abstracts in English containing first person pronouns is 19 (23.75%). On the other hand, the total number of Spanish abstracts which show instances of first personal pronouns is 24 (30%).

Overall, there were 48 forms of first person pronouns in the English texts, as presented in Table 1. No instances of first person singular pronouns (*I, me, mine*) were found in our sample.

Table 1. Frequency of occurrence and forms of first person pronouns in the English abstracts

<i>we</i>	<i>our</i>	<i>us</i>	Totals
38	6	4	48

Table 2. Frequency of occurrence and forms of first person pronouns in the Spanish abstracts

<i>yo*</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>nosotro s*</i>	<i>nuestro/ s</i>	<i>nos</i>	Totals
6	1	0	40	4	6	57

As regards the Spanish corpus, there were 57 expressions of first person pronouns distributed in the forms that can be seen in Table 2. It is necessary to mention here that there were no explicit occurrences of the pronouns *yo/nosotros*, since this would convey an emphatic meaning. The first person singular/plural forms are marked in all cases with the verbal ending (e.g. *realicé/realizamos*).

As can be inferred from Tables 1 and 2, the most frequently used pronoun in both languages is the plural form *we-nosotros*, which may have different semantic references and perform various discursual roles as discussed in the following section.

4. Semantic References and Discourse Functions of First Person Pronouns

A further analysis of the cases of first person pronoun revealed that they have a number of semantic references and perform multiple socio-pragmatic functions in the abstracts. Following earlier studies (Ivanic 1998; Kuo 1999; Tang & John 1999; and Hyland 2001), I attempted to establish, in this chapter, a classification which shows the degree of authorial presence through a particular instance of the use of the pronoun.

A first person plural pronoun can have either *inclusive* or *exclusive* semantic reference. In the classification proposed here I have made a strict separation between these two broad categories:

1. **Inclusive** first personal pronoun, which refers to both writer and reader.
2. **Exclusive** first personal pronoun, which refers only to writers.

1. Inclusive

This role represents a generic use of the first person pronoun, realised as the plural we / us or nosotros (implicit in the verb ending) / nos, that writers use to refer to a large group of

people. In this function, far from giving the reader information about the writer, the first person pronoun reduces the writer to a non-entity. Therefore, in terms of the potential authorial presence displayed in the text, this is the least powerful role that the first person pronoun can perform. For pedagogical purposes, I have divided this category into two subtypes:

Inclusive 1.A. This represents the weakest indication of authorial presence through first person pronouns. In these cases, the pronouns refer to people in general, as in the following examples:

A second major gap is in defining the kinds of task on which discrepancies may be expected to occur, since in every day life we do quite frequently expect people to know what they are doing. (Engl. Psych. 3)

The faces of twins present us with a very complex visual task. How do we get from the stage of being unable to distinguish between the twins, to being able to identify each twin correctly and readily by name?. (Engl. Psych. 20)

In the English sample there were 10 instances of this function distributed in two abstracts, whereas in the Spanish texts no examples of this role were found.

Inclusive 1.B. In this other subcategory, the plural pronouns refer to a smaller group of people, namely the members of the discourse community, as in the following examples:

Si tenemos en cuenta, tal como se deriva de un gran número de investigaciones, que la conducta antisocial en la adolescencia (...), podríamos inferir que... (Sp. Psych. 33)

Voiceless velar stops may become palatoalveolar affricates before front vowels (...). Nevertheless, we do not have an adequate understanding of how this sound change takes place. (Engl. Phon. 17)

This function may represent an attempt on the writers' part to signal their desired membership in the discourse community. This can be seen as if the writers display knowledge of the facts and opinions that are generally accepted by the other members of the scientific community. This use shortens the distance between writers and readers and emphasises solidarity with readers, indicating shared knowledge between the writer and the reader, and a presupposition of the writer's acceptance in the discourse community. Three instances of this function were found in the English texts and two instances in Spanish.

2. Exclusive

This second form of semantic reference has a greater degree of authorial presence as it refers exclusively to the writer himself/herself. Several roles performed by the first person pronoun can be described. These roles or functions reflect the specific communicative purpose of the writer in a certain part of the abstract. In the sample analysis, I found five different roles, which I have labeled as follows:

- 2.1. *The author as describer of the research.*
- 2.2. *The author as experiment conductor.*
- 2.3. *The author as opinion holder.*
- 2.4. *The author as cautious claim maker.*
- 2.5. *The author as fully-committed claim maker.*

Each of these socio-pragmatic functions has been divided into two subtypes:

- A. When *we* is used in single-authored texts instead of *I*.
- B. When *we* is used in texts written by more than one author.

The reason for this division is that I consider that in type A there is a lower degree of authorial presence than in type B, in terms of situating these two options on a continuum. The decision to use *we* by writers of single-authored texts arguably indicates an intention to reduce personal attribution although, according to Hyland (2001), it is not always the self-effacing device it is often thought to be. This author cites Pennycook (1994, 174) who observes that "there is an instant claiming of authority and communality in the use of *we*". Hyland goes on to argue that the distancing which attends the plural meaning seems to create a temporary dominance by giving the writer the right to speak with authority. Therefore, using this strategy, writers can simultaneously reduce their personal intrusion and yet emphasise the importance that should be given to their claims.

This appears to be a relatively frequent strategy used by the Spanish writers in the texts: In six abstracts written by a single author, the writer decided to use a *we*-form with the function described in opposition to the only case found in the English abstracts:

We used an existing data base of vowel sounds (...)
and we compared... (Eng. Phon. 10)

As seen in this example, apart from withdrawing from his claims in the abstract, another possible reason for this usage, as suggested by Hyland (2001), might be that the writer is reporting research carried out by a team, and so he could be acknowledging the part played by his colleagues. In any case, it is clear that there is some kind of reduction of authorial presence when a *we*-form is used in single-authored texts; therefore, I considered it convenient to maintain this distinction in each of the roles proposed above.

2.1. The author as describer of the research.

This usage of the first person pronoun foregrounds the person who writes, organises, structures the discourse and outlines the material in the abstract. This function is also related to the representation of the author as stating the goal or purpose of the research. This is a fairly non-threatening role, as the writer informs but does not actually make claims.

2.1.A. No examples of *we*-forms with this function performed in single-authored texts were found in English. In the Spanish sample I found five instances of this role performed in the Introduction section of the abstracts written by single-authors. Four of the cases corresponded to Move 3 - step 1A/B (*Outlining purposes/Announcing present research*), in terms of Swales' (1990) CARS model¹, as in the following example:

Presentamos aquí dos de los objetivos de esta
investigación: ... (Sp. Phon. 27)

On one occasion, this role corresponded to Move 3 - step 3 (*Indicating the research article structure*):

¹ Swales (1990) analysed the introduction section of English research articles from several disciplines. He postulates three underlying move-step patterns, known as Create a Research Space (CARS). Swales's (1990:141) model shows preferred sequences of moves and steps, which are largely predictable in article introductions, and which are reflected, to some extent, in the introduction of the abstracts analysed in the present study (see, Martin-Martin, 2002).

Presentamos una descripción del programa que incluye los componentes del programa, el dise_o, los resultados y conclusiones. (Sp. Psych. 37)

2.1.B. This is the function most frequently used by the writers in both languages: There were 14 instances in the English texts and 12 in Spanish. All cases were used in the Introduction unit of the abstracts, in which the authors present the purpose of their research (Move 3 - step 1A/B). Typical linguistic exponents are: we examine..., we report..., our goal is..., we investigated...; el objetivo de mi trabajo ha sido..., hemos realizado..., exponemos..., analizamos....

2.2. The author as experiment conductor.

In this function, the writer uses the first person pronouns to describe or recount the various steps of the research process. This work done by the researcher prior to the writing includes such things as interviewing subjects, collecting data and so on. This role typically occurs in the Methods section of the abstracts and is often signalled by the pairing of the first person pronoun with what Halliday (1994) calls material process verbs (i.e. *work, collect, interview*) used in the past tense. Author presence here serves to reassure the reader of the writer's professional credentials through a demonstrable familiarity with disciplinary practices. Furthermore, it highlights the part the writer has played in the research process, which is frequently represented as having no agents by means of the use of impersonal constructions.

2.2.A. There were two instances in English of this function in one single-authored abstract, and five instances in Spanish:

We used an existing data base (...). We compared the results with data on... (Eng. Phon. 10)

Llevamos a cabo tres experimentos paralelos, con un total de 129 sujetos: 84 hablantes nativos de chino mandarín que clasificamos en 5 niveles... (Sp. Phon. 33)

2.2.B. The frequency of occurrence of this usage is fairly high in both languages. There were 8 cases in the English abstracts and 7 in Spanish. Some of the examples found in the Methods unit are the following: we compared..., we varied..., we presented..., we asked...; recogí..., grabé..., hemos establecido..., hemos realizado....

2.3. The author as opinion holder.

The writer, in this function, shares an opinion, view or attitude (for example, by expressing agreement or interest) with regard to known information. This role co-occurs with verbs of cognition (e.g. *think, believe*). It seems that, using these verbs the authors display appropriate respect for alternatives and invites the reader to participate in an interactive discussion, but also express certainty and conviction. Therefore, this function allows writers to make their claims by conveying caution with commitment.

2.3.A. No instances of this function were found in any of the single-authored abstracts in English or Spanish.

2.3.B. The only example with this function was found in one of the abstracts in Spanish in the Introduction unit, corresponding to Move 2 - step 1A (*Counter-claiming*), in Swales' (1990:141) model. In this instance, the writers express disagreement with the work of a previous author and make a claim using a verb of cognition in the first person, with the purpose of displaying authorial presence which expresses commitment and, at the same time, shows respect for the reader's opinion:

(...) creemos que no poseen dos modos diferenciados y que constituyen una sola clase. (Sp. Phon. 25)

2.4. The author as cautious claim maker.

The writers use this function to establish a more personal sense of authority based on confidence and command when showing the results of their research and drawing the conclusions. However, the degree of authorial presence is somewhat diminished by the use of first person pronouns co-occurring with lexical devices such as modal auxiliary verbs (*may, might, can/poder*), semi-auxiliaries like *to seem, to appear/parecer*; epistemic verbs like *to suggest/sugerir, to indicate/indicar*; or modal adverbs, nouns and adjectives (*perhaps/quizás, possibility/posibilidad, possible/posible*), which perform the discourse function of hedging a claim. As recent research has shown (e.g. Salager-Meyer 1994; Hyland 1996), hedging is a strategy frequently used in academic discourse as a means of mitigating the writer's responsibility for the claims expressed. Hedges show modesty by tentative statements and invite readers to draw inferences by themselves and, simultaneously, they express caution to minimise possible criticism from other researchers.

2.4.A. There were no examples in the English and Spanish texts of first person pronouns with this function performed in single-authored abstracts.

2.4.B. In the English abstracts there were three instances of this function and two instances in Spanish:

Our findings *suggest* that... (Eng. Phon. 28)

Our results *indicate* that... (Eng. Psych. 35)

(...) con lo cual podemos pensar que los índices invariantes hay que buscarlos *probablemente* ... (Sp. Phon. 24)

Sugerimos por tanto, que... (Sp. Psych. 5)

2.5. The author as fully-committed claim maker.

This role represents the highest degree of authorial presence that a writer can perform with the use of first person pronouns, as it involves the writers claiming authority and exhibiting some form of ownership for the claims stated in the text. It also shows that writers perceive themselves as competent researchers who have the right and ability to originate new ideas. As Hyland (2001) has pointed out, this function serves to foreground explicitly the writer's distinctive contribution and full commitment to his/her position. This use also suggests the conscious exploitation of a strategy to manage the readers awareness of the writer's role, his/her attempt to take a position in relation to the community and to seek credit for that position.

2.5.A. Most of the single-authored abstracts in Spanish exhibited this usage. There were 12 instances in the Spanish texts (the highest frequency of occurrence). However, as opposed to these findings, in the English abstracts no cases of this use were reported. In the Spanish sample, all cases in which the writers used this function occurred in the Results and Conclusion/Discussion sections of the abstracts, which is where the writers make the highest level of claims:

Hemos conseguido demostrar que... (Sp. Phon. 26)

El análisis acústico (...) corroboró nuestras expectativas de que... (Sp. Phon. 37)

No encontramos relación alguna entre... (Sp. Psych. 21)

2.5.B. In both the English and Spanish texts the frequency of occurrence of this role was quite high in relation to the total number of examples (there were 8 cases in English and 11 in Spanish). Two instances in English occurred in the Introduction section (Move 1) of one of the abstracts, in which the authors show their knowledge of their research topic and establish the relevance of their work:

We have shown in earlier work that (...). More recently, we demonstrated that... (Eng. Phon. 21)

The rest of the instances always occurred in the Results and Conclusion/ Discussion sections of the abstracts, in which the authors directly make their knowledge claims, displaying explicitly their authorial presence:

Our study shows that... (Eng. Phon. 3)

We found no evidence that (...). We concluded that... (Engl. Psych. 4)

We did not find... (Eng. Psych. 33)

Hemos encontrado evidencias... (Sp. Phon. 19)

Nuestros datos revelan que... (Sp. Psych. 7)

Sostenemos que... (Sp. Psych. 36)

It is also worth noting that there was an example in the Spanish corpus in which the writers did not use an implicit first person pronoun to refer to themselves but a self-mentioning term (*los autores*):

La inconsistencia de algunos resultados junto con (...), son factores que llevan a los autores a cuestionar la hipótesis de que EE esté determinado socioculturalmente. (Sp. Psych. 30)

The six semantic roles and their variants that I have described above can be represented along a continuum (Fig. 1) in which the first function (*Inclusive 1.A.*) shows the lowest degree of authorial presence, whereas the last function (*Exclusive 2.5.B. - The author as a fully-committed claim maker*) shows the highest degree of authorial presence:

Fig. 1. Continuum representing the degrees of authorial presence from lowest towards highest.

<p style="text-align: center;">INCL.1A> 1B> EXCL.2.1.A.> 2.1.B.> 2.2.A.> 2.2.B.> 2.3.A.> 2.3.B.> 2.4.A.> 2.4.B.> 2.5.A.> 2.5.B.</p>
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The frequency of occurrence and overall distribution of the various roles in both languages are presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Frequency of occurrence and distribution of discourse functions in the abstracts.

DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS	ENGLISH	SPANISH
1. <i>Inclusive-we</i>		
1.A.		0
1.B.	10 (20.8%) 3 (6.2%)	2 (3.5%)
2. <i>Exclusive-we</i>		
2.1. <i>The author as describer of the research</i>		
2.1.A.		5 (8.7%)

2.1.B.	0	12 (21%)
2.2. <i>The author as experiment conductor</i>	14 (29.1%)	
2.2.A.		5 (8.7%)
2.2.B.	2 (4.1%)	7 (12.2%)
2.3. <i>The author as opinion holder</i>	8 (16.6%)	
2.3.A.		0
2.3.B.	0	1 (1.7%)
2.4. <i>The author as cautious claim maker</i>	0	
2.4.A.		0
2.4.B.	0	2 (3.5%)
2.5. <i>The author as fully-committed claim maker</i>	3 (6.2%)	
2.5.A.		12 (21%)
2.5.B.	0	11 (19.2%)
	8 (16.6%)	
TOTALS	48 instances	57 instances

5. Concluding remarks

We have seen that out of the total of 80 English abstracts analysed in this study, 19 presented instances of the various uses of first person pronouns (23.75%), and out of the 80 abstracts in Spanish, there were 24 texts (30%) containing instances of these uses in the texts. This indicates that this is not a prevalent strategy in English and Spanish abstract writing in the field of social sciences. However, this also reveals that this rhetorical practice is operative to some extent in both languages, and that some writers, in fact, make use of some of the several functions which are performed by first person pronouns and which indicate the various degrees of personal attribution as presented on the continuum which I have proposed in this study.

As can be inferred from Table 3 above, out of the total of 48 instances of the first person pronoun in the English abstracts 14 fell into the category of 2.1.B. (*The author as describer of the research*), which represents 29.1% of the total number of occurrences. This function was also used in 21% of the Spanish texts: There were 12 instances out of the total of 57 uses of first person pronouns. Moreover, in both languages, there is a relatively high frequency of occurrence of the use of function 2.5.B. (*The author as fully-committed claim maker*): 8 cases were reported in English (16.6%) and 11 cases in Spanish (19.2%).

A striking difference between the English and Spanish abstracts is related to the high number of uses of first person pronouns in the English texts with the function of *Inclusive-we* referring to people in general (10 instances) in contrast to no cases in Spanish. This difference can be explained by the fact that 9 of the instances occurred in a single abstract (Eng. Psych. 20), which might be considered as atypical. But the most significant difference can be seen in the higher frequency of single-authored texts in Spanish as regards the use of *exclusive-we* performing all the five functions, especially 2.5.A. (*The author as a fully-committed claim maker*) of which there were 12 examples in Spanish (21%), whereas in English there were no instances of this use. Moreover, the total number of examples of first person pronouns performing this last function (2.5.A+B) was 23 in Spanish (40.3%), in opposition to the 8 examples found in the English texts (16.6%). This indicates, on the one hand, that the writers in Spanish tend to display a higher degree of authorial presence in the abstracts by stating their claims directly, which reflects a higher degree of commitment and authority; and, on the other hand, that they favour the strategy of using *we*-forms in single authored texts as a way of claiming authority and reducing personal attribution at the same time. The higher tendency among Spanish writers to make explicit their authorial presence in the texts by taking full responsibility for their claims (function 2.5.A) can be explained by the fact that the number of members belonging to the Spanish scientific community in the social sciences, and particularly in the fields of Phonetics and Psychology, is very small and, consequently, the risk of criticism from their peers is considerably reduced.

A further analysis of the texts showed that writers both in English and Spanish favour the use of strategies of depersonalisation across all the structural units of the abstracts, mainly agentless passive and impersonal constructions (e.g. *An attempt was made to see...*, *No evidence was found...*, *Perceptions tests were carried out...*, *It was observed/concluded that...*; *Se ha efectuado el análisis de...*, *Se obtuvieron...*, *Se ha procedido...*, *Se concluye/ se demuestra que...*, *Se observó...*), and impersonal active constructions in which the personal subject is replaced by some non-human entity (e.g. *The paper deals with...*, *The results reveal/ indicated...*, *The discussion considers...*; *El objetivo de este artículo es...*, *Los resultados mostraron/ sugieren...*).

The fact that the writers in both languages prefer to use impersonality strategies instead of making explicit their authorial presence by using first person pronouns may reveal something important about the way they perceive themselves and their relation with their audience. As Myers (1989) has stated, in scientific writing the social distance between individuals must be treated as very great. The community as a whole is supposed to be vastly more powerful than any individual in it; thus one researcher must always humble himself/herself before the community as a whole (Myers 1989: 4). This suggests that, in these interactions, making very explicit the author's presence in the texts might be considered a Face Threatening Act (FTA), in terms of Brown & Levinson (1987), as "the making of a claim threatens the general scientific audience because it is a demand for communally granted credit. The claim also threatens the negative face of other researchers because it implies a restriction on what they can do now." (Myers, 1989:5). Therefore, this might be one reason why the writers in both languages favour the use of impersonality strategies that function as politeness/hedging devices which mitigate the FTAs involved in the use of personal attribution, particularly in the English texts where there is more competition among the members of the international discourse community to publish the results of their research.

It may also be speculated that some academics in both languages may be avoiding the use of first person pronouns simply because of the preconceived notion that scientific writing should be distant and impersonal. However, as we have shown, this use may contribute to the kind of interaction that the writer establishes with the reader, as this rhetorical practice represents an efficient strategy to gain acceptance and credibility in the discourse community by contributing to constructing a more engaged and committed presence in the texts.

As previous studies of the use of person pronouns have concluded, the results of these analyses imply the need to recognise that the question is not simply whether or not the use of first person pronouns should be allowed or encouraged in academic writing. Rather, the issue becomes which specific function of the first person pronoun, if any, writers should use, when, and for what purposes. In this sense, any writing education programme at university level should make students aware of the different rhetorical options that are available in academic discourse to represent the various degrees of authorial presence. It should also show students the differences in the use of first person pronouns across languages (e.g. English and Spanish). In this regard, contrastive studies of this type can be particularly helpful to Spanish postgraduate students and novice academics who wish to obtain international recognition through their publications and that, therefore, need to know the rhetorical conventions which are favoured by the English-speaking discourse community.

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