

Self-mentions in anthropology and history research articles: Variation between and within disciplines

MCGRATH, Lisa <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2598-4942>>

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Self-mentions in anthropology and history research articles: Variation between and within disciplines

Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the deployment of self-mentions in 18 history and 18 anthropology published research articles. 'I' was used more frequently in the anthropology articles than in history articles, a finding that can be traced to the knowledge-making practices of the disciplines. However, considerable intra-disciplinary variation was also observed, both in terms of frequency of self-mentions per article and the author roles adopted via the use of the first-person subject pronoun. Based on the results, I argue that there is a need to raise students' awareness of intra- as well as interdisciplinary variation in academic discourse, particularly in the humanities.

Key words: self-mentions, genre, research articles, variation; history; anthropology

1. Introduction

EAP studies have contrasted disciplinary genre conventions at either end of the hard versus soft domain continuum (Becher & Trowler, 2001), revealing variation on the macro and micro levels of text. For example, Hyland's work (e.g. 2001; 2004; 2005) has been particularly influential in identifying disciplinary textual patterns, such as his corpus investigation into personal pronoun usage across a range of fields (Hyland, 2002a). The view that differences across academic genres can be drawn along disciplinary lines has been integral to our understanding of academic discourse, and has provided a rationale for discursive patterns observed in genre analyses and guidance for students of academic writing.

However, disciplinary discursive norms or conventions can be overstated. For example, considerable intra-disciplinary variation has been observed in the rhetorical structure of RAs in some disciplines (e.g. Ozturk, 2007; Kuteeva & McGrath, 2015), and in the use of self-mentions in political science RAs (Harwood, 2006). Based on his findings, Harwood advises caution when making generalizations along disciplinary lines.

As Bondi (2007, p. 50) observes, more “finer grained studies of closer disciplines” are needed, particularly as “students are often exposed to the discourse of a variety of disciplines addressing similar problems, and thus need to develop literacy in neighbouring disciplinary fields”.

Postmodernism, the dismantling of disciplinary boundaries and the creation of interdisciplinary degrees (Hyland, 2009) adds another dimension, rendering investigations into the genre conventions of disciplines with theoretical and epistemological overlaps more pertinent; for example, Starfield and Ravelli’s (2006) exploration of self-mentions focuses on sociology and history PhD thesis introductory sections, and in particular, those which fall under the umbrella of the “new humanities”. New humanities theses are typically “inter or trans-disciplinary”, “adopt a critical perspective”, are “self-reflexive” and “informed by an awareness of the role of discourse in constructing knowledge” (p. 223). Their study develops a taxonomy of author roles adopted via first-person subject pronouns, and again reveals some of the complexity of drawing disciplinary lines.

Disciplinarity has been extensively revisited in a recent article by Trowler (2014), in which he questions the strong essentialism of existing taxonomies (e.g. Becher & Trowler, 2001; Bernstein, 1999) which inform EAP genre analyses (e.g. Hyland, 2005; McGrath & Kuteeva 2012). Trowler argues that given the reduction in the generative power of disciplines in postmodern, interdisciplinary academia, disciplinary practices should not be viewed in terms of defining core characteristics, but rather facets of “family resemblance” (Wittgenstein, 1953). In

other words, a discipline will display various characteristics, but none of these characteristics are defining or necessary. ‘Families’ share clusters of features which make them recognizable, even though each member may not share all features. History is used to illustrate: “[A]cademic historians [...] may display very different characteristics in different universities, though there are still some common features between them which render them recognizable as historians” (Trowler, 2014, p. 1723).

The explanatory potential of family resemblance for ESP genre theory has also been discussed (e.g. Paltridge, 1997; Swales, 1990). As Swales observes with reference to prototype theory (Rosch, 1975), genres vary in their typicality: some texts are more representative of a genre in terms of macro and micro features than others. Nonetheless, instantiations of genres display sufficient common textual features to enable the discourse community (Swales, 1990) to recognize disciplinary membership. However, a family resemblance approach implies that no particular rhetorical or textual (structural or lexico-grammatical) feature or patterning would be defining or necessary.

The aim of the present study is to explore disciplinary genre conventions by building on previous research into self-mentions. The roles authors adopt via the first-person subject pronoun are investigated in RAs from two closely related disciplines: anthropology and history. First-person pronouns were selected for investigation, as previous research has suggested that disciplinary preferences are apparent both in the frequency of 'I' (e.g. Hyland, 2005), and the roles authors adopt via the subject pronoun (e.g. Flottum et al. 2006). Furthermore, the view that frequent use of "I" in academic texts is stylistically inappropriate continues to be held by some novice academic writers across fields. More specifically, my study poses the following research questions:

RQ 1 Which roles do authors of the history and anthropology RAs in the study adopt via the first-person subject pronoun?

RQ 2 What (if any) disciplinary genre conventions in terms of first-person subject pronoun use emerge?

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on self-mentions in various disciplinary, generic and linguistic contexts. Section 3 describes how the RAs in the study were compiled and presents Starfield and Ravelli's (2006) taxonomy of author roles as the analytical framework. Section 4, fleshes out and problematizes my interpretation of the framework, and in Section 5, the results of the analysis are presented. Drawing on family resemblance, I argue that in less discursively "rigid" (Gnutzmann & Rabe, 2014, p. 24) disciplines such as history and anthropology, deviation from textual 'norms' is to be expected, if indeed these norms can be identified in the first place. Therefore, a focus on intra- rather than interdisciplinary variation to identify the range of discursal options open to our students may be more pertinent.

2. Review of the literature

Following Ivanič's (1998) seminal work on the discursive construction of "self" in writing, author presence (and absence) in academic texts has been widely studied. While an author's textual presence manifests itself through a variety of linguistic resources – for example, Anderson et al. (2009) investigated possessive determiners, as well as more implicit stance adverbials – many investigations have focused on personal subject pronouns, the most overt signal of a writer's "intrusion" into the discourse (Fløttum et al., 2006; Hyland, 2001, p.211). In various quantitative and qualitative studies (e.g. Harwood, 2005a; Hyland, 2002b; Kuo, 1999; Zareva, 2013), frequency counts have been reported, and functional or metaphorical labels assigned to

instances of self-mentions in learner and research genres, predominantly in the sciences and linguistics.

While Fløttum et al. (2006) found discipline to be more influential than language background in terms of self-mentions, several analyses have adopted a contrastive-linguistic approach, such as Carter-Thomas & Chambers, (2012) on economics (contrasting English/French RAs), Mur Dueñas (2007) on business management (English/Spanish RAs), Sheldon (2009) on applied linguistics and language teaching (English/Spanish RAs), and Molino (2010) on linguistics (Italian/English RAs). These studies provide some evidence that an author's native language can influence the deployment of first-person pronouns (e.g. Mur Dueñas, 2007; Vergaro, 2011). However, considering the increasingly global character of academia, determining with any certainty an author's L1 based on name and home institution is problematic.

A key interest of many of the studies cited above is how authors adopt various "roles" (Ivanič 1998; Tang & John, 1999, p. 25) such as a meta-textual guide, who directs the reader through the text, and a conductor of research, who outlines methodological procedures (e.g. Harwood, 2005b; Hyland, 2001, 2002a; Starfield & Ravelli, 2006). The use of the subject pronoun in conjunction with these roles is considered a rhetorical strategy to present the authorial self in the text (e.g. Mur Dueñas, 2007). Likewise, authors can absent themselves from the text through impersonal language, which would represent a different rhetorical strategy. Nonetheless, my focus is on author presence as signalled by the use 'I'. Categories are assigned chiefly according to contextual and (to a lesser extent) linguistic clues. For example, Sheldon (2009) references Hallidayan linguistics, suggesting that process verbs (Halliday, 1994) in the predicate indicate that the self-mention corresponds to the 'conductor of research' role. Roles have been ranked according to most and least *authoritative* (e.g. Sheldon, 2009; Starfield & Ravelli, 2006;).The

term refers to the extent to which authors convey a strong identity as a writer with 'authority' within a given role (Clark & Ivanič, 1997).

In analyses of IMRD RAs (e.g. Martinez, 2005; Mur Dueñas, 2007), sections also provide an indication of the function or role of the first-person subject pronoun. However, writing in the humanities often entails an alternative argument structure (Shaw, 1998), as is the case for history and anthropology. Where language is used to construct rather than report knowledge, self-mentions may invoke different roles and pose additional challenges for a study into author presence. Therefore, it is surprising that less attention has been given to self-mentions in the humanities.

The discourse of history has received considerably more attention than anthropology, in part due to multiple publications by Bondi (e.g. 2007, 2009, 2013). In addition, Thompson (2009) investigated undergraduate writers' use of self-mentions in the discipline, and found that personal pronoun usage decreased as students became "more acculturated into their disciplines" (p.60). While the discourse of anthropology has been discussed from a disciplinary insider's perspective (e.g. Geertz, 1988), EAP research is scarce. This is surprising given that anthropologists from different countries publish extensively in English (McGrath, 2014) and that academic writing in the discipline undoubtedly poses challenges for students (e.g. Reynolds, 2010).

The aim of this section was to provide an overview of research into self-mentions in academic genres. The following section sets out the methodological approach to the study.

3. Method

3.1 Selection of disciplines

History and anthropology have much in common; both disciplines are interpretive and tend to produce single-authored articles (Becher, 1989). Knowledge is constructed through

argumentation in the text and the reconstruction and analysis of past or contemporary events through the prism of a particular theory. However, while history can be defined in terms of its object of study (the past), anthropology research is characterized by ethnographic fieldwork (Krishnan, 2009), and the importance of reflexivity. The past few decades have seen calls to recognize that history does not provide a “factual record” (Coffin, 2002, p. 504), and therefore a greater emphasis on the author’s role in the construction of knowledge has also come into focus.

3.1 Article selection

Journal and article selection proceeded as follows: five informants were recruited from the departments of social anthropology and five from history at a large, highly-ranked Swedish university. The informants provided examples of journals they regularly read and/or target for publication. While texts from the top-tier of academic publishing are often selected for EAP investigations, this somewhat elitist approach neglects the range of articles in other peer-reviewed journals that are read, cited and written by scholars, and that therefore constitute examples of the disciplinary discourse. In social anthropology, three English-language journals gained the most nominations, and were selected. In history, two of the three most nominated journals contained primarily Swedish rather than English-language articles. Therefore, the subsequent two most nominated were selected. No consensus was reached for the third. Instead, I selected the nominated journal with the widest scope in terms of subject matter to maximize the chances of drawing on authors with different research interests. The journals selected are listed in Table 1.

(TABLE 1 HERE)

It should be noted that the *Scandinavian Journal of history* is not limited to authors from Scandinavia; for example, the sample includes an author whose name and home institute suggest Estonian nationality.

A relatively limited number of articles were compiled to enable a detailed analysis, which is outlined in Section 3.2. Six articles per journal were selected. For inclusion, RAs had to report new research (review articles were excluded), and be written in English by a single author. Papers published in special issues were excluded so as to avoid a limited range of authors with specialist interests. The six most recent articles at the time of data collection which adhered to the criteria were selected, and appeared in 2012-2013. The mean length of the history articles is 10344 words, and in anthropology, 8576 words. Author bios revealed representation of the full-range of professional experience, from PhD student to professor. A list of the articles is located in Appendix A.

3.2 Approach to the analysis:

The focus of the study is the first-person subject pronoun, irrespective of position or clause type. Some studies (e.g. Tang and John, 1999) do not distinguish between ‘I’ and ‘we’, but this occludes the difference between the two pronouns (Thompson, 2009) in that ‘we’ can be reader inclusive or exclusive.

I began by reading the RAs and highlighting manually all instances of self-referential ‘I’. Acknowledgements, references and notes were excluded, but abstracts were retained. Electronic versions of the articles were then downloaded from the journals and converted to text files. Sections of the text containing the search item were extracted from the articles with 30 word surrounding co-text using AntConc (Anthony, 2011) In many instances, I returned to the full text

in the allocation of the categories, as the linguistic environment in which a pronoun occurs has been shown to be important in assigning roles (e.g. Harwood, 2005c).

As set out in the literature review, several models have been proposed to categorize instances of self-mentions in academic genres. Starfield and Ravelli's (2006) model was selected as it was derived from an analysis of humanities texts. An account of the model is provided in Section 4. I first coded all instances that could be accounted for by the model, and then returned to problematic cases with a view to establishing a new category if necessary. Therefore, coding was both inductive and deductive. In coding the extracts, the following was taken into account: co-text (e.g. Harwood, 2005c), position in the overall text, and main verb co-occurring with the first-person pronoun (e.g. Sheldon, 2009). Numerical results were not analysed using statistical methods.

Throughout the article, extracts from the RAs are used to illustrate my argument. Each RA is allocated a letter based on discipline (history (H), anthropology (A)) and numbered (1-18). The code is given in brackets after each extract.

4. Exploring the model in the context of history and anthropology RAs

The roles identified in the Starfield and Ravelli's (2006) model are (in order of least to most authoritative): 'I as guide or architect', 'methodological I', 'I as opinion holder', 'I as originator or claim maker', and 'reflexive I'. As has been found in comparable studies (e.g. Tang and John, 1999; Sheldon, 2009) significant overlap between role categories is possible. The following extended extract taken from a history article in my collection provides some indication. The letters in brackets are for reference.

I will start by describing (a) the basic legal wording that was the foundation of legal pluralism in the Dutch East Indies, and follow that with a brief discussion (on the basis of

both internal administrative papers as well as published treatises) of the justification given by colonial lawyers for this plural system. Subsequently, I will examine (b) various subgroups and the reasons why they were considered part of the ‘European’ group, exploring what this reveals about the importance of different markers of Europeaness (race, class, gender, education and so on). Finally, I will illustrate (c) how these categories were embedded in the Indies’ daily social practice by analysing in more detail the position of one very peculiar sub-group. (H3)

The role of ‘guide or architect’ is assigned to (a) based on the verb *start*, which indicates the beginning of a process description of how the article will unfold. This description extends over the paragraph with the use of chronological order transition markers. Therefore, it could be argued that (b) and (c) also fulfil an architectural function. Other clues support this interpretation: the extract appears in the introductory section of the article, and the future tense is used. However, (b) also describes the analytical approach taken and data selection, which in my view constitutes method description in history. Equally, (c) evokes the role of ‘originator’ in that the author sets out to illustrate a finding based on an analysis; however, subsequent co-text also suggests method (“by analysing in detail”). For analytical purposes, it seems helpful to follow Fløttum et al. (2006) and disregard tense and modal verbs, and use the main lexical verb as the key indicator of category where possible. Finally, in the instances where an example has two possible interpretations, I generally err on the side of the more authoritative category, according to Starfield and Ravelli’s framework. Therefore, taking all the considerations set out above into account, (b) is coded ‘methodological I’ and (c) ‘I as originator-claim-maker’. While this solution is not necessarily optimal, it provides a rationale for categorization purposes.

In the following section, the categories are discussed in more detail with examples from the RAs used in the study.

4.1 *I as the guide or architect*

This category comprises discourse organizational actions such as signposting, outlining how the article unfolds, and announcing aims. The category appears in multiple frameworks albeit under different names (e.g. “navigator” (Sheldon, 2009, p. 253); “stating goal and purpose” (Luzon, p. 197, 2009)). Extract 1 appeared in the introduction of the article in a section that sets out the purpose of the paper and fills a research gap. Furthermore, the verb *aim* signals the guide or architect role (Starfield & Ravelli, 2006):

1. I aim to fill this gap by studying the artistic side of Soviet industrial design. (H4)

The functions of announcing aim and signposting were found in both anthropology and history articles. In anthropology, the architect role also involved defining terms, signalled by verbs such as *speak of*, *define*, *label*, and *call*. An example (2) follows:

2. I use the grammatically descriptive term racial to mean of, or having to do with loaded conceptions of difference based on physical appearance...(A3)

4.2 *Methodological I*

This category pertains to what “was done as a researcher” (Starfield and Ravelli, 2006, p. 232). Previous studies (e.g. Sheldon, 2009) draw on Halliday’s (1994) system of verb classification, arguing that the role is signalled by material processes (e.g. the verbs *work*, *read*, *interview*, *collect*, *select*). However, given that the disciplines under scrutiny are not experimental, some cognitive and sensory verbs are also used to describe the interpretive lens (3), the selection of sources including historical and geographical setting (4), and overall methodological approach (5):

3. I look at alcohol in this context partly as suggested by many anthropologists and sociologists: as a dye (...). (H13)
4. I study the legal categories in late-colonial Indonesia (then known as Nederlands-Indie, the Dutch Indies) to understand the functioning of the colonial system of rule. (H3)
5. Secondly, I will probe my hypothesis in a comparative case study of two, predominantly liberal, rural regions (...). (H18)

References to method in anthropology are more difficult to isolate. Some instances are clear due to lexical items in the co-text. For example, in the extract below, several items pertain to qualitative research methods:

6. In terms of methodology, I began by using inductive generalization to search for commonalities between the students' presentations and their narratives of their experiences of life. (A7)

All of the anthropology articles in the collection use ethnographic field work as their predominant data collection method. Starfield and Ravelli (2006, p.232) give an example from a PhD thesis introduction which uses ethnography:

“The methodology and research methods reflect the importance of a careful process of entering into young homeless people’s life worlds. Initially *I began the research* with an introduction to the field through participating in street outreach (...)” (original emphasis in italics).

Here, the author describes the entry into the field. Presumably, the role is indicated by the fact that the extract appears in an introductory section that outlines other aspects of method. In addition, the lexis suggests that this is a section primarily devoted to describing methodology (*method, process, research, field*). However, anthropological results derive from the researcher’s lived experience and observations in the field, which in RAs appears to be detailed after the introduction. Example (7) from my collection also describes entry into the field:

7. I began my regular visits to these markets in the local spring of 2009, just as businesses readied for Christmas and the sun broke through Lima's gray skies for the first time in months. It is difficult to convey the thrill.

In this extract, I interpret a different author role. The writer describes how the research was undertaken, namely by visiting locales in the field. The time and place of entry are given. However, this extract was taken from a section describing lived experience during field work, rather than an explicatory section detailing the approach taken for the entire study. Given also the literary style (the description of the light and sensations), this self-mention is not coded as 'methodological I', but rather 'narrative I' (see Section 4.5).

4.3 *I as opinion holder and I as originator*

Following Starfield and Ravelli (2006), a distinction is drawn between 'I as opinion holder' and 'I as originator-claim maker'. Here, the category is determined by the main verb in the predicate. The former includes some mental verbs (e.g. Biber, 2006) such as *think, believe, assume* and *suppose*, whereas the latter category is signalled by stance verbs, such as *claim, suggest* and *argue*. Examples follow (8 and 9):

8. But, I believe, explaining the genealogy of Soviet industrial design only by the avant-garde experience (...) is incomplete. (H2)
9. There is a lesson for both natural and social scientists here, I believe, about the failure to connect to the human agents already in place (A9)

Examples of 'I as originator' in the collection of RAs include (10) and (11):

10. I contend that street liminality is a conceptual tool that can help us understand how the interventionists accomplish this. (A11)
11. I argue that in about the mid-1950s a significant aesthetic turn happened. (H2)

Both these roles are ranked by Starfield and Ravelli (2006) as more authoritative than the previously discussed roles. However, in history, ‘I as originator’ tends to be deployed towards the start of the RA, where the claims function as thesis statements, and thus to a certain extent combine outlining aims and advancing claims. Given this overlap, in these instances interpretations of ‘guide’ as a less authoritative role than ‘originator’ or ‘claim maker’ (e.g. Starfield and Ravelli, 2006) seem problematic.

4.4 Reflexive I and Narrative I

As discussed in Section 1, reflexivity in the humanities entails explicit researcher positioning “in relation to their objects of study so that one may assess researchers’ knowledge claims in terms of situated aspects of their social selves” (Maton, 2003, p. 54). Thus, Starfield and Ravelli (2006, p.233) propose ‘reflexive I’, a role which “locate(s) the writer as subject within the research process”. Sheldon (2009, p. 261) develops the definition, by describing the role as situating “the writer in the heart of the research, revealing the researcher’s *critical reflections* on the intellectual value of the research” (my emphasis). She identifies two strands to this category: the narrative self, anecdotally connecting the researcher with the study and the explicatory self, expressing the engagement of the individual within the research.

It is difficult to pinpoint any particular linguistic resources that are unique to this category (Starfield & Ravelli, 2006). Nonetheless, (12) is a clear example of ‘reflexive I’, as the author critically examines the preconceptions she brought with her to the study and the evolution of her thinking over the course of her research project:

12. I began fieldwork in Mexico in the summer of 2008, solidly convinced that I knew what race looks like when it appears in or informs genetic research. This confidence was such

that I did not quite seriously imagine different national contexts would fundamentally alter or challenge my understanding of race.

However, in the anthropology data, there were many instances of ‘I’ which were indeed narrative, but contained no explicit reference to critical reflection. For example, (13) is taken from an extended description of field work:

13. I climbed in with other observers and assessors. (A17)

The ‘I’ is clearly narrative, but not reflective, and the impact in terms of “authority” (Starfield & Ravelli, 2006, p. 231) is somewhat different from Sheldon’s (2009) category description. The ‘I’ is the author situated in the field, embedded in the research context in time and place and participating in or observing the unfolding action. Thus, the pronoun often appears in this role in conjunction with an activity or communication verb (Biber, 2006). Using Sheldon’s terminology, I have coded self-mentions which convey this role as ‘narrative I’ and reserved ‘reflexive I’ for instances where reflection on the part of the researcher is explicitly conveyed. Examples were found in both the history and anthropology RAs.

The purpose of this section was to describe in detail the model and to discuss some of the challenges involved in the categorization. Section 5 reports the results of the analysis.

5. Results and Discussion

In Tables 2 and 3, the number of first-person subject pronouns per category in each article as a raw score is shown. Underneath and in brackets, the number of first-person subject pronouns per thousand words per article is shown. Both figures are given as some articles, particularly those published in the *Journal of Modern History*, are considerably longer than the others, which

allows for more opportunity for the use of personal pronouns. The results for each article rather than per discipline are shown so that intra-disciplinary variation is visible.

(TABLE 2 HERE)

Table 2 First-person subject pronouns in history RAs

(TABLE 3 HERE)

Table 3 First person subject pronouns in anthropology RAs

5.1 Interdisciplinary variation and similarities

Tables 2 and 3 reveal some broad disciplinary differences and similarities; however, these need to be treated with caution given the apparent intra-disciplinary variation. This will be discussed in detail in Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2.

While all roles are present in both disciplines, authors in anthropology use considerably more first-person subject pronouns than authors in history. This pattern was to be expected, particularly in the case of ‘narrative I’ in that a large proportion of the anthropology RAs in the study are given over to recounting lived experience during fieldwork. Nonetheless, authors in the discipline also tended to use more subject pronouns in the other role categories.

The most frequent role in history is ‘I as originator’. In other words, the historians intrude most when it comes to making claims. This role distribution contrasts sharply with the very low number of instances of ‘I as opinion holder’. A similar pattern was observed in anthropology. In both disciplines, authors get behind claims (for examples, see section 4.3), but avoid explicit self-mentions in conjunction with expressing opinions. This result could be accounted for by genre; Tang and John (1999) for example found multiple instances of ‘opinion holder’ in their

investigation into a learner genre, where claims may have been formulated as opinions due to inexperience or the intention to lessen the strength of the assertion. If this is a marker of an inexperienced writer, the absence of this role in published RAs, a professional genre, is perhaps to be expected.

The highest frequency role in anthropology was ‘narrative I’. As mentioned previously, this pattern was not unexpected given that anthropology draws on the researcher’s personal observations and interactions during fieldwork. Conversely, a higher number of ‘reflexive I’ in anthropology was anticipated (Sheldon found 98 instances out of a total of 414 self-mentions in her corpus, but did not distinguish between ‘narrative I’ and ‘reflexive I’). Equally surprising was the low number of ‘reflexive I’ in the history articles given the reported shift in focus onto the individual’s role in knowledge creation (Coffin, 2002), which could be textualized via the use of ‘reflexive I’. However, it seems that in the vast majority of RAs in my study, this role is not expressed via the use of first-person subject pronouns, if at all.

Both disciplines have instances of ‘methodological I’, although the articles in the collection do not contain a Methods section. The results here are due to the inclusion of theoretical framing of the argument and the setting up of hypotheses into the category, rather than experimental style method-process descriptions.

The aim of this section was to give an overview of the data along disciplinary lines. The section below looks in more detail at individual articles.

5.2 Intra-disciplinary variation and similarities

As previously stated, some broad generalizations can be drawn from the data in terms of disciplinary patterns. Nonetheless, the differences in distribution between articles of the same discipline are apparent, although less pronounced in history than anthropology.

5.2.1 History

A small majority of authors in history took on the role of guide/architect (10/18), originator (11/18) and ‘methodological I’ (12/18) via the subject pronoun. The number of occurrences ranged from 0-5, 0-7 and 0-3 respectively. Considerably less variation was observed in the case of ‘opinion holder’, ‘reflexive I’ and ‘narrative I’; instances of self-mentions in these roles were isolated, but are nevertheless explored in order to gain insight into the textual conditions that make adoption of these roles appropriate.

Three history articles, H1, H11 and H7 had no instances of ‘I’. Instead, the functions of the most commonly occurring roles were carried out but by other means. For example, the author of H1 frequently employed an abstract rhetor to outline claims (“the article argues”), set out method (“the article compares”) and to structure the argument (“the article seeks to understand”). In the latter, a cognitive attribute (understanding) is assigned to the article as agent.

The author of H1 also takes on the role of opinion holder, but through an impersonal construction rather than the subjective pronoun:

14. It is important to study this form of activism. (H1)

This use of anticipatory it followed by an adjective is common in academic writing (Biber et al. 1999), as the construction occludes the presence of the writer, with the effect of conveying objectivity and de-personalizing the opinion (e.g. Hewings & Hewings, 2002; Zhang, 2015). De-personalization may have been the intention here, as the author also overtly seeks consensus with the reader (Hyland, 2005) by signalling membership of the disciplinary community through reference to historians (e.g. “...has only attracted limited attention from historians”; “any historians...”), and in one instance, use of inclusive we:

15. In order to understand the internal politics of the two organizations we need to consider the politics of leading activists. (H1)

The author of H11 also seems to de-personalize the discourse by avoiding personal pronouns through assigning the article agency, and guiding the reader using passive constructions. For example:

16. (...) both will be taken up in the present study. (H11)

These impersonalization strategies are well documented in the EAP literature (e.g. Hyland, 2009), and use of them was not confined to the articles that did not have instances of the first-person pronoun.

In contrast to authors who chose not to use ‘I’, others (e.g. H5, H8) employed the subjective pronoun relatively liberally. At times, H5 intensified the personalization of the self-mention by combining ‘I’ with the modal verb ‘want’, conveying heightened personal investment:

17. I want to show how the concept of ‘real-and-imagined’ locations contains rich implications... (H5)

18. What I want to suggest is...(H5)

19. In this article, I want to focus on the philhellenes...(H5)

This authorial style clearly conveys personal involvement, and is at odds with the more “faceless discourse” (Hyland, 2008, p. 146) found in other RAs in the collection (e.g. H1, H11 and H7).

One interpretation could be drawn from Hyland’s (2008) analysis of Swales’ writing. Hyland invokes Swales’ standing in the ESP community as an explanation for his frequent use of ‘I’, as renowned researchers purportedly have more licence to subvert disciplinary writing conventions (Hyland, 2008). However, given H5’s rank according to the article bio (lecturer), a more plausible explanation perhaps is that heightened personal investment (or indeed lack of) is not particularly subversive in history.

Three articles in history were found to contain an element of ‘reflexive I’. H13 and H14, published in the same journal, are the more tenuous instances. In H14 ‘reflexive I’ appears in a section towards the end of the article, where the author critically reflects on the method taken in the analysis and the subjectivity inherent in the selection of a case:

20. The central question of this methodology is which cases to choose. At first glance, I could have left out Norway and Lithuania...(H14)

Here, the author conveys awareness that her role in the research process has implications in terms of the findings. However, it should also be noted that an aim of the article was to examine historiography as method, and therefore reflections of this nature are necessary to achieve the author’s purpose. H13 also evokes shades of reflection, overlapping with ‘methodological I’. The author writes:

21. The best method I have been able to devise to tackle these problems is to overcome them by sheer bulk of sources (H13).

Again, this could be loosely interpreted as a critical reflection on the author’s role in the research as the superlative indicates that other methods were available but rejected. The recognition that the method was devised by the author also underscores somewhat the human intervention. Interestingly, (21) could also be interpreted as self-deprecatory, or a form of anticipatory “self-protection” (Hyland, 2008, p. 147) from anticipated challenge to the research-design.

The least controversial example of ‘reflexive I’ was in H4. In one paragraph, instances of ‘reflexive I’ and ‘narrative I’ intertwine to convey how the author’s personal experience played a role in the genesis of the project (22). Indeed, the content and literary style are reminiscent of the anthropology RAs investigated:

22. It was during several holiday trips to southern France that I was reminded of Krakow and its tales of displacement and exile, authenticity and sham, and the visitor’s longing for

community projected onto a seemingly timeless, diasporic minority (...) I attended the pilgrimage in 2004, 2007, 2009 and 2012. The streets bustle with life and the festive mood is enhanced by the sounds of Gypsy music wafting above the cafe terraces.

This article could fall under the umbrella of new humanities, particularly given that the paper cites ethnology, comparative literature journals and anthropology journals in the reference list. Perhaps in light of this interdisciplinary flavour, the author intervenes to state clearly her disciplinary identity as historian when outlining the method:

23. As a historian I will interpret the case studies as performative spaces.

The aim of this sub-section has been to bring to light some of the variation observed among the articles in the history RAs. As has been shown, considerable differences among the articles are evident, both in terms of author presence and the roles authors take. In the next section, a similar discussion is carried out in relation to the anthropology articles.

5.2.2. Anthropology

Variation was also found in the anthropology articles. For example, while all authors bar one were present in the role of guide or architect, there is considerable variation in the number of instances of this role (between 1-15 occurrences). Clearly some authors have a preference for announcing aims and guiding the reader through the text via the use of personal pronouns, while others do not. There is also considerable variation in how frequently authors intervene as ‘architect/guide’ (0-15), ‘originator/claim-maker’ (0-14), ‘methodological I’ (0-16), and ‘narrative I’ (0-51). These results would seem to make discussions of overuse and underuse of first-person subject pronouns problematic.

A particularly high frequency of ‘methodological I’ in some articles appears to be due to the explicit setting out of multiple data gathering procedures (e.g. A7, A11). A5 was the only article

which had no occurrences of ‘methodological I’; however, this article had comparatively low numbers of self-mentions across the board, and therefore, a general preference for non-usage of self-mentions on the part of the author is plausible.

Three authors did not use ‘I’ when making claims. Instead, the author of A14 employs a more hard-science oriented discourse by attributing agency to the method, followed by a boosting verb (Hyland, 2005):

24. [E]thnographic observation showed that their business success depends less on the provision of dependable market information than on their role of a specialised information dealer. (A14)

The author of A5 also makes claims without using ‘I’. Nonetheless in (25), the use of emotive vocabulary conveys strong personal investment in the claim:

25. The ultimate effect leaves (far too many) to rock and to whimper, to bury their faces in the hands. In the end, what emerges on the ground, ethnographically speaking, is..."

The remaining 15 articles revealed considerable variation in the number of instances of ‘claim maker’ per article (1-14). In fact, the overall score is influenced by two articles which have particularly high numbers (A14, A16). In contrast, ‘opinion holder’ consistently had the least number of self-mentions per article.

As already stated, a relatively consistent pattern across the anthropology articles was the inclusion and, in most cases, frequent use of ‘narrative I’. Nonetheless, A5 and A13 have very few instances compared to the highest number (51). As with all the articles in the collection, A5 draws on fieldwork. However, unlike the other authors who relate events as a first-person narrative, naturally resulting in high numbers of ‘narrative I’, the author of A5 does not. Instead, the sense of the researcher’s lived experience is created through highly descriptive and detailed accounts of the other actors and events, for example, (26) and (27):

26. She paused to punctuate her next point. (A5)

27. These child sponsors sat awkwardly on the bed. (A5)

A5 also avoids 'I' in other roles by using abstract rhetors to advance claims and to describe the approach to the analysis (e.g. "this article observes"; "this article assesses"), although the author does intrude when it comes to defining a concept:

28. The net result is what I call the *subject of prevention* (original emphasis in italics). (A5)

A13 also warrants closer investigation; in some respects, the distribution of self-mentions in this article appears more in line with articles in the history corpus. In this case, the most frequent role is 'guide/architect' rather than 'narrative I', and there is generally a low number of first-person subject pronouns. This may be because the researcher carried out interviews rather than participant observation, which would perhaps entail a less detailed method description. Also, the article seems to combine reporting new knowledge with advocacy, which leads me to suspect that the target audience could be agencies as well as academics. A brief scan of the reference list revealed (as would be expected) multiple anthropology journals, but also politics journals, political geography journals, science journals such as *Nature* and *Bioscience*, and reports from the World Bank. However, it should be noted that other articles in the collection also draw on publications from other disciplines (e.g. A4 cites the *American Journal of Public Health and Science*).

A6 also has a low number of 'narrative I' and elements of inter-disciplinarity; for example, Berlant (a literary theorist/philosopher) is cited, and the main claim, presented as a thesis statement, takes on a historical perspective:

29. I show how bricks came to represent utopic objects of desire. (A6)

In contrast, A14 includes a very high number of self-mentions, practically all of them narrative. In the introduction, the functions of originating claims and guiding the reader are carried out

using abstract rhetors (“this paper studies”, “this paper aims to offer”) or passives (“it will be shown that...”). It is only when the author describes the entry into the field and the subsequent ethnographic observations are detailed (unusually, in the present tense) that ‘I’ appears. Intentional or otherwise, this creates an interesting contrastive effect, clearly delimiting interpretation from the field description, the analytical from the biographic, and suggests that author invisibility can contribute to rhetorical effectiveness in the discipline.

In this section, I have demonstrated that while some broad generalizations can be drawn regarding the differences and similarities in the distribution of first-person subject pronouns across the two disciplines, there are clear differences within disciplines which should not be overlooked.

6. Conclusion

I now return to the research questions posed in the introduction. The first question sought to investigate which roles were taken on by the authors of the history and anthropology RAs, via the use of the first-person subject pronoun. While all Starfield and Ravelli’s (2006) roles were present in the data, there were very few instances of ‘opinion holder’ in either discipline. In addition, many of the occurrences in anthropology (234 in total) suggested a category which is termed ‘narrative’. This was introduced for instances which were biographical, but did not convey explicit critical reflection on the author’s role in the research process. It should again be noted that significant overlap was found between the categories; therefore, while my approach to the categorization was rigorous, alternative interpretations are feasible.

My second research question probed disciplinary patterns in the distribution of occurrences of ‘I’. As in other studies investigating multiple disciplines (e.g. Hyland, 2009), some loose trends emerged; for example, first-person pronouns were generally more common in the anthropology

RAs, and there was a higher frequency of ‘narrative I’ and ‘reflexive I’. This difference is not surprising; anthropological knowledge unlike historical knowledge is constructed through the reconstruction of events experienced or observed by the researcher (rather than revealed via historical source material), and therefore this pattern of pronoun usage is intuitive.

However, while some disciplinary “preferred patterns of expression” (Hyland, 2001, p. 224) can be argued based on the data, a lack of conformity among authors is apparent. Harwood (2006) underscored variation in his study on personal pronoun usage in political science RAs, and proposed differing sub-disciplinary epistemologies as a possible explanation, as does Hobbs (2014) on self-mentions in philosophy. This could account for the results here; for example, the author of A13 (an article with an object of study that I suspect is of particular interest to some environmental agencies) may have avoided self-mentions in order to align with a more positivistic discourse (Hyland 2005) familiar to a hard-science oriented audience. Another possible interpretation is inter- rather than sub-disciplinarity. H4, for example, could be argued to occupy a liminal position between history and anthropology, with occurrences of both ‘reflexive’ and ‘narrative I’.

If disciplinary conventions are less pronounced in the humanities, perhaps “personality, confidence, experience, and ideological preference” (Hyland 2005, p. 191) are more influential in an author’s use of ‘I’. This interpretation seems intuitive, and could certainly account for some variation identified in my data, and could be explored further by interviewing members of the disciplinary community. Nonetheless, if the disciplinary convention argument stands, it would suggest that authors deploy self-mentions at will, yet guided by a (tacit) disciplinary parameter of acceptability so as to avoid over- or underuse; the question of what constitutes over- and underuse remains unanswered. While the use of ‘I’ may be “critical to meaning and credibility” (e.g. Hyland, 2002b, p.1093) in some disciplines, it would seem that in individual cases,

published authors in history, and to a lesser extent in anthropology, can opt to exclude the subject pronoun altogether in certain roles (e.g. H1 and A1), or indeed use multiple pronouns (e.g. H8 and A11), and still successfully achieve their communicative purpose. This renders the notion of prototypical usage problematic and perhaps unhelpful.

It is apposite here to return to family resemblance within the context of ESP approaches to genre (e.g. Swales, 1990; Paltridge, 1997). In my data, there is not one role that all the anthropologists take on via the use of a subjective personal pronoun, and likewise the history authors. Furthermore, the number of first-person subject pronouns used by authors differs greatly within as well as between disciplines. Nonetheless, the choices made by individual authors did not affect their article's acceptance by the disciplinary community as a 'family member'; other constellations of facets of disciplinary knowledge, discourse and genre are embodied in the text and cohere with the communicative purpose.

Ultimately, if textual "norms exist and have to be recognized" (Vergaro, 2011, p. 130), the question remains as to how they are established, where the boundaries of the 'discipline' in disciplinary discourse lie, and to what extent members of academic discourse communities conform. In terms of lexico-grammatical features which indicate author presence, corpus studies have revealed aggregated patterns of pronoun usage and enabled comparisons between disciplines. These studies have been crucial to increasing our understanding of disciplinary discourse, and remain important for discussions with students who are, for example, exposed to multiple fields of study. However, these studies are perhaps less successful in revealing diversity and individuality (Harwood, 2006; Hyland, in press), the possible rather than probable, which appears to be particularly pertinent for writing in the humanities.

EAP teachers are tasked with "ensuring students understand the rhetorical options available to them and the effects of manipulating these options" (Hyland, 2002b, p.1111). These discursal

“options” rather than norms will become clearer through more investigations that focus on intra-disciplinary rather than interdisciplinary variation in the humanities. Textual methods combined with interview data would be particularly insightful, as this would allow researchers to probe why authors opt to deploy or omit self-mentions in their writing. This includes the small-scale genre explorations often conducted by graduate students as part of genre-based EAP courses. Rather than seeking to establish disciplinary conventions in terms of pronoun usage, students could be encouraged to collect samples of RAs and compare their own writing with that of professional scholars in the field. Following comparison with and reflection on their own discursual preferences, students could discuss the rhetorical effects of the different possibilities open to them.

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Appendix A. List of research articles used as data in the study

(Ai) History Articles

H1 Johansen, A. (2013). Defending the individual: The personal rights association and the ligue des droits de l'homme, 1871–1916, *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 20(4), 559-579.

H2 Karpova, Y. (2013). Accommodating ‘design’: Introducing the western concept into Soviet art theory in the 1950s–60s. *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 20(4), 627-647.

H3 Luttikhuis, B. (2013). Beyond race: Constructions of ‘Europeanness’ in late colonial legal practice in the Dutch East Indies. *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 20(4), 539-558.

H4 Ruethers, M. (2013). Jewish spaces and Gypsy spaces in the cultural topographies of a New Europe: Heritage re-enactment as political folklore. *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 20(4), 671-695.

H5 Stock, P. (2013). The real-and-imagined spaces of philhellenic travel. *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 20(4), 523-537.

H6 Thomas, M. (2013). Coming to terms with the Stasi: history and memory in the Bautzen Memorial. *European Review of history: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 20(4), 697-716.

H7 Tzoref-Ashkenazi, C. (2013). Romantic attitudes toward oriental despotism. *The Journal of Modern History*, 85(2), 280-320.

H8 Houlbrook, M. (2013). Commodifying the self within: Ghosts, libels, and the crook life story in interwar Britain. *The Journal of Modern History*, 85(2), 321-363.

H9 Jansen, J. (2013). Celebrating the “nation” in a colonial context: “Bastille Day” and the contested public space in Algeria, 1880–1939. *The Journal of Modern History*, 85(1), 36-68.

H10 Loberg, M. (2013). The streetscape of economic crisis: Commerce, politics, and urban space in interwar Berlin. *The Journal of Modern History*, 85(2), 364-402.

H11 Christian Priemel, K. (2013). “A Story of Betrayal”: Conceptualizing variants of capitalism in the Nuremberg war crimes trials. *The Journal of Modern History*, 85(1), 69-108.H12

Sternberg, G. Manipulating information in the Ancien Régime: Ceremonial records, aristocratic strategies, and the limits of the state perspective. *The Journal of Modern History*, 85 (2), 239-279.

H13 Enefalk, H. (2013) Alcohol and respectability. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 38(3), 296-317.

H14 Kristi Kukk (2013). Stubborn histories. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 38(2), 135-153.

H15 Jakobsson, S. (2013). From reciprocity to manorialism. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 38(3), 273-295.

H16 Lundh, L. (2013). The geography of marriage. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 38(3), 318-343.

H17 Matz, J. (2013). Cables in cipher, the Raoul Wallenberg Case and Swedish–Soviet diplomatic communication 1944–1947. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 38(3), 344-366.

H18 Åberg, M. (2013). Liberalism and revivalism. A comparative case study of liberal ideology, individualism, and revivalism in Schleswig-Holstein and Värmland, ca. 1860–1920. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 38 (2), 154-179.

(Aii) Anthropology articles

A1 Gandolfo, D. (2013). Formless: A day at Lima’s office of formalization. *Cultural Anthropology*, 28(2), 278-298.

A2 Hartigan, J. (2013). Mexican genomics and the roots of racial thinking. *Cultural Anthropology*, 28(3), 372-395.

- A3 Kaifa-Roland, L. (2013). T/racing belonging though Cuban tourism. *Cultural Anthropology*, 28(3), 396-419.
- A4 M'Charek, A. (2013). Beyond fact or fiction: On the materiality of race in practice. *Cultural Anthropology*, 28(3), 420-442.
- A5 Lewis O'Neil, K. (2013). Left behind: Security, salvation and the subject of prevention. *Cultural Anthropology*, 28(2), 204-226.
- A6 Schwenkel, C. (2013). Post/socialist affect: Ruination and reconstruction of the nation in urban Vietnam. *Cultural Anthropology*, 28(3), 252-277.
- A7 Caputeo-Levine, D. (2013). The yard face: The contributions of inmate interpersonal to the carceral habitus. *Ethnography*, 14(2) 165-185.
- A8 Ilan, J. (2013). Street social capital in the liquid city. *Ethnography*, 14(1) 3-24.
- A9 Hastrup, K. (2013). Scales of attention in fieldwork: Global concerns and local connections in the arctic. *Ethnography*, 14(2), 145-164.
- A10 Kaye, K. (2013). Rehabilitating the 'drugs lifestyle': Criminal justice, social control, and the cultivation of agency. *Ethnography*, 14(2), 207-232.
- A11 Lopez-Aguado, P. (2013). Working between two worlds: Gang intervention and street liminality. *Ethnography*, 14(2), 186-206.
- A12 Sharabi, A. (2013). 'Boundary work' in a religious revival movement: The case of the 'teshuvah movement' in Israel. *Ethnography*, 14(2), 233-254.
- A13 Abbink, J. (2012). Dam controversies: Contested governance and developmental discourse on the Ethiopian Omo River dam. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, 20(2), 125-144.
- A14 Beuving, J. (2013). Playing information games: *Démarcheurs* in the second-hand car markets of Cotonou, Benin. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, 21(1), 2-22.
- A15 Hamilton, G. (2012). Plural gifting of singular importance: Mass-gifts and sociality among

precarious product promoters in eastern Germany *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, 20(2), 145-160.

A16 Jansen, S. (2013). People and things in the ethnography of borders: Materialising the division of Sarajevo. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, 21(1), 23-37.

A17 Revet, S. (2013). 'A small world': Ethnography of a natural disaster simulation in Lima, Peru. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, 21(1), 38-53.

A18 Verkaikk, O. (2012). Designing the 'anti-mosque': Identity, religion and affect in contemporary European mosque design. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, 20(2), 161-176.