

An Analysis of the Development of ‘Academic Voice’ In the English-Medium Academic Writing Produced By Omani Authors

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Abstract

Founded largely on the theoretical work of Hyland, (2002), Hyland & Sancho Guinda (2012) and Matsuda and Jeffery (2012), this study constructs a framework of components used in the construction of an author’s voice in academic discourse such as pronouns and grammatical voice constructs as well as interactions with referencing and academic authorities. An Omani-authored corpus containing texts from a number of key developmental stages in academic writing are evaluated and compared to a standardized model of written discourse practice, with publications drawn from authors in established communities of practice writing in the same genre. Rather than focussing on the failings of writers, the project seeks to establish the differences in core academic values and highlight the misconceptions currently taking place within the teaching, writing and expectations of constructing academic discourse and anticipates the realities of the dialectization of academic writing currently taking place in areas such as the Arabian Gulf.

Key terms: Academic Writing, Discourse, Academic Voice, Omani Writers.

Introduction

Finding access to the discourse of academic environments is essential for students and academics and is a way of finding their identity and voice as part of that community, as West & Kramarae (1997: 97) so eloquently phrase it, they are “...recasting the sociolinguistic notion of ‘speaker identity.’” This is, as Hyland informs us, because “academic writing is not just about conveying an ideational ‘content’, it is also about the representation of self” (Hyland, 2002: 1091). This interaction with the discourse thus plays a key role in the establishment of the individual academic elements such as viewpoints, actions and, crucially, the stance of its members.

There is currently a drive to develop the academic culture in Gulf countries such as Oman. In this light, the successful acquisition of written discourse features by developing writers within academic environments such as universities, colleges and research centres becomes of central importance to achieving these developmental goals. Furthermore, to allow greater access to the global academic community, such knowledge is a vital step in enabling the prospective authors to engage effectively with academic communities of practice outside of the region, whether that is academic institutions or publications.

The effective construction of an author’s voice within their texts is a key aspect that needs to be acquired if a writer is able to tie their ideas and propositions together in a coherent way. At its heart, the function of voice is involved in the projecting of the writer’s identity and construction of their role as a writer within their text (Matsuda and Jeffery (2012: 151). Further to this, the managing of the additional textual voices drawn from academic, experiential, social and a range of other sources found within a text is equally important in the creation of academic authority, the assignment of propositional responsibility and the degree of commitment invested in a statement by the writer (Hyland, 2002: 1093). Failure to adequately manage these aspects can be responsible for much of the pragmatic failure and difficulties in finding a voice in academic environments experienced by many university students and aspiring academics (Umair, 2011: 237).

The manner in which an author constructs his/her authorial voice will differ depending on a number of factors. Firstly, it has been noted that a key factor which is critical in defining the stylistic conventions of features such as authorial voice is the genre in which an author is writing. Stylistic conventions have been demonstrated as varying significantly, particularly in the cases of the pure sciences and the humanities (Silver 2012). A second major consideration in the construction of authorial voice is the medium of instruction used to teach novice writers. The content of the instructional material has been shown too often to generalize all academic writing towards one set of prescribed norms, which do not accurately reflect the writing practice in different fields and genres (Hyland 2012). However, it should also be noted that these factors are highlighted within current English writing practices and this is a vital step, as there is significant divergence in practice across language and cultural backgrounds.

Academic Voice

An introduction to academic voice:

The author's 'Voice' is a component of written academic discourse which, despite being a linguistic element of considerable academic interest over the last few decades, has proved controversial and difficult to assign precise meaning to (Hyland & Sancho Guinda, 2012: 1). This means that writers engaging in academic practices often experience difficulty finding a 'Voice' appropriate to their genre (Tardy, 2012: 34).

Matsuda and Jeffery (2012: 151) describe voice in written language as a 'concept capturing a sense of author identity that comes through when readers interact with texts'. It is an important skill that requires development and tuning through a process of 'apprenticeship', being developed as novice writers learn their trade. It is a key academic skill for writers to incorporate the many voices, ideas and arguments coming from various sources and academics, in order to effectively support the opinions and concepts they wish to communicate. Knowing how to effectively orchestrate the many competing voices, and construct them into a clear and logical series of arguments, is essential for any writer. This is especially the case in the academic context, where constructing both the individual authorial voice, as well as a collective voice of academic opinion, requires time and training through teaching, reflection and feedback.

It has been noted (Prior, 2001, Elbow, 1994) that there are two central aspects of authorial 'Voice'. Firstly, in regards to a writer's individual identity and style, writers may develop the 'individual aspect' as unique, and stylistically recognisable. The second, which is drawn from the work of Bakhtin (1981), is the 'social aspect' of voice, which is referred to as being a '*multiplicity of voices within a text as writers resort to blend many voices*' (p. 294), (for example, quoting and referencing other sources). In addition to this Ivanic (1998) promotes the 'dialogic aspect' of Voice. This is presented as an entanglement of the 'autobiographical self', the 'self as author', the social or 'discoursal self' and the 'possibilities of selfhood'. As such, the dialogic element of 'Voice' complements and ties together both the 'individual' and 'social' elements of the author's Voice.

How academic voice can be expressed:

Hewings (2007), in her study of discoursal components in new electronic environments within the academic context, investigated the way in which pronoun use demonstrates something of individual or corporate identity. She found that the pronoun 'I' was used to denote the thinker's personal identity and thoughts, while 'we' was used as a collective term for the voice of collaborative peer groups and also used for the more authoritative opinions of teachers/educators. Silver and Bondi (2004) describe the co-mingling or 'weaving' together of voices. These are usually those of academics and established researchers, as described by Silver (2012) as the 'communal voice'.

Hyland's position (Hyland, 2002: 1095) challenges the idea of an 'author-evacuated' prose proposed by Geertz (1988), which is found in the work of many textbooks and style guides that attempt to steer novice writers away from personal intervention (Lester, 1993: 144), (Spencer and Arbon, 1996: 26) etc. The reality is, as Hyland argues, that pronouns are used not only to announce and represent the writer in the text, but also occur in thematic positions, i.e. typically to identify the subject of the sentence or clause (Hyland, 2002: 1093). With an education system in a state of development, it may prove to be the case that taught generalisations such as 'absence of author' (which may not accurately reflect academic realities) may be a prevalent in the writing of Omani authors.

Why academic voice is relevant:

It is important to realise that the construction of academic voice, like stance, differs in form and process across different academic disciplines and genres of writing. Silver (2012) found that academic authors writing in different fields tend to demonstrate highly paradigmatic norms in their writing, with relatively little variation within the framework of a particular genre. However, the construction of academic voice can differ substantially in different genres of English written discourse. It is reasonable to assume that profound differences exist between different language and writing cultures.

How academic voice can be viewed as an indicator of writer identity:

Fløttum (2012) sees voice as the author's mark of visibility in academic discourse. She analyses 'self-projection' (both covertly and overtly in research articles), and finds that divergence of voice projection (author visibility) exists between English, French and Norwegian. English, for example, has a much higher frequency of first person singular pronouns ('I') than the other languages, and thus a higher author-visibility. According to Fløttum this can be explained with the fact that the presence of the arguer (i.e. the person who puts forth a given point or argues a claim) is more explicit in English. In established, English-language academic contexts, authors appear to be acting as a guide for the reader, making the text more accessible and comprehensive (Fløttum, 2012: 227). We can contrast this, for example, to the French use of the pronoun 'on', corresponding to the English pronoun 'one', which is used to help maintain a more detached and abstract quality to the text.

These findings by Fløttum evidence that there are distinct and definable differences in the construction of academic voice (as theorised above) in the writing practices in different languages and cultures. This would lead us to predict that there should be similarly distinct and definable sets of academic norms between the realisation of voice in British-English academic writing and Omani Arabic.

How academic voice can be viewed as an indicator of writer power:

In his study of final year reports, Hyland (2002:1107) finds that the pattern of markers denoting the presence of the writer suggests that students deliberately try to avoid authoritative stances and, through the use of rhetorical features, seek to '*deny ownership and responsibility for their views*'. The writer's voice, in the case of his students, is greatly reduced and also shows a greater reluctance to use first person pronouns.

Hyland believes that there are a number of possible reasons why students should not wish to take direct ownership of their views, these beliefs being highlighted in the students' feedback he received. These elements I will discuss in regard to the developing academic writing cultural context of Oman. One of these relevant elements Hyland describes as '*culture specific views of authority*' (2002: 1107), which is a perspective that may have similar resonance in Omani academic culture.

Another key factor Hyland raises in this regard is that of the effectiveness of instruction and '*culturally shaped epistemologies*' (2002: 1107). Hyland, and others (Bizzell, 1992, Lemke, 1990), note that "*reluctance to stake out a firm authorial identity stemmed from the inequalities of power in the writer-reader relationship which many students experience when writing in the academy*" (Hyland, 2002: 1109).

Based on an analysis of the writing, coupled with the student feedback, Hyland concludes that Asian students, albeit fluent bilinguals, seem very uncomfortable with both the assertive nature and expressions of subjectivity associated with the use of first person singular pronouns. Instead they seek rhetorical distances afforded by other, more general, terms. Hyland highlights that "*academic literacy is a 'foreign culture' to students of all backgrounds*" (2002: 1108).

Expected divergent features of Omani academic voice:

In the case of Omani students there have been a number of issues resulting in consistent pragmatic and academic failure. Firstly, it has been repeatedly shown that In Oman, like in many of the Gulf States, there has been a consistent failure in the education system in producing students with an adequate grasp of English (Trabelsi, 2014). In the case of Oman, an emphasis on the reliance of memorisation (rather than learning), especially in preparation for examinations, has led to a deeply entrenched culture of exam-based motivation (Al-Seyabi 1995, Al-Toubi 1998, Al-Balushi 1999, Al-Issa 2002, Trabelsi, 2014). As a consequence, despite having over nine years of English language education, students do not have, by the end of their secondary education, the proficiency needed for university study (Al-Issa, 2002: 223).

As Babrakzai (2001) argues, this is the reason why so many Omani students enter English medium universities possessing such a limited knowledge of functional English. They simply do not remember the formulaic expressions that they have temporarily memorised at school. In addition to this, as Al-Abri (2003) identifies, there is the clear disadvantage encountered by Omani Arabic students writing in English, in that they are learning to read and write again in a script which contains radically different concepts (e.g. an alphabet written from left to right as opposed to an abjad, [a script consisting solely of consonants and without an inherent vowel system] which is written from right to left). As Tanveer's study (2013) suggests, Omani student writers encounter a major gap in terms of English language and study skills.

Difficulties faced by Omani writers in referencing voices:

It is common practice in both Western and Middle-Eastern academic institutions and publications to give appropriate guidelines for the written academic conventions favoured by that particular organisation. An overview of guidelines given by a Western academic institution, such as Sussex University (Chishom & Cole, 2013) and an equivalent Omani institution, show that only minor differences may exist between institutions regarding forms of referencing work, quotations and other sources. However, allowing for these small differences in layout and ordering of information, the vast majority of such institutions require the same basic information and only differ on a superficial level.

The ability to reference information is thus a key skill that novice writers need to acquire during their literary apprenticeship. However, it is widely assumed that not all cultural approaches to referencing authorities are the same. Students' attitudes towards their referencing of perceived academic authorities, such as experts and public writers, lecturers and teachers (notably in the case of students from Asia) may well lead to issues in the way in which their writing is received in the established, English academic context (Kennedy & Lee, 2010).

As we have discussed, tying together of the many strands of thought and voices, in a way appropriate to most Western academic contexts, is a skill apprenticed by students beginning in their secondary education, and is assumed to be fully developed during the early stages of their tertiary education. It seems that failure in instruction, or lack of appropriate or sufficiently detailed 'apprenticeship' may be the fundamental issue retarding their progress and success. Many students coming from other backgrounds, who lack this apprenticeship in English written academic conventions, often fall foul of either the stringent plagiarism rules enforced in the West, or fail to acquire the ability to clearly order the many different voices (e.g. their own authorial voice, the voice of quotation of experts, cultural references etc.). In the case of students this can lead to both pragmatic and academic failure. Having discussed the importance of being able to effectively master key elements of English academic discourse such as critical stance and academic voice, we can conclude that it is vital for students and academics wishing to engage in tertiary education to be able to surmount their socio-cultural and linguistic barriers. As such, gaining an understanding of the degree to which Omani writers are able to acquire such skills, within the current frameworks provided for them, is the key to understanding where the major differences lie in their developing academic discourse communities. This information would prove highly productive for researchers, academics, instructors and material writers working in Oman and its neighbouring communities, as well as those wishing to facilitate greater involvement, empowerment and attendance of such students in Western academic contexts.

Research Methodology

As we have seen, Hyland (2002) demonstrates a practical difference in the way written academic genres are composed. Fløttum (2012) has also demonstrated how differences in culture and background of a writer can affect the way in which writers approach and construct a text, and Silver highlights (2012) the inadequacy of preparation material for novice writers in addressing these elements. In light of these principles, an analysis of the work produced by Omani academic writers should give us insight into the influences acting upon this crucial developmental stage of the Omani academic community.

Overview of the corpora:

This study will investigate Omani writers' approaches to critical stance, academic voice and attitudes towards academic power and authority. Two corpora will be analysed, and will be drawn from the same genre (ELT), and published in the same language (English). The only differences between these two corpora shall be, the origin of the authors (Omani writers compared with non-Omani writers) and the sources of the publications (publications local to Oman compared with internationally published material).

The primary sources of material for evaluation shall be drawn from local (to Oman) English language publications, with papers written by Omani academics. There are a number of peer reviews of this nature published within Oman. However, many of these are tied to specific institutions, often have limited circulation, are of varying qualities and often cover very specialised fields. Due to the large range of disciplines that these publications cover, from medicine (Oman Medical Journal, available online at www.omjournal.org) to Omani cultural development (the Journal of Oman Studies, available at www.squ.edu.om), it would prove problematic to build a corpus either from such a small pool of publications (drawn from a specific field), or to try and create a corpus with material taken from such varying genres and sources.

The Ministry of National Economy (MONE), when promoting the use of English as a motor for development, encourages teachers and academics to publish research in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). The Ministry itself has, in recent years, published a large quantity of academic research projects, on an annual basis, in the field of ELT. As such, a large body of work drawn from this source of writing in the area of ELT, and under a single editor, would prove to be a suitable source for building a corpus for analysing Omani writers' approaches to critical stance and academic voice. The author of this paper will seek to construct a corpus of around 100 articles, drawn from the most recent publications available from the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE).

In addition to this, in order to try and avoid any misleading findings, which could create areas of difficulty, the author will only select single-authored publications. This is because writing produced by co-contributors would inevitably show divergence of academic practice, particularly in the area of forming an academic voice. Furthermore, it shall be necessary for the author of this paper to filter out any publications which are not written by Omani authors. This shall be accomplished by simply analysing the names of the authors (which in Oman signify regional tribal identities) which are normally very distinctive and accurately linked to a town or area of origin. There may be writers that have been raised and educated in Western, English-speaking environments, and, as such, do not demonstrate any divergence from expected Western academic writers. However, the author would expect such instances to appear as anomalies, which, during the process of analysis, would stand out as distinctly different.

The second (or 'test') corpus, as discussed, will be drawn from work published in international journals. This shall guarantee that there is no bias according to the origin of the author, as the test corpus shall be constructed from the work of authors from potentially any nation (in theory including Oman) in which ELT is practiced, having undergone a vigorous editing process to guarantee standardisation, and having written to an international standard. This should guarantee that the test corpus constitutes as close as possible a model of international quality standard practice. This corpus, drawn from such established communities of practice, shall henceforth be labelled ECP.

Rational for the choice of corpora

There are a number of peer reviewed journals published within Oman. However, many of these are tied to specific institutions, often have limited circulation, are of varying quality and often cover very specialised fields. Due to the large range of disciplines that these publications cover, from medicine (Oman Medical Journal, available online at www.omjournal.org) to Omani cultural development (the Journal of Oman Studies, available at www.squ.edu.om), it would prove problematic to build a corpus either from a small pool of publications drawn from a specific field, or to try and create a corpus with material taken from such varying genres and sources.

When promoting the use of English as a motor for development, the Ministry for National Economy (MONE), encourages teachers and academics to publish research in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). The Ministry itself has, in recent years, published a significant quantity of academic research projects, on an annual basis, in the field of ELT. These are bound and published as a large body of work under a single editor. This has proven to be a suitable source for building a corpus for analysing Omani writers' approaches to stance, voice and authority. With this material, I plan to construct a corpus of around 100 articles, drawn from the most recent publications available from the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE).

Furthermore, one of the advantages of using work published by the Ministry of Higher Education is that we would ensure that the material is of the highest quality available (when compared to publications of local educational institutions) and is, from a national perspective an official product. Such a source also guarantees an accurate representation of home-grown Omani writers at their best. Furthermore, having undergone a local editorial process, the sources will not necessarily have been conformed to a Western academic style in the same way as papers published by Omani authors who write in international journals.

In addition to this, the author will only select single-authored publications. This is because writing produced by co-contributors would inevitably show divergence of academic practice, particularly in the area of forming an academic voice. Furthermore, it shall be necessary for the study to filter out any publications which are not written by Omani authors. This shall be accomplished by simply analysing the names of the authors (which in Oman signify regional tribal identities) which are normally very distinctive and accurately linked to a town or area of origin. There may be writers that have been raised and educated in Western academic environments, and, as such, do not demonstrate any divergence in their writing from expected Western academic writers. However, such instances are expected to be rare anomalies, which, during the process of analysis, would stand out as distinctly different.

The second corpus will be used to create a comparative model of normative, international academic discourse of written English in the field of ELT. As discussed, this will be drawn from work published in international journals. This approach draws on the work of Gross and Chesley (2002) that used an electronic software package in dealing with a similar corpus.

Approach to Analysis:

In regard to this study, with the use of an electronic software package, we should guarantee a high degree of impartiality in findings, reducing the inevitability of human error. Choosing Gross and Chesley's method of approach, as discussed above, would seem to be the most compatible approach, in the context of an electronic analysis methodology. This is because many of the search facilities found in the available software are well suited to search for elements such as word class (i.e. modal verbs, adverbs) and individual lexical items (e.g. suggest, believe) and individual lemma.

The Omani authors' work will be compared with a model of normative practice in the construction of critical academic voice. A range of such texts will be analysed in the same manner as the Omani authored work, and a comparison drawn between the two. The articles shall be converted to an electronic format, and once this has taken place they shall be processed through ANTCOnc software. With an analysis of the use of pronouns and related features can give an overall understanding of what is taking place in the construction of authorial voice. Studies on the analysis of written discourse features, such as voice, have focused on a wide range of topics and have explored different methodologies accordingly. Such a broad field of study will inevitably require the innovation of new techniques for the analysis of the language within a text (Hyland, 1998), such as lexical markers denoting writer's voice, such as personal pronouns.

Verschueren states that '*When making a detailed analysis of personal deixis in a given text...the most interesting observations tend to bear on apparent breaches of expected or discovered patterns.*' (2012: p.88). As such, it is the Omani authors' divergence in practice from academic norms that will be my area of focus in this study. The corpus of Omani authors' work will therefore be compared with the corpus of internationally published texts that reflects a model of normative practice in the construction of critical academic discourse features. The articles shall be converted to an electronic format, and once this has taken place they shall be processed through ANTCOnc software, which is available online (www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/software.html). With the use of this software, instances of personal pronoun use (as markers of authors' voice), referential markers (demonstrating the presence of a formal quotation) and passive constructs can be compiled and quantified to give an insight into the how such features are comparatively employed.

Key elements relating to Academic Voice:

Matsuda and Jeffery (2012) describe voice in written language as a '*concept capturing a sense of author identity that comes through when readers interact with texts*'. It is an important skill that requires development and tuning through a process of 'apprenticeship' as a writer learns to find an appropriate sense of self within the text, while entwining the voices of other experts and sources to construct a meaningful text. We have noted previously, that Prior, (2001) and Elbow (1994) discuss how a writer's voice within a text is usually formed of two elements. Firstly, the *authorial voice (the individual aspect of voice)*, which is often perceived as the manner of self-representation through the use of features such as personal pronouns and related linguistic markers. Secondly, the *intertwining of other voices (the social aspect of voice)*, usually those of academics and sources of expertise, to help support, give weight and validity to an author's propositions. These two different elements will be dealt with separately.

As previously discussed, the manner in which an author constructs his/her authorial voice will differ depending on a number of factors. Firstly, it has been noted that a key factor which is critical in defining the stylistic conventions of features such as authorial voice is the genre in which an author is writing. Stylistic conventions have been demonstrated (Silver 2012) as varying significantly, particularly in the cases of the pure sciences and the humanities. A second major factor in the construction of authorial voice is the medium of instruction used to teach novice writers. The content of such material has been shown to often generalise all academic writing towards one set of prescribed norms, which do not accurately reflect the writing practice in different fields and genres (Hyland 2012). However, as pointed out previously it should also be noted that these factors are highlighted within current English writing practices and that there is significant divergence in practice across language and cultural backgrounds. A lack of authorial voice may lead to pragmatic failure in some cases, however, and could demonstrate an unwillingness or inability to take credit or responsibility for thoughts and ideas which would be consistent with much of the theory.

Analysis of personal pronouns as a marker of voice:

In the case of the construction of authorial voice, the use of personal pronouns (first person singular pronouns i.e. I/me, followed by first person plural pronouns i.e. we/us, second person plural pronouns i.e. you, and, finally, third person polite i.e. one) will be analysed through the ANTCOnc software. The visibility of the article authors shall firstly be represented through an analysis of their use of personal pronouns. Following this, the two corpora can be compared and contrasted, and conclusions drawn.

Analysis of Passives Structures

There have been a number of studies which have demonstrated the use of the *passive-voice* to reveal a writer's stance such as Baratta: 2009. The *passive-voice* is used primarily to de-emphasise the semantic role of the subject of a sentence, as the construction of a passive sentence omits entirely or changes the emphasis of the subject, in order to highlight the importance of the object of the sentence. In this way, a passive structure can reveal a personal emphasis on the part of an interlocutor, and thus, the frequency of the use of the passive voice, and the occasions in which this feature of voice construction should provide insight into the attitudes which authors hold towards their propositions.

Analysis of the use of other voices within a text:

The third aspect of voice that will be investigated will be the authors' effectiveness and clarity in using other sources in their work. To investigate the authors' critical engagement with the work of others, we will quantify the regularity of the use of outside sources of opinion and information and make reference to the attitudinal language used to frame the quotations which would give insight into the purpose for which the quotations are used and the status they are afforded.

Once the data has been analysed, the results concerning the use of modality and pronoun use found throughout the texts will be tabled and discussed. Other elements, such as quotations of an Arab, Islamic and socio-cultural nature, and expressions indicating divergence from standard academic practice, will also be tabled and noted for discussion.

Summary of research results:

Analysis of first person pronoun use (singular and plural) in established communities of practice and Omani authored publications.

The analysis of the two corpora demonstrates a number of real differences in the approaches to the construction of a writer's academic voice in the two communities of practice. Firstly, it is apparent that Omani authors use a great deal more personal pronouns in their texts than the established communities of practice. The Omani academic writers manifested a total of 888 personal pronouns in their writing, which was a 1.7651 % of the 50306 words that the corpus was comprised of. In comparison, the writing drawn from an established community of practice authors used less than a quarter of the personal pronouns by percentage. There were a total of only 308 personal pronouns used by this demographic, which is less than the Omani total, despite having a larger corpus, with a percentage of 0.4833% of the 63725 words. (See figure 1 below.)

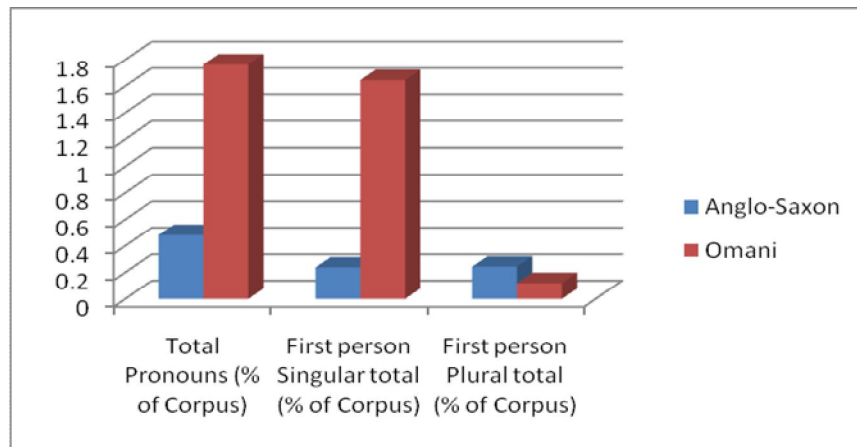


Figure1. Pronouns by corpus percentage

The most important element for us to consider in an author’s construction of voice is the self-representation of the writer. In this regard, the corpus analysis demonstrated some very interesting results. The results demonstrated that there is a difference in approach to the writer’s representation of self in their texts. The Omani authors represented themselves primarily through the use of the first person *singular* pronoun (I).

This appeared some 828 times, which was a total of 1.6459 % of the total corpus, but interestingly enough was some 93.2432 % of all the total pronoun use, demonstrating that Omani writers rely very heavily on the use of the first person *singular* pronoun. (See Figure 2 below).

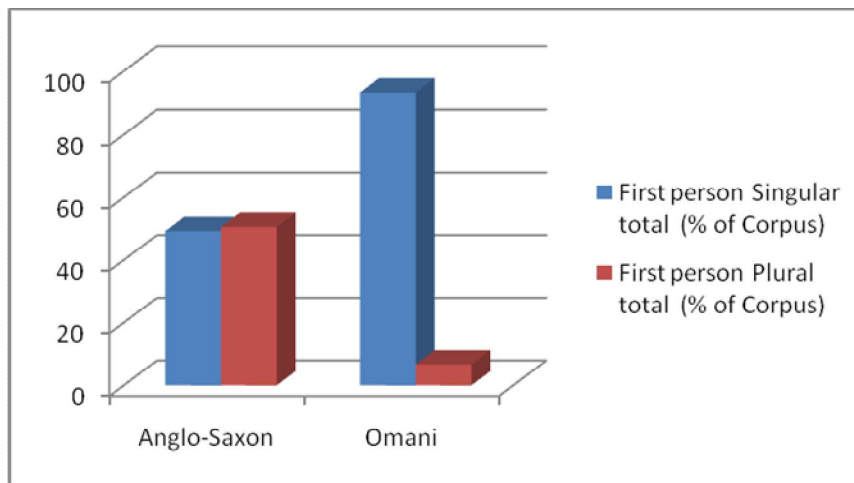


Figure2. First person pronoun comparison

In contrast to this, the ECP authors in the establish community of practice demonstrated a polar approach to the construction of authorial voice. This corpus manifested only 152 tokens of the first person singular pronoun (I), which registered at only 0.2385%, a dramatically lower percentage given the larger corpus. Just as interestingly, this pronoun was only 9.3506% of the total number of pronouns used by this body of authors. As well as displaying a much greater range of pronoun use in general, the ECP authors preferred to represent themselves through the first person *plural* (we) pronoun. This is demonstrated through the fact that over half the pronouns used by these authors (50.6493% of the total pronouns tokens) were of this type.

We can surmise from this that there are significant differences in the total amount of pronouns being used by authors from the two different demographics. It appears that Omani authors have been trained to represent themselves in their texts through the use of the first person *singular* pronoun. This is well documented in the instructional material being used to develop the academic English writing skills in foundational courses found in the country’s universities. A fundamental reason that this material has been included and prioritized in the instructional courses is to help enable the students to find a voice in their texts, associate themselves with ideas and to express opinions.

However, we can see that in reality, the practice of writers in established communities of practice represent themselves differently in a text. These writers prefer to use the first person *plural* pronoun (*we*). This is because, unlike other Western socio-linguistic communities of practice (such as Norwegian, French, German etc.). Native English writers and the communities of practice that they support (such as English language journals and academic institutions) have a different motivation for their lexical choice. It is well established that native-speaking English writers have been *apprenticed* into writing communities and have acquired the academic norms through their education system and cultural expectations of the examinations for which they have prepared since secondary/high school. They have little issue in finding their own personal voice in their texts or associating themselves with ideas. These writers instead clearly prefer to use the pronoun ‘*we*’ as their approach to self-representation. This is because the authors do not see themselves as alone in text. This demonstrates a higher level of consciousness of the readership as co-participants in the text and as such, the role of the author as a guide through the thoughts and ideas that the writer is expressing. We could see this as a cooperative voice, which is lacking in the Omani authorship and demonstrates different priorities in their writing and academic consciousness.

Analysis of Passive Voice Structures in the corpora

The use of passive structures within the texts of the two corpora demonstrates another area of substantial difference between the ways in which Western, English-speaking communities and Omani academic communities present their ideas in their texts. The comparison of the uses of passive voices within the texts demonstrates a significant difference in the frequency of the use of passive construction use, with ECP authors using the passive voice a meagre 8 times throughout the course of the whole corpus. In stark contrast to this, the Omani writers frequently employed the passive voice to present their prepositions and ideas, a combined total of 200 times throughout the corpus (See figure 3 below).

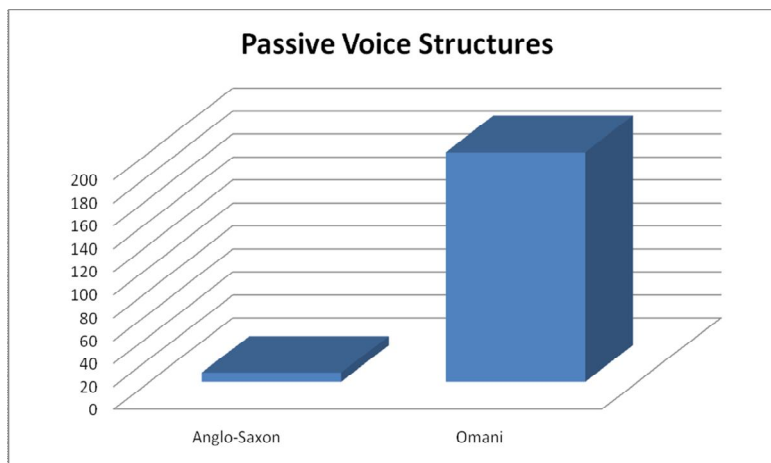


Figure3. Passive Voice Structures

The contrast here is very pronounced with the Omani writers tending to use the passive voice whenever presenting their ideas or personal thoughts (e.g. ‘*It can be understood from these findings...*’), or the thoughts of others, such as in reference to other authors. The ECP writers meanwhile tended instead to use the passive to present non-negotiable elements (e.g. ‘*It has already been demonstrated...*’).

Firstly, it would appear here that the Omani writers are using the passive voice in their texts to limit the commitment of personal perspectives. This would suggest that the Omani writers are less comfortable committing themselves to an opinion in general than their ECP counterparts. Secondly, the use of the passive voice to present the thoughts, findings and ideas of other authors would help to create a sense of scientific objectivity within their texts.

These findings however, perhaps suggest a different set of strategies to what is taking place in Omani academic writing than to the findings relating to pronoun-loaded structures (as discussed in the previous section), in which Omani authors used a high frequency of first person singular pronouns perhaps to associate themselves wholeheartedly with the thoughts and ideas in their texts.

Analysis of the referencing of other authors in the corpora

In terms of the use of referencing of other academic sources by the authors of the two corpora, again the difference in frequency is noticeable. The ECP authors used a total of 704 references between them, compared to the Omani authors 481. (See fig.4 below).

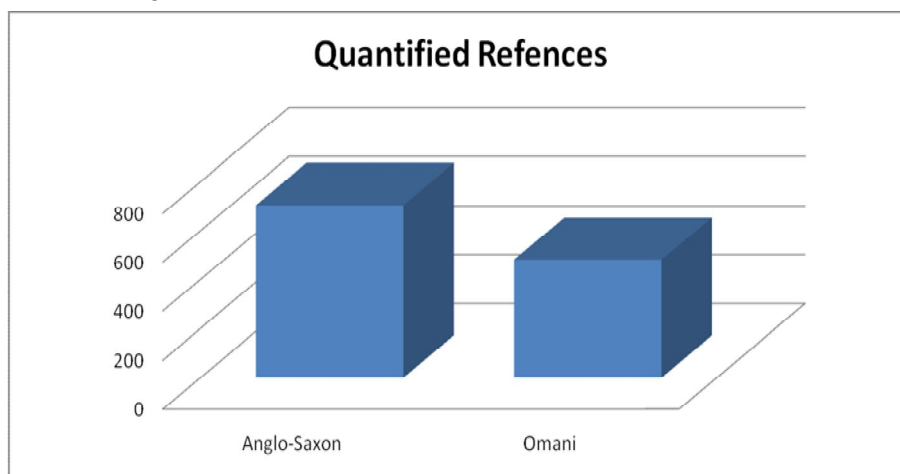


Figure 4: References by corpora

This is not a significant number when taking into consideration the slightly larger size of the ECP writers' corpus; however, it was how these references were used that proved of most interest. The ECP authors tended to use the referenced work of authors to support the flow of their argument, with a number of sources drawn in support of the same proposition at times, although with often only passing reference made to the opinion or findings of the referenced author. Another use of referencing by this demographic was the balancing of ideas, critically comparing present ideas on a subject whether those ideas were seen as having further value or not. The critical discussions that such supported discourse represents is at the very heart of Western academic values.

This being said, the Omani authors also used their own use of references with a high degree of proficiency, however with a less extensive range of texts being used per individual. This did give the impression that sources were less well explored, however there may be a variety of reasons for the smaller range of relevant sources. More interestingly, in terms of the Omani writers, the references are used in a very factual manner, to support an argument, but not in terms of critical discussion, but more in terms of establishing facts. This took place on a number of occasions, with prepositions being established in the minds of the readers by the presence of what is perceived to be an established expert.

Conclusions

It is clear that there are some differences in the approaches to the construction of critical academic voice between the emerging Omani academic communities of writers, and established English-speaking communities of practice. These differences, although in many respects without demonstrating any significant areas of pragmatic failure in the approaches to construction of academic voice in themselves, do suggest a difference in the academic paradigms which exist between these two groups of academic communities. It is these paradigms that of particular relevance given the background to the study.

Firstly, we can see that there are significant differences in the total quantity of pronouns being used by authors from the two different demographics. It appears that Omani authors have been trained to represent themselves in their texts through the use of the first person *singular* pronoun. This is well documented in the instructional material being used to develop the academic English writing skills in foundational courses found in the country's universities. A fundamental reason that this material has been included and prioritized in the instructional courses is to help enable the students to find a voice in their texts, associate themselves with ideas and to express opinions, as this is an area that many students in the Gulf context are reported to have found difficulty. However, as we discussed previously, it is well documented that the ECP writers preference the use of the first person plural pronoun in some Arts-based academic communities. It is interesting to point out at this juncture, that the use of the first person singular pronoun, would likely result in pragmatic failure in other, scholarly domains, such as the pure-sciences.

It could be suggested here that the differing methods of constructing discourse features such as academic voices that occur between different communities of practice in the established communities of practice, are not taken into account. Here, perhaps the replacement of 'academic apprenticeship' with generalized instructional material used on crash-courses and foundation programs in the Omani context are too generalized to be of help in developing the norms of a particular academic community.

Furthermore, in this particular case, it appears that our ECP authors are far happier making proposition in general, with a larger quantity of propositions being made in total than their Omani counterparts. They are not necessarily bound by the need to defend these ideas, but instead debate and discuss them, proposing suggestions which they themselves don't necessarily support but are raised to add to their debate. It is noteworthy here that there was a very high level of hedging (lexical items used to limit the authors' commitments to their statements) used by the ECP authors, which is suggestive of a lower degree of commitment to such ideas as the writers expose them to discussion and critical analysis.

The data suggests however that Omani writers are by contrast more comfortable working with concepts that they perceive as factual. This can be explained through the cultural background and academic context which is prevalent in the society as a whole. This is especially true in light of the views of conservative Islamic scholarship in which truth is something to be handled with expert care and great reverence. The propositions that are made by Omani authors, are fewer in number and are hedged far less in comparison to their Western peers, particularly in terms of the lexis used to demonstrate 'possibility' in their texts.

This blend of features, could seemingly highlight a confusion, or disagreement in the features of Omani authors' construction of grammatical voice, in which the Omanis tend to use passive as opposed to active voice in propositions, which shows the limitation to that commitment), and the self-referencing use of first person singular pronouns (in which the Omani authors use the pronoun 'I' which would suggest a very high level of commitment to a proposition).

Instead, it seems that the Omani writers use the passive voice to present information that is important to the texts, but is not necessarily their own suggestion. This demonstrates a different approach to the manner in which this demographic chooses to show their level of commitment to a firm proposition. The alternative method in use is when the authors show their highest level of commitment. In these instances, with little hedging taking place and the active voice in use, the proposition is associated strongly with the author by self-identification using the first person singular pronoun 'I'. In these ways, we can see how the Omani authors present facts in their writing, partly through the use of the passive voice, whilst the firm conclusions and beliefs of the Omani writers are presented wholeheartedly with a low level of doubt and a high level of association on the part of the author in the strong line of the authors' own opinions, and the results in the debate taking the form of a particular line of thinking supported by approving experts, the underlying thought process. These different approaches to managing voices within a text appear to demonstrate a distinct manner in which academic voice is constructed and used in a text. Very much in line with what has been described in other Gulf-Arab this style is notably different to established academic ECP communities of practice.

Reflections

In terms of the differences in approaches to discourse such as the different choices of pronouns (I and We) and grammatical voice (active or passive), these factors in themselves are of little significant relevance in terms of the pragmatics of constructing academic texts. The major difference is instead in the underlying access to the world of critical academic writing.

Discourse features and style are elements that can be taught, as Hyland states; "*academic literacy is a 'foreign culture' to students of all backgrounds*" (2002: 1108). All students wishing to engage in scholarly pursuits must engage with and enquire the discourse in which their discipline is engaged. Although perhaps there is a certain degree of teaching as to what is perceived to be written Western academic norms in opposition to what those norms actually consist of (such as using the pronoun 'I' and the regular use of the passive voice), such instruction would only prove to be a step up for developing writers into the writing community in which these authors intend to be engaged. What this study reinforces however, is the fact that Western academic writing is a medium that is intended to a place of critical freedom for our scholarly endeavours, where we are free to substantiate any claim that we are able to justify rationally, and that such debate is healthy and productive.

Instead, this prospect appears to be more of a daunting proposition for many students from the Arabian Gulf countries than has up to now been fully grasped. The illegitimacy that has been felt by so many aspiring writers in the Gulf in engaging with criticality, where up to that point respect and reverence were fundamentals of their cultural mind-set, experiencing a “*reluctance to stake out a firm authorial identity stemmed from the inequalities of power in the writer-reader relationship which many students experience when writing in the academy*” (Hyland, 2002: 1109).

With criticality being such a fundamental element of Western academic writing, the differences in approaches that we have discussed may have real ramifications for any attempt for Omanis (and their Gulf neighbours) wishing to access academic communities of practice. The academic norms which are practiced globally in well established, English-language communities and publications may be less accepting of Omani academic products (both human and textual) if they do not meet the particular standards that the institution and its practitioners abide by. This is the reason for much of the pragmatic failure documented in the attempted interaction with Western institutions by Gulf Arab academics and students.

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