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Carving out a Dialogic Space for "I": A Corpus-Based Study of Novice L2 College Writers' Use of First-Person Pronouns in Argumentative Essays

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L2 writers likely perceive "good academic writing" as impersonal (Hyland, 2002; Shen, 1989; Tang & John, 1999). Yet research has shown that every linguistic and rhetorical choice that a writer makes—including, the presence/absence and different forms of self-mention—potentially reveals the writer's authorial identity (Ivanič, 1998). The dialogic nature of academic writing, as manifested in strategic self-mentions, has remained overshadowed in L2 writing pedagogy by other linguistic issues. This article draws attention to this gap in research: specifically, I report on the findings of a corpus-driven descriptive inquiry into authorial identity, operationalized as the use of first-person pronouns in a corpus of 126 argumentative research papers written by students enrolled in first-year L2 composition courses. The study examines how L2 writers practice self-mention, comparing the frequencies of first-person pronouns in the argumentative corpus with both a "parent" corpus, which contains other genres produced by the same group of writers, and published research analyzed by Hyland (2001). I also define and characterize the five qualitatively coded and quantitatively measured rhetorical functions of "I" used in the corpus (i.e., reporter, architect, narrator of personal experiences, conceder, and opinion-holder). L2 writers in this study were found to use self-mention more frequently than published authors. However, L2 writers employed self-reference less frequently in their argumentative essays than for other genres. Their argumentative texts reproduced a narrative tone, as indicated by the lower ratio of the subjective/objective case of the first-person singular pronoun. A comparison of rhetorical functions reveals that nearly 50% of "I"s in the corpus function as a "narrator of personal experiences." In light of the findings, I propose pedagogical suggestions aimed at more effectively socializing college-level L2 composition students into academic discourse communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Novice college student writers in the United States, first language (L1) or second language (L2) alike, often conceptualize "good college-level writing" or "good academic writing" as impersonal and uniform. This is particularly the case in the STEM (sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines, as the hard science fields, traditionally, prefer writing that is devoid of subjective involvement and that focuses on describing and explaining the procedures and results. This disciplinary disposition has translated into academic writing practices (teaching and learning writing) that value impersonality and the eradication of subjectivity, which, in turn, have contributed to the academic myth that a writer should conceal or withhold their personal beliefs, perspectives, opinions, and their ethos in general; prioritize the research methodology and findings; and let the data speak for themselves. This construct of "academic writing" and pedagogical tendency of teaching such writing are manifested in

writing textbooks and style guides. For example, "[t]he total paper is considered to be the work of the writer. You don't have to say 'I think' or 'My opinion is' in the paper. Traditional formal writing does not use I or we in the body of the paper" (Spencer & Arbon, 1996, p. 26). "To the scientist it is unimportant who observed the chemical reaction: only the observation itself is vital. Thus the active voice sentence is inappropriate. In this situation, passive voice and the omission of the agent of action are justified" (Gong & Dragga, 1995).

The academic myth of impersonality is reinforced by students' assumption that in order to gain membership into the academic discourse community, they have to "learn to speak our language" (Bartholomae, 1986, p. 4) and "appropriate (or to be appropriated by) a specialized discourse" (pp. 4–5). The tropes of "our language" and "specialized discourse," in this sense, are usually characterized by the absence of writers' authorial voice. Yet student writers, especially novice L2 writers, "must imagine for themselves the privilege of being 'insiders'— that is, of being both inside an established and powerful discourse, and of being granted a special right to speak" (Bartholomae, 1986, p. 10), which implies that students need to adopt or create an appropriate authorial identity that is reflected in their discoursal choices (Ivanič, 1998) and recognized in discoursal interactions. The situation is particularly complex, or rather, problematic, for novice L2 writers, as they are not only relatively less familiar with the discoursal conventions, but also less proficient in the language in which they write. Yet as Peirce (1995) notes, "[i]t is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time, and it is through language that a person gains access to—or is denied access to—powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak (Heller, 1987)" (p. 13). Therefore, novice L2 writers' construction and negotiation of authorial identity expressed through textual production is worth investigating.

Admittedly, writers constantly make linguistic choices as they write and every decision that they make potentially reveals who they are as a writer. However, the presence or absence and different rhetorical functions of self-mention are salient textual manifestations of writers' authorial identity. The most visible form of self-mention, i.e., the use of first-person pronouns, "can often reveal how writers view themselves, their relationship with readers, and their relationship with the discourse community they belong to" (Kuo, 1999, p. 123). Thus, a comprehensive study of L2 novice writers' use of first-person pronouns may provide insights into the construction of their emerging authorial identity as represented in their texts.

In this study, I investigate the notion of authorial identity as it is manifested through the use of first-person pronouns in the writing of L2 undergraduate students enrolled in multiple sections of an L2 writing course at a large Midwest research university in the U.S. The study, through corpus analysis, examines the frequency and rhetorical functions of the first-person pronoun "I" in different contexts in 126 final drafts of argumentative research papers written by first-year international students enrolled in the L2 sections of an introductory college composition course. My purpose is to provide a comprehensive overview of novice L2 writers' authorial identity as indicated by their use of first-person pronoun "I" in their texts. Specifically, the study is guided by the following questions:

(1) How frequently do novice L2 writers use the first-person pronoun "I" in argumentative essays in comparison to published research articles in multiple disciplines? How frequently do novice L2 writers use the first-person pronoun "I" in argumentative essays in comparison to other genres?
(2) How frequently do novice L2 writers use the subjective singular case of first-person pronoun "I" in comparison to other cases?

(3) How do novice L2 writers use first person pronoun "I" differently to index different authorial identities in academic discursive interactions?

I begin with a review of the notions of authorial identity and interaction in academic discourse, drawing primarily on Ivanič (1998). Then I introduce the methods I adopted for data collection and analysis, followed by a presentation of the findings and pedagogical implications for L2 writing teachers.

AUTHORIAL IDENTITY

Writing, regardless of its genre, purpose, audience, and rhetorical situation, is autobiographical in nature and involves identity negotiation (Brooke, 1991). As Hyland (2001) reflects on Ivanič's (1998) conceptualization of writers' identity, "[a]ll writing carries information about the writer" (p. 209). Thus, writing is, essentially, an act of identity. Writers' identity is inevitably expressed and communicated through textual production. Ivanič (1998) suggests three ways of thinking about a writer's identity, i.e., "autobiographical self," "discoursal self," and "authorial self." The notion of authorial self, which is particularly relevant here, refers to a writer's identity as it is reflected in their act of claiming responsibility for their textual production.

The first-person pronoun "I" is arguably the most direct textual representation of a writer's authorial identity, as it is inextricably linked to the writer's degree of comfort and assertiveness in claiming responsibility for the content. Specifically, the use of the first-person pronoun "I" creates dialogical space for writers to "emphasize, and to seek agreement for, their own contributions" (Hyland, 2002, p. 1093). The presence of the first-person pronoun "I" is also a reliable indication of a writer's attempt at inserting their own voice into existing textual dialogues as a legitimate, credible, and authoritative speaker, and of their willingness to justify the text produced.

The importance of the presence of authorial identity in academic writing has recently been highlighted in textbooks and writing pedagogy. For example, Graff and Birkenstein's (2014) writing textbook *"They Say / I Say": The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* explicitly incorporates a template approach to guide students through the process of negotiating ideas and claims with existing scholars and thus to negotiate their authorial presence. Scholars have also documented different cultural perceptions of the construct of authorial identity and disciplinary writing conventions, when it comes to novice L2 writers' writing practices. Shen (1989), a scholar originally from China, in his autobiographical account of his experiences of learning to compose in a different linguistic and cultural context—academia in the U.S., reflects that "[b]oth political pressure and literary tradition require that 'I' be somewhat hidden or buried in writings and speeches. . . The word 'I' has often been identified with another 'bad' word, 'individualism,' which has become a synonym for selfishness in China" (p. 460). In terms of disciplinary writing conventions, studies have demonstrated that in general, "the writer in the hard sciences is seeking to establish empirical uniformities through research activities that involve precise measurement and systematic scrutiny of a limited number of controlled variables," and as a result, "the writer can downplay his or her personal role in the research in order to highlight the phenomena under study, the replicability of research activities, and the generality of the findings" (Hyland, 2001, pp. 215–216). The close relationship between first-person pronoun use and a writer's authorial identity reviewed above suggests that a writer's authorial identity is always textually and discursively embedded, which necessitates a further

understanding of how writers, novice L2 writers in this case, interact with their readers in academic discourse.

INTERACTION IN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

Novice L2 writers enter an introductory composition course in the U.S. context oftentimes with the belief that they are expected to write grammatically flawless sentences. More advanced writers may not be easily contented with the basic level of grammatical perfection, and would aim for "American-like" and "lively" or authentic academic writing (Liu & Tannacito, 2013, p. 364). Grammatical soundness and "nativeness," thus, may be considered and internalized by many novice L2 writers as two defining characteristics of the construct "academic discourse."

Yet the academic discourse that writing teachers construct differs considerably. First, academic discourse only shares a small portion of overlap with grammaticality and "nativeness" in the sense that academic writing typically (though often polemically) implies using standard written English. However, academic discourse is also ideology-, discipline-, and genre-bound. It presupposes a certain way of thinking and composing the thinking, which requires writers to speak and write as established discourse community members do. This requirement might pose challenges to novice L2 writers who may not be familiar with disciplinary writing conventions. Second, academic discourse is inherently social and interactive, fluid and dynamic, as opposed to a set of fixed rules to which one can conform. The tacitly agreed way of thinking and composing is socially and discursively constructed and shared by community members through textual communications, which characterizes academic discourse practices.

Given the social nature of academic writing activities, it is crucial for writers to claim responsibility for their texts by demonstrating meta-discourse awareness of and authorial control over their texts. Although the assumption has its merit in acknowledging writers' responsibility, it inevitably bolsters the view that academic writing is "essentially an issue of accommodation" and "gaining acceptance of one's claims" (Hyland, 2001, p. 209), which tends to draw academic writers' reliance on impersonality. The dilemma is documented in Kuo's (1999) study of first-person pronouns in scientific journal articles. He notes, "[a]s a writer, therefore, the scientist must claim the significance of his/her research to the discipline on the one hand, but appeal modestly to both editors and expected readers—his/her peer researchers—seeking their approval and acceptance on the other" (p. 122). Hyland (2001) maintains that "because articles are sites of disciplinary engagement, where writers interact with specialist audiences rather than with general readers, admonishments to avoid self-mention are sometimes said to be misguided" (p. 209). The dominant influence of academic writing conventions in the hard science fields has shaped the way novice L2 writers approach writing at the college level in general. For example, they tend to minimize the presence of first-person pronouns and overuse passive voice constructions in research papers. As Kuo (1999) argues, the use (and by implication, absence) of personal pronouns "can often reveal how writers view themselves, their relationship with readers, and their relationship with the discourse community they belong to" (p. 123). It is, thus, potentially fruitful to examine novice L2 writers' use of the first-person pronoun "I" in order to understand their textual construction of authorial identity within the academic context.

METHODS AND DATA

In this study, I quantitatively analyzed and qualitatively interpreted the use of first personal pronoun "I" in a corpus of 126 research-based argumentative essays written by L2 students enrolled in 10 sections of an introductory college composition course at a large Midwest research university. Corpus analysis is, in general, a reliable approach to studying a large collection of textual materials, as suggested by its machine-aided high-accuracy and high-speed calculation. The corpus I used in this study is a sub-corpus extracted from a larger corpus of student essays produced in 12 sections of the same introductory composition course at the same university. The corpus contains papers of 5 different genres: autobiography, research topic proposal, interview report, synthesis paper, and argumentative essay. The essays are produced by first-year international students from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds with an age ranging from 18 to 22. They are all enrolled in the L2 sections of an introductory composition course designed for students who might be disadvantaged in the mainstream composition class due to their relatively lower level of English proficiency, experience writing in English, familiarity with U.S. culture (as defined in a broad sense), or educational experiences. The class is typically taught by instructors with expertise in L2 writing. Students are allowed to work on multiple drafts before submitting the final draft.

I mainly focus on a sub-corpus consisting of the final drafts of Chinese students' (56 female and 70 male) final assignment—the argumentative essay. Table 1 shows the basic information of the sub-corpus used in the study. I selected the argumentative essay to be the genre through which I examine students' authorial identity for two reasons. First, argument is an essential rhetorical move in academic contexts, as suggested by the constructivist notion that knowledge construction and scholarly activities are argumentative in nature. Scholarly publications are inherently dialogic, which predetermines the textual presence of the writer's identity. The value of argument in academic contexts has translated into the curriculum of the introductory composition course, as the majority of the course focuses on the argumentative essay assignment. Second, the argumentative essay is the last of the five major assignments, which suggests that in most cases, it is the culmination of the progress students make and a representation of their most mature writing.

Table 1. Text Corpus Used in the Study

Number of Texts	Female	Male	Native Language	Genre	Word Tokens	Word Types
126	56	70	Chinese	Argumentative Research Essay	133,266	9,310

The corpus examined in this study contains 133,266 word tokens and 9,310 word types. I imported the texts into text concordancing tool *AntConc 3.4.3* (Anthony, 2016) and conducted a keyword search of the first-person pronoun "I," its plural case "we" and objective case "me" in the five genres, in order to understand the use of "I" in relation to other cases in context. The results are presented in a list of concordance lines that displays the keyword "I" in its immediate context. I then coded the keyword "I" based on its different rhetorical functions, drawing on the modified coding schemes adopted from Tang and John (1999), Kuo (1999), and Hyland (2002). It is worth noting that the data set examined in Kuo (1999) consists of

published journal articles, whereas that examined in Hyland (2002) is a corpus of undergraduate theses, both of which are drastically different from texts produced in the L2 introductory composition courses. Therefore, I modified the schemes to better represent the functions of "I" in this corpus. I invited a second coder who has experience in coding corpus data to code a randomly selected sub-data-set, which accounts for 10% of the entire data set, and negotiated the discrepancies and reached an intercoder reliability of 87%.

FINDINGS

The results of the software-assisted analysis of first-person pronouns used in the corpus were processed and interpreted both quantitatively and qualitatively. I will present the quantitative results generated from inter-corpora and intra-corpus comparisons, and then provide my qualitative interpretations of the results.

Quantitative Data

It is necessary, first and foremost, to contextualize the argumentative essays examined in this study in relation to other genres (i.e., autobiography, research topic proposal, interview report, synthesis paper) that students have practiced prior to composing the argumentative essays, as their writing may be affected by their exposure to instruction in other genres.

Table 2. Frequency of First-Person Pronouns Across Genres

Genre	Word Tokens	"I"	Frequency	"me"	Frequency	"we"	Frequency
Autobiography	135,812	6,823	5.02%	1693	1.25%	365	0.27%
Proposal	142,143	3,427	2.41%	668	0.47%	708	0.50%
Interview report	160,289	2,527	1.58%	572	0.36%	700	0.44%
Synthesis paper	327,872	1,258	0.38%	182	0.06%	688	0.21%
Argumentative essay	*133,266*	*693*	*0.52%*	*116*	*0.09%*	*348*	*0.26%*
Total	899,382	14,728	1.64%	3231	0.36%	2809	0.31%

Table 2 illustrates the genres, word tokens of each genre, and number and frequency of the subjective singular case of the first-person pronoun "I," those of its objective singular case "me," and those of its subjective plural case "we." It should be noted that the texts of other genres that are analyzed here are also final drafts from Chinese L2 writers as is the case with the sub-corpus of argumentative essays introduced above. Table 2 provides an overview of the writers' use of first-person pronouns across different genres.

Comparison Across Genres

As can be seen from Table 2, the total number of the first-person pronoun "I" is 14,728, which accounts for 1.64% of the total word tokens. This frequency is relatively higher, compared with that of the first-person pronoun "I" in Hyland's (2001) corpus of 240 research articles in eight disciplines (p. 212), which is 0.11%. This can be tentatively explained as the result of the involvement of personal expressive genres such as autobiography in the corpus,

which is narrative in nature and typically contains a more subjective account of personal stories. The higher frequency of "I" in the novice L2 writing corpus may also be explained by the students' relative lack of understanding of disciplinary conventions or appreciation of their function, or by their lack of exposure to explicit instruction on the proper use of first-person pronouns. However, even if we only compare the frequency of "I" appearing in argumentative essays in the corpus with that in Hyland's (2001) corpus of research articles, the former is still slightly higher than the latter (0.52% vs. 0.11%). Interestingly, the frequency of "I" in another of Hyland's (2002) corpora, which consists of 64 Hong Kong undergraduate theses, is significantly lower than that of "I" in his corpus of research articles (0.04%).

As Table 2 illustrates, compared with its counterpart in other genres (except for synthesis papers) in the same corpus, the frequency of the first-person pronoun "I" in the argumentative essay sub-corpus is relatively lower. For example, the frequency of "I" is 5.02% in students' first assignment—autobiographies, 2.41% in proposals, 1.58% in interview reports, and 0.38% in synthesis papers. The result is not surprising in the first case—autobiography, since it's characteristically personal and expressive. The first-person pronoun "I" is frequently used in a narrative as a textual guide that serves to lead the audience through personal accounts.

Comparison Across Pronoun Cases

Pronoun cases used in the corpus are also examined quantitatively in this study. Published academic writers tend to restrict their use of the objective case of the first-person pronoun "me," which carries a narrative tone. This avoidance of the objective first-person pronoun "me" can be demonstrated by Hyland's (2001) statistical data of the frequency of self-mention, which shows that the frequency of "me" in his corpus of 240 journal articles is a mere 0.008% across 8 disciplines, compared with a 0.112% frequency of the subjective form of "I." The ratio of the frequency of "I" to that of "me" in Hyland's (2001) corpus is 14. This significant difference between the use of subjective and objective case of the singular first-person pronoun is also observed in the corpus used in this study. As Table 2 shows, the overall frequency of the pronoun "me" in the corpus is 0.36%, which is considerably lower than that of the pronoun "I," which is 1.64%. The ratio of the frequency of "I" to that of "me" in the corpus of L2 student writers is 4.56. The lower ratio indicates that L2 student writers in the introductory L2 writing course tend to use more of the objective-case first-person pronoun "me" than published writers in various disciplines. This could be ascribed to two possible reasons— vastly different genres included in the corpus of my study and students' reliance on narratives in even non-narrative argumentative essays.

I ran a correlation coefficient analysis on the frequency of "I" and that of "me" in the corpus across different genres. The result, which is 0.995, suggests that the use of subjective case "I" and objective case "me" in students' writings are strongly correlated. More specifically, students who use "I" tend also to use "me." This tendency is a strong indication that students rely on narratives in their writing regardless of the genre differences. For example, the following line is extracted from a student's argumentative essay in the corpus. "Through this experience, some experts testified that most of students have the same feeling as me after volunteering" (Student Sample). In this sentence, the student is justifying his/her own feeling about an experience using scholarly evidence.

The use of the plural case of the first-person pronoun shows a different tendency in terms of its relation to the singular case. Compared with the subjective singular case "I," the frequency of "we" is much lower. The ratio of the frequency of "I" to that of "we" is 5.29.

However, in Hyland's (2001) corpus of research journal articles, the ratio is 0.63, which is lower than the ratio in my corpus. The ratio difference suggests that authors of published journal articles tend to use more plural first-person pronouns than novice L2 writers. This could be a consequence of specific disciplinary writing conventions. The disciplines from which Hyland drew texts usually require a great deal of collaborative work, such as physics, marketing, and biology. As a result, they tend to use the plural form of the first-person pronoun to refer to the co-researchers/co-authors in their articles. In contrast, the L2 writers in introductory L2 writing courses in this study are not directed to work collaboratively during the course of the semester. A closer examination of specific cases of the use of "we" indicates that novice L2 writers typically use "we" to group themselves with their audience, rather than refer to their co-authors. For example, in one case, the student writes "Even in daily life, drinking tea provides a chance for us to mediate [sic] a short time so that we can receive mental pleasure" (Student Sample). In this example, the student writer is using "we" to refer to the general population.

A correlation coefficient analysis reveals that the correlation between the frequency of "I" and "we" across different genres is relatively weak at 0.15, which suggests that students' use of the plural first-person pronoun "we" does not strongly affect their use of the singular first-person pronoun "I." While this result suggests possible directions for further research, the focus remains on the use of "I." In the following section, I will discuss the rhetorical functions of the first-person pronoun "I."

Rhetorical Functions of "I"

A comparison of the use of the first-person pronoun "I" across genres and in relation to its objective case and plural form contextualizes the case being studied. Yet an examination of the frequency of the pronoun "I" does not sufficiently operationalize the rather nebulous construct of authorial identity. In other words, it is not enough to merely calculate "how many." The "how" should also be investigated to understand textual representations of L2 student writers' authorial identity. The "how" refers to writers' textual manipulation of first-person pronouns in order to project a certain textual identity and achieve a certain rhetorical effect. Here, I use the term "rhetorical function" to refer to ways in which "I" could be used in different rhetorical contexts to achieve different rhetorical effects. As I explained in the Methods and Data section, I adopted and revised the typology of rhetorical functions in Tang and John (1999), Kuo (1999), and Hyland (2002) to better represent the data of my study. Table 3 shows the revised typology I use in this study. The rhetorical function of a certain instance of "I" in the corpus is determined by its immediate word context. In other words, the rhetorical function of a specific "I" is determined by several words (up to six) preceding and following it. In most cases, the key determiner of the rhetorical function of a certain instance of "I" is the main verb following it. There are cases in which the same main verb contributes to different rhetorical functions due to different semantic contexts.

I identified five rhetorical functions of students' use of the first-person pronoun "I" in the sub-corpus of 126 argumentative essays— "reporter," "architect," "narrator of personal experiences," "conceder," and "opinion-holder." I use personified verbs or phrases to emphasize writers' agency. The 693 cases of first-person pronoun "I" are distributed across the 5 rhetorical functions. As can be seen from Table 3, the function "narrator of personal experiences" is predominant, accounting for 49.35% of the entire dataset of the uses of "I." In contrast, the function "conceder" accounts for merely 1.01% of all instances of "I." In the

following sections, I will elaborate on each of the 5 rhetorical functions.

Table 3. Rhetorical Functions of First-Person Pronoun "I" in the Sub-Corpus of Argumentative Essays

Rhetorical Function	Number	Frequency
Reporter	98	14.14%
Architect	65	9.38%
Narrator of personal experiences	342	49.35%
Conceder	7	1.01%
Opinion-holder	181	26.12%
Total "I" tokens	693	100%

I. Reporter

The first-person pronoun "I" that indicates the writer's authorial identity as a reporter in the sub-corpus is defined as the writer's rhetorical move of recounting the research procedures and other research-related activities, such as introducing secondary sources and reporting on interviews. Since the assignment is a research-based argumentative essay, students are required to conduct secondary research and encouraged to design primary research. The evidence from secondary research is usually collected by reading books, journal articles, and online resources, whereas that from primary research is typically gathered through interviews. Thus, it is not uncommon that students present themselves as legitimate sources of evidence and initiate a report of the research procedures as an agentive researcher. It should be noted, however, that "I" as the reporter does not equal "I" followed by a reporting verb, as not all reporting verbs are stance-neutral. For example, "I argue" is a typical "I" followed by a reporting verb "argue." Yet it is not categorized as "I" as the reporter in this study, as the function "reporter" is defined here as reporter of research procedures that do not typically involve explicit stance-making. Table 3 shows that the instances in which "I" is used as the reporter account for 14.14% of all instances of "I"'s. Here are several examples from the sub-corpus in which "I" is used rhetorically as the reporter.

(1) After that, *I* interviewed a [sic] expert, [person name withheld], who is sociology professor works in [institution name withheld] and his subject area [sic] are Psychology, Sociology, Ethnic and Racial Studies. *I* emailed him asking if he would be available to answer some of my questions (Student Sample).

(2) For more evidence and proof, *I* performed a small research experiment. *I* chose ten Chinese students from my social circle randomly and they are all currently studying at [institution name withheld] (Student Sample).

(3) Moreover, *I* read an article named "Are friends important in educational outcomes?" It shows that students influence each other not only through how teachers respond to him/her, but also in how he/she influences classroom standards (Student Sample).

In the above examples, the first-person pronoun "I" is used to explain the evidence-collecting processes, as indicated by the main verb of each sentence: "I interviewed," "I emailed," "I performed," "I chose," and "I read." As can be seen, the writers are fairly assertive in their authorial presence in the text, as indicated by their use of simple and direct sentence structures

with the subject "I," verbs in their past tense, and the object. There are minimal instances of hedging in the sentences that include an "I" coded as the reporter. It seems that L2 student writers are mostly confident in recounting research procedures or other related activities that help to build their authorial identity as credible and competent researchers. It's worth pointing out, however, that this presence of authorial identity does not necessarily suggest the quality of their writing.

II. Architect

The first-person pronoun "I" that indicates the writer's authorial identity as an architect in the sub-corpus is defined as the writer's rhetorical move of constructing and organizing the essay through informing the audience of the arguments, evidence, sources, and contexts that are included in the essay. Contrary to "I" as the reporter, which typically indicates what the writer did prior to writing the essay, "I" as the architect often involves a preview of what is going to be covered in the essay. In this case, novice L2 writers present themselves as the architect of the essay and the guide of the textual construction simultaneously. On the one hand, through explicitly presenting their authorial identity using "I," they are claiming their ownership of the textual construction and illustrating the components of the text. On the other hand, they are implicitly directing the audience as to how to read the text. As Table 3 presents, the instances in which "I" is used as the architect account for 9.38% of all instances of "I"s. Here are several examples from the sub-corpus in which "I" is used rhetorically as the architect.

(1) In what follows, *I* will introduce the root causes and immediate causes of hair growth, and utilize them to explain why shaving boosts our body hair or beard growth is actually a self-evident illusion (Student Sample).
(2) In the rest of my paper, *I* will state that the CBT's benefits with other solutions, like medicines or lifestyle changes (Student Sample).
(3) To support my opinion, *I* will take the compare and compete of 2D animation and 3D animation (Student Sample).

In the above examples, the first-person pronoun "I" is used to indicate what is going to be discussed in the following sections of the student's essay. The three examples above identically follow "I" with the modal verb "will" and the main verbs. Hedging is rarely used to imply the writer's uncertainty. When presenting themselves as the architect in the texts, novice L2 writers are fairly assertive in directing their intended audience's attention and potentially establishing a cooperative writer-reader relationship. This particular use of "I" also implies that the student writers in this study are consciously aware of and willing to assume the responsibility of enhancing the readers' comprehension by clearly stating for what they should be prepared.

III. Narrator of Personal Experiences

"Narrator of personal experiences" here refers to students' rhetorical move of using first-person pronoun "I" to initiate an account of personal experiences, or anecdotes that happened prior to composing the essay. It differs from "I" as the reporter in that it is not directly related to the research that provides evidence for the writer's argument. Rather, it reflects the writer's attempt at incorporating his/her personal experiences to illustrate a point, using pathos to

build rapport with the intended audience, and implicitly establishing their ethos as an experienced writer. "Narrator of personal experiences" accounts for 49.35% of all the instances of "I," suggesting a strong tendency of using "I" to tell personal anecdotes among the novice L2 writers in this study. This tendency demonstrates the exact antithesis of the belief that academic writing is and is supposed to be impersonal and objective. Students not only find it comfortable using "I," they also rely on it to share personal stories. Yet, personal stories are usually not generalizable and thus, within academic writing, should not be used to support writers' arguments. Here are several examples from the sub-corpus in which "I" is used rhetorically as the narrator of personal experiences.

(1) *I* was going back to my dorm when *I* saw another room's door open. *I* found an American student playing online game. *I* felt excited at that time, because *I* played the same game (Student Sample).
(2) *I* am also a big fan of exercising. *I* have been working out for 2 years, and *I* really enjoy it. Every time *I* see myself in the mirror, *I* feel really pleasant because *I* can clearly recognize the result of my effort (Student Sample).
(3) From my own experience, after *I* joined the Hunter's Moon (A name of a volunteering program), *I* learned how to fire corns. This is a new experience that *I* have never imagined before (Student Sample).

As the examples above illustrate, the writers' authorial identity is textually manifested as the narrator of their personal experiences that reveal who they are apart from the initiator of the argument. These experiences often involve expressions of emotions and feelings, which appeal to the audience through a less impersonal and more engaging way. Some of the narratives may be personal confessions, for example, "I am also a big fan of exercising." This type of authorial presence contributes to the establishment of the writer's credibility and further connects the writer to the readers.

IV. Conceder

The rhetorical function of the first-person pronoun "I" that is rarely attended to is "conceder," by which I refer to the rhetorical move of projecting an authorial identity as a reasonable and credible writer who acknowledges potential counterarguments. In the sub-corpus used in this study, "I" as the conceder accounts for merely 1.01% of all cases of "I." It should be noted that I initially intended to combine the rhetorical function of "conceder" and that of "opinion-holder," since essentially, by conceding, or acknowledging opponents' views, the writer is revealing his/her own opinion. Nonetheless, concession is one of the most frequently used rhetorical devices, among others, such as illustration and comparison and contrast. Further, self-mention in a concession is an effective rhetorical strategy of building the writer's academic ethos. Additionally, its rarity suggests the need of special attention. It is also important to point out that the identification of the rhetorical function "conceder" is not always reliant on the word context to the right of "I" or the main verb attached to "I." Rather, in most cases, conjunctions such as "although" serve as an indication of a concession. Here are several examples from the sub-corpus in which "I" is used rhetorically as the conceder.

(1) At certain extent, *I* agree this view. But as I observer, some restaurants are still using low quality raw materials in cooking so as to reduce their business cost (Student

Sample).
(2) I know that *I* am not a master of English, but I am pretty sure that my language skill can handle the daily talk with local students (Student Sample).
(3) Originally, *I* stood on the side of hand-writing. But now, as an old saying goes in a Chinese ancient poetry "Reaching the top, then you can hold all mountains in a single glance", I should say that I stand a step higher above both modes of writing after having a deeper knowledge of them (Student Sample).

As can be seen from these examples, the "I"'s whose rhetorical function is coded "conceder" are not necessarily opinion-holders. It may also take the form of a confessor, as student sample (2) illustrates. In this example, the student writer is confessing and conceding that he/she is not a "master of English," which builds his/her ethos as an honest and credible writer. Student sample (3) demonstrates that the rhetorical function of "I" is not always easily identifiable and unequivocal, since the "I" in "originally, I stood on the side of hand-writing" might be perceived and coded as the narrator of personal experiences. Yet I decided to code it as "conceder" due to the chronological contrast the writer deploys and the clear stance he/she holds. This example, too, illustrates that "I" as a conceder is not always an indication of acknowledging opponents' views; it can also serve as a rhetorical device to recognize the writer's own previous opinion.

V. Opinion-Holder

Circumstances abound when the novice L2 writers in this study explicitly take stances and position themselves in the discussion of topics of their choice. In some situations, they may not be consciously aware of their rhetorical moves of taking a stance. However, in most cases, they are consciously aware of their attempt to emphasize their beliefs and stances on a certain issue through textually presenting their authorial identity as opinion-holders. This rhetorical function is typically indicated by reporting verbs such as "argue," "believe," and "think," etc. It accounts for 26.12% of all the instances of "I." Here are several examples from the sub-corpus in which "I" is used rhetorically as the opinion-holder.

(1) In order to help international students improve English levels in both academic areas and social areas, *I* argue that it is important to set up specific courses that aim at enhancing English abilities of international students (Student Sample).
(2) From my perspective, *I* believe dancers' performance is the most important quality (Student Sample).
(3) They suggest that international students might feel uncomfortable in the communication with the native because of the cultural misjudgment which is from the local peer's incomprehension of cultural differences. *I* agree with this point of view (Student Sample).
(4) Other Japanese civilians think that Otaku culture seems useless to the reality. I cannot say their point is wrong. But in my own view, *I* think that these people would think that Otaku culture is useless is because that Otaku culture is too novel to Japanese civilians (Student Sample).

The first example illustrates an explicit self-mention as an opinion-holder, in which the writer follows "I" with the reporting verb "argue." Although this is a fairly assertive move of

representing a rhetorical stance, it is not a common one in this corpus. Out of 181 instances, there are only three instances of the use of "argue" when writers presenting authorial identity as an opinion-holder. This may be ascribed to novice L2 writers' lack of lexical variety or their lack of authorial confidence in making arguments. Example (3) illustrates a different rhetorical move of taking a stance, which is demonstrating agreement on preexisting opinions. This indirect way of taking a stance is less risky and helps the writer to establish credibility. Example (4) is a rather sophisticated deployment of arguments. The writer concedes first by acknowledging opponents' stance, and then clearly distinguishes him/herself from that stance.

DISCUSSION

In his corpus analysis of first-person pronouns in Hong Kong undergraduate theses, Hyland (2002) argued that "students consciously avoided the most authoritative functions and sought to deny ownership and responsibility for their views" (p. 1107), and provided his speculations about the reasons for doing so: "recommendations from style manuals, uncertainties about disciplinary conventions, culturally shaped epistemologies, culture-specific views of authority, conflicting teacher advice, or personal preferences" (p. 1107). Contrary to what Hyland found out, novice L2 writers in the present study demonstrated their practice of using first-person pronouns to achieve different rhetorical purposes across different genres. For example, novice L2 writers in this study used the first-person pronoun "I" in argumentative essays much more frequently than both published authors in a range of disciplines (Hyland, 2001) and the 64 Hong Kong theses writers (Hyland, 2002). This finding suggests that these novice L2 writers do not seem to readily conform to the tacit academic writing convention, especially in hard sciences, of downplaying the writer's personal role in research-based argumentative papers. However, it is worth pointing out that the quantitative data alone does not contribute to our understanding as to whether or not these writers made conscious rhetorical choices of using certain first-person pronouns, nor does it contribute to our understanding of why they use first-person pronouns. Yet it is safe to claim that the frequent use of first-person pronouns and self-mention, regardless of writers' conscious rhetorical choice, reveals their authorial identity as perceived by their audience.

Moreover, novice L2 writers' use of the objective and plural cases of the first-person pronoun in relation to the subjective singular case "I" seems to challenge the reductive and outdated cultural myth that Chinese writers tend to embrace collectivism in their writings by favoring "we" over "I" (Wu & Rubin, 2000). For example, novice L2 (Chinese) writers in the present study use singular case "I" more frequently than plural case "we," whereas published authors in different disciplines in Hyland's (2001) study show the opposite tendency—using plural case "we" more frequently than singular case "I." This finding may suggest that these novice Chinese L2 writers are comfortable enough to claim expressions of thoughts and ideas in their writings as their own, as opposed to attributing them to collective wisdom while undermining their own contributions.

The analysis of the rhetorical functions of first-person pronoun "I" demonstrates that not only do novice L2 writers use "I" in constructing research-based academic arguments, they also use it in different ways to assume different authorial roles in discursive interactions. These writers use "I" to explain their research methods and procedures, to guide the audience through their essays and orient the audience to their arguments and key claims, to help the audience more effectively take up their arguments through recounting personal experiences, to acknowledge counterarguments and their own biases and limitations, and to clearly and

responsibly position themselves in academic arguments. Depending on how the writing instruction is scaffolded and to what extent the writers are rhetorically aware of the functions of "I," they may or may not be able to articulate the rationale behind their choices of "I" functions. Nonetheless, these novice L2 writer are engaged in marking their authorial identities and initiating textual interactions with their audience through the exploration of different rhetorical functions of "I."

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

I have explored the frequency, scope, and rhetorical functions of the subjective singular first personal pronoun "I" used in a corpus of texts produced by college-level L2 writers from China that reflects their complex authorial identities. The findings suggest that these novice L2 writers from China are more reliant on self-mention in their research-based argumentative essays than published academic writers, as suggested by their more frequent use of the first-person pronoun "I." In addition, these L2 writers' argumentative essays tend to carry a narrative tone, as indicated by the relatively frequent use of the objective singular case "me." An exploration of the rhetorical functions of "I" used in students' argumentative essays reveals that novice L2 writers in my study use "I" in different ways to assume different authorial roles in discursive interactions. Various factors may account for the differences in terms of the use of first-person pronoun "I" both quantitatively and qualitatively between novice L2 writers in my study and published academic writers in Hyland's (2001) study. For example, the intended audience, disciplinary genre conventions, experience with academic writing, and classroom instruction, rather than the mere factor of L1 background or rhetorical practices related to culture. In short, while the data and methodology of the present study may be limited in terms of explaining students' rationale behind their use of first-person pronouns, we could safely claim that their textually embedded authorial identities and interactions with audience are multifaceted, complex, purposeful or arbitrary. In this final section, I provide several pedagogical suggestions that could be adopted by college-level L2 writing teachers in order to more effectively discuss with students the deployment of first-person pronouns in their writings to present discursively appropriate and stylistically idiosyncratic authorial identities.

First, I would like to suggest that we as L2 writing teachers recognize and respect our students' act of drawing on their culturally shaped linguistic resources to construct their textual authorial identity, and acknowledge that all writing activities are "identity work" (Snow & Anderson, 1987). A traditional pedagogical approach built upon the deficit model tends to attribute novice L2 writers' idiosyncratic linguistic codes or rhetorical moves to their still developing language proficiency or emerging cultural awareness. Yet the study shows that these novice L2 writers from China do make use of their available (perhaps still limited) linguistic resources—in this case, first-person pronouns—to mark their authorial identity in different rhetorical contexts, although they may or may not be able to articulate their linguistic choices at this point. As L2 writing teachers, we need to provide them with the discourse to talk about and reflect on their use of first-person pronouns and the corresponding rhetorical effects. Further, L2 writing teachers need to be cautious not to essentialize the ways in which novice L2 writers from a certain linguistic or cultural background use first-person pronouns to perform their identities. A common response to the unconventional use of first-person pronouns that we would find in most L2 writing teachers' repertoire is "this is caused by the writer's different linguistic and cultural background." However, as the findings of the study

suggest, novice L2 writers do indeed use first-person pronouns in a variety of ways to achieve different rhetorical purposes. Although they may use first-person pronouns differently than those published writers in different academic disciplines do, we are yet to confidently claim that the difference is associated with or could be explained by cultural differences. Doing so would easily put us in danger of reducing students' complex identity construction to the texts that they produce and dismissing their rich literacy experiences. Therefore, I suggest that L2 writing teachers refrain from automatically attributing students' unconventional use of first-person pronouns to their linguistic and cultural difference; instead, teachers should be willing to negotiate with each individual student and learn the rationale behind their rhetorical decisions.

In addition, despite the fact that most L2 writing teachers are extremely busy, they should aim to cultivate in students a critical awareness of textually represented authorial identity by initiating an explicit discussion in class. I encourage teachers to not only openly discuss the use of first-person pronouns, but also to initiate conversations about the ways in which writers' identities are embedded in their writing and the ways in which certain audiences might perceive a writer's textually embedded identity.

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