Personal and Impersonal Authorial References: A Contrastive Study of English and Italian Linguistics Research Articles

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10 April 2024

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TORINO

Personal and Impersonal Authorial References: A Contrastive Study of English and Italian Linguistics Research Articles

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Abstract

A cross-cultural approach is taken to analyse Linguistics research articles in English and Italian in terms of 1) the use of exclusive first-person subject pronouns in English and first-person inflected verbs in Italian, and 2) the passive voice in both languages and *si* constructions in Italian. The aim is to determine whether personal and impersonal authorial references as realised by these features are susceptible to vary across academic writing cultures. The results indicate that discrepancies are observable in the frequency of use of personal and impersonal authorial references across discourse functions. This variation seems to be due to the adoption of differing interpersonal strategies, subjectivity or objectivity, within the two academic discourse communities, and the dissimilar incidence of particular discourse functions and their sub-functions, which ultimately influence the rate of occurrence of personal and impersonal authorial references.

1. Introduction

Current approaches to academic communication view writing as a social activity and knowledge as the product of the social validation of claims. Discourse is seen as

playing a crucial role in the process of knowledge construction. Consequently, in English for Academic Purposes, scholars have focused their interest on the interpersonal nature of academic communication describing how academics use language to argue in favour of their views and seek consensus.

In this paper, I argue that the rhetorical construction of objectivity is an important aspect to consider when dealing with interpersonality in academic writing. As many scholars have observed (MacDonald, 1992; Hyland, 2000; Becher and Trowler, 2001; Hyland and Tse, 2005) the decision to frame one's arguments in a rather objective and impersonal style is related to the epistemological beliefs of the disciplinary community which writers belong to. However, the adoption of an impersonal style may also be associated with the need of scholars to conform to the writing traditions of their academic community (Vassileva, 2000; Shaw, 2003; Yakhontova, 2006; Shaw and Vassileva, 2009). In either circumstance, the adoption of an impersonal style may be considered a rhetorical choice that has more to do with how academics present a situation than with how it "really" is. Therefore, it may be argued that the decision to base one's arguments on objectivity is a matter of social alignment for persuasive purposes.

Current models for the study of social interaction through language seem only partially adequate to account for the socially-driven lexico-grammatical resources used to construct objectivity. A first obstacle is that current frameworks are mainly concerned with how subjectivity is expressed rather than with the expression of objectivity. The study of *appraisal* in language, for instance, focuses on the "subjective presence of writers/speakers in texts as they adopt stances towards both the material they present and those with whom they communicate" (Martin and White, 2005, pp. 1). Similarly, the study of *evaluation* deals with the expression of the writer's opinion,

which can be recognised in discourse by "identifying signals of comparison, subjectivity and social value" (Hunston and Thompson, 2000, pp. 13).

A second problem lies in the focus of frameworks, such as *metadiscourse,* on the overt "manifestation" of interpersonality, i.e. markers appearing on the surface of language (Hyland, 2005a, pp.28). As a consequence, not all the grammatical structures which are part of the inventory of resources used to convey objectivity can be accounted for by applying current analytical schemes. A case in point is the passive voice, which is difficult to fit in these models because what makes it relevant to the study of interpersonality is often the absence rather than the presence of a signal indicating the agent/actor.

A way to investigate the interpersonal role of objectivity may be to simply adopt the metaphor of "interpersonality" as a reference point, without restricting it to specific semantic domains or codified elements in texts, but including all those aspects of communication which are able to index connections between the writer/speaker and a particular social identity. In this paper, I use the metaphor of "interpersonality" to account for the way the expression of subjectivity and objectivity is balanced in Research Articles (RAs) in the field of Linguistics. I take a contrastive approach and compare how this balance is achieved within the international, Anglophone academic community and the national, Italian-speaking academic community.

In particular, I focus on how writers make explicit or conceal their presence in texts. While in English first-person subject pronouns are used by writers to appear as visible authors, in Italian this function is mainly realised through verb endings. For this reason, I use the term "personal authorial reference" to refer to exclusive first-person subject pronouns in English and first-person inflected verbs in Italian. I add the qualification "impersonal" to "authorial reference" to indicate passive, passive-like and

impersonal constructions as used to refer to the actions carried out by writers. In this study the impersonal constructions under analysis are the so-called "periphrastic passive" (auxiliary + past participle) in English and Italian, and *si* constructions in Italian (see section 2.2.).

It should be acknowledged that the visibility or invisibility of authors in texts may be realised by means of other personal and impersonal rhetorical options, such as possessive adjectives (e.g. *my*) or metonymic expressions functioning as "abstract rhetors" (e.g. *this paper*). First-person subject pronouns and inflected verbs, on the one hand, and passive and *si* constructions, on the other, were chosen because these features can be considered the more extreme, polarised forms writers have to highlight or obfuscate their role as authors.

The goals of this paper are the following: 1) to compare published Linguistics RAs in English and Italian to establish to what extent writers intrude in their texts by means of personal authorial references; 2) to investigate the use of impersonal authorial references to establish whether they are susceptible to cross-cultural variation; 3) to determine in what contexts Anglo-American and Italian linguists prefer the construction of objectivity over that of subjectivity and vice versa, so as to verify whether possible cross-cultural discrepancies in the frequency of personal and impersonal authorial references are due to the adoption of differing interpersonal strategies.

2. Personal and impersonal authorial references

2.1. Previous studies

The use of first-person pronouns in academic writing in English has increasingly attracted the attention of scholars as they have been shown to be an important rhetorical device which allows writers to emphasise their contribution to the academic debate and

construct an authoritative discoursal self through the realisations of various discourse functions (Kuo, 1999; Tang and John, 1999; Hyland, 2002). First-person pronouns have been studied across different disciplinary fields (Hyland, 2001; Harwood, 2005) and in texts written by native and non-native speakers of English (Hyland, 2002; Martínez, 2005).

An important line of inquiry has been the cross-cultural investigation of personal authorial references (Vassileva, 2000 – English, German, French, Russian and Bulgarian; Breivega et al., 2002 – English, French and Norwegian; Yakhontova, 2006 – English, Ukrainian and Russian; Mur Dueñas, 2007 – English and Spanish), which have been found to vary across "large" (Holliday, 1999), national cultures in terms of both their frequency and range of uses. Personal authorial references, therefore, appear important foci of analysis for the investigation of cultural identity in written academic discourse.[1]

The passive voice was one of the first grammatical resources to be investigated in early studies of scientific and technical English (see Barber, 1962; White, 1974). The aim was to provide evidence that specialised registers are characterised by distinctive lexico-grammatical features as compared to general English. From these initial quantitative investigations at the level of register, the study of voice progressively shifted to analyses of specific disciplinary fields, aiming at correlating form to function (Tarone et al., 1981; Heslot, 1982; Shaw, 1992).

As scholars have increasingly understood knowledge as the product of social construction, the initial attention to language structures such as the passive has

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[1]   In dealing with the English language the notion of national culture becomes problematic given the lingua-franca status of English. Therefore, it is more appropriate to refer to academic writing in English as reflecting the conventions of the international academic community.

gradually shifted to other linguistic phenomena, such as hedges (Hyland, 1998) and reporting verbs (Thompson and Ye, 1991), which more clearly indicated the highly rhetorical nature of academic writing. However, it may be argued that the use of the passive voice is no less rhetorical than the adoption of an overt stance by means of a personal pronoun. Rundbald suggests that impersonal forms of authorial reference, such as passive verbs and metonymic expressions, enable writers to "signal credibility, reliability, objectivity, and ultimately authority to their readers and the research community" (2007, pp. 251). In addition, the choice not to appear as visible authors may be related to the need to produce a text which conforms to the level of writer (in)visibility expected within a particular discourse community. Therefore, a study of the discourse functions of impersonal constructions combined with a parallel analysis of personal authorial references may reveal something of how writers position themselves within the academic community they belong to, and how they construct the relationship with their readers.

2.2. Cross-linguistic considerations

English and Italian differ in the way first-person references are encoded in grammar. In English, subject pronouns are indispensable to identify the agent/actor of a given process. In Italian, personal pronouns may be used, but they are most often omitted, as the subject is always signalled though morphology in the verb ending. Despite this difference, personal pronouns in English and verb endings in Italian can be considered comparable as they perform the same function.

In this article I also analyse periphrastic passive constructions in English and Italian. These structures can be considered comparable not only because they share the use of an auxiliary verb followed by the past participle of the main verb; they may also

be employed to background the writer's role through the omission of the agent phrase (examples 1 and 2).

(1)

These cases **are considered** individually below. [Lin3][2]

(2)

In (30) **vengono forniti** alcuni esempi […]. [AGI2]

[In (30) some example are provided […].]

Si constructions in Italian are also investigated in this paper. Under the label "*si* constructions" I include two different structures, namely the so-called passive and impersonal *si* (see Renzi, 1988). Both structures feature the particle *si* in preverbal position. However, passive *si* constructions can only occur with a transitive verb; the object of the verb, which functions as grammatical subject, controls verb agreement like in periphrastic passives (example 3).

(3)

In questi contesti non **si sono notate** possibili analogie […]. [RID1]

[In these contexts no possible analogies were noted […].]

Impersonal *si* constructions, on the other hand, can be used with transitive and intransitive verbs. The object of the verb is not promoted as subject, hence the verb is always conjugated in the third person singular (example 4).

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[2]   Henceforth each example will be accompanied by a tag referring to the article from which the example was taken. [Lin3] stands for article n.3 of the journal *Linguistics*. See Appendix A for a list of tags.

(4)

Si tenterà di mettere in connessione i dati acustici con i meccanismi fono-articolatori che vi sono sottesi. [RID3]

[We will try to establish a relationship between acoustic data and related phono-articulatory mechanisms.]

Si constructions have the effect of impersonalising verbal processes and generalising the semantic referent (Renzi, 1988). Therefore, they may be regarded as corresponding approximately to the indefinite pronoun *one,* which indicates an unspecified referent ("any person") (Quirk et al., 1985). However, in academic writing *si* constructions are often found in association with speech acts which are exclusively performed by writers, who can be considered the only referent actually backgrounded by these structures (example 5).

(5)

Con ciò **si vuole sottolineare** che in contesti del genere […]. [SGI3]

[With this, we wish to underline that in similar contexts […].]

These uses of *si* constructions can be compared to the so-called *pluralis majestatis* rather than the indefinite pronoun *one*. I therefore decided not to include *one* in the comparison, but to consider exclusive uses of the plural subject *we*. Following Hyland (2005b), inclusive references were interpreted as fulfilling a different rhetorical function (i.e. "engagement markers") and were consequently left out.

3. Corpus and methodology

The corpus for analysis consists of 60 single-authored RAs (about 450,000 words; see Table 1) taken from 10 journals in the field of Linguistics (i.e. 30 articles in each language corpus). The discipline of Linguistics was selected because in this area both English and Italian are required by Italian scholars to pursue their academic careers (see Cuccurullo, 2007).

The selection of journals was made by consulting an expert informant (Appendix A). The design of the Anglo-American sub-corpus was subordinated to the choice of journals in Italian so as to increase comparability. In particular, every effort was made to find periodicals publishing research in the same sub-fields and, when possible, addressing a similar audience.

A few restrictions were imposed in the sampling process. The texts had to fall under the category of "research articles" and they had to be single-authored. Texts in English had to be written by scholars based in Anglo-American Universities, whereas texts in Italian had to be written by scholars based in Italian Universities. Although it was not possible to ascertain the native language status of Anglo-American academics on the basis of their name and affiliation only, it was assumed that the texts are representative of international standards because they were all taken from authoritative peer-reviewed journals. The first article which met the above-mentioned requirements was included in the corpus.

The quantitative investigation of personal and impersonal authorial references was supplemented with a contextual analysis of occurrences so as to identify exclusive references to the writers and their discourse functions.

4. Frequency of use of personal and impersonal authorial references

4.1. Personal authorial references

Since there is considerable variation among articles in the two corpora – the longest totalling 14,684 words [SSL3] while the shortest 2,094 [IJL3] – raw frequencies were normalised to a hypothetical RA of 10,000 words. Table 2[3] shows the raw and normalised frequencies of personal authorial references in subject position. Anglo-American writers step into the discourse by means of this resource almost twice as often as their Italian colleagues. This result is not directly comparable to other data in the literature. However, previous studies have often found that English academic texts display higher frequencies of personal authorial references than equivalent texts in other languages (see Vassileva, 2000 for English, German, French, Russian and Bulgarian Linguistics RAs; Yakhontova, 2006 for English, Ukrainian and Russian conference abstracts in Applied Mathematics; Mur Dueñas, 2007 for English and Spanish Business Management RAs; Giannoni, 2008 for English and Italian medical editorials).

Differences across the two academic discourse communities may also be noted in the type of personal authorial reference used by linguists in their RAs. A preliminary reading of the texts indicated that six Italian papers featured the use of the *pluralis majestatis*. In the Anglo-American sub-corpus no instance of "royal we" was found (Table 3). In addition, of the 19 Italian articles in which first-person singular references were attested, 5 papers used a mixed strategy involving both single exclusive personal forms and the *pluralis majestatis*. This language behaviour has also been noted by Vassileva (1998, pp. 174-176), who argues that the shift to the *pluralis majestatis* seems to be the preferred choice by Russian and Bulgarian writers when explaining procedures, making reference to the terminology and stating their research goals. In the

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[3] In displaying normalised figures in tables, I rounded the first decimal. Since rounding implies an error between the approximation and the real mathematical value, the value obtained by normalising the total number of occurrences of a given phenomenon (Tables 2 and 4) may be slightly different from the value obtained by summing up single normalised figures (Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8).

Italian corpus, the most widespread uses are in statements of research goals (example 6) and in the explanation of procedures (see section 5.1. for the investigation of discourse functions).

(6)

[…] con il presente lavoro, **intendiamo** porci all'interno di questa prospettiva di studio. [SGI3]

[[…] in the present work, we intend to situate ourselves within this study perspective.]

On the basis of this quantitative investigation, it can be said that in single-authored Linguistics RAs the preferred interpersonal strategy by Anglo-American writers is to use exclusively singular first-person pronouns to construct their authorial *persona*. In Italian, too, first-person singular references are the favoured choice in single-authored articles. However, this preference is less marked than in English, and a greater variety of linguistic choices is attested. It therefore seems that conventions in the use of personal authorial references are less strong in the Italian context.

4.2. Impersonal authorial references

Table 4 shows the rate of incidence of periphrastic passives in English and Italian, and *si* constructions in Italian. The normalised figures indicate that periphrastic passives are much less frequent in Italian (8.4) than in English (19). From Table 4 it also emerges that *si* constructions (10.3) are preferred to periphrastic passives as impersonal forms of authorial reference in Italian texts. Their incidence of use compensates for the low frequency of periphrastic passives to the extent that the two corpora display almost the same number of impersonal authorial references (19 per 10,000 words in English and 18.7 in Italian).

The quantitative investigation of personal and impersonal authorial references

suggests that personal authorial references show greater variation in frequency across the two language corpora than impersonal authorial references.

5. Functional analysis

5.1. Personal authorial references

The major discourse functions which personal authorial references perform in my corpus are listed in Table 5. I considered as "major" discourse functions all those uses which were attested in at least one sub-corpus at a minimum frequency of 1 instance per 10,000 words. This taxonomy is based on previous classifications found in the literature (Kuo, 1999; Vassileva, 1998; 2000; Hyland, 2002; Swales, 2004; Mur Dueñas, 2007).

In both English and Italian, personal authorial references are mainly used to *announce goals or purposes*, that is, statements whereby writers inform readers about their research or discourse objectives (example 7); their methods, principal findings and claims (example 8); and the structure of the paper (example 9). These uses are generally attested in Introductions, towards the end of the section. However, in some articles, especially in logico-argumentative papers, writers intrude with such metadiscourse comments in the body of the text, at the beginning or end of a section.

(7)
a. In this paper **I aim** to reveal the complex and dynamic process of decision-making behind these "elocutions lessons". [WE2]
b. Ora **vorrei** toccare invece un problema di natura generale: come possiamo decidere con sicurezza se le varietà romanze dell'Italia settentrionale […].[RID3]
[I would like now to touch upon a more general problem: how can we confidently decide if the romance varieties spoken in northern Italy [...].]

(8)

a. In this paper, **I employ** Critical Discourse Analysis […] to investigate two such events of gender positioning in the classroom. [AL3]

b. In tal senso, seguendo un approccio descrittivo, **verificheremo** sino a che punto il costrutto in esame abbia compiuto questo percorso di grammaticalizzazione […]. [RID1]

[Therefore, through the adoption of a descriptive approach, we will verify to what extent the construction under analysis has accomplished this grammaticalisation process […].]

(9)

a. The paper is organised as follows. In Section 2 **I briefly describe** the study on which this analysis is based. [JS1]

b. Nella sezione 2, **riportiamo** alcuni dati relativi al ruolo delle gerarchie di definitezza e agiatezza. [SSL3]

[In Section 2, we report some data concerning the role of definiteness and animacy hierarchies.]

The data in Table 5 indicate that although *announcing goals or purposes* is the most frequent use of personal authorial references, the difference between English and Italian is considerable. One reason may be that Italian writers are less inclined to emphasise their authorial role in Introductions to anticipate what direction their argument will take in the rest of the paper. They seem more eager to employ personal authorial references in what Bunton (1999) calls "immediate" and "local metatextual references", that is, references to segments of text that immediately follow the comment or that appear within the same section (see example 7b, which is taken from the body of the text; example 7a is taken from the Introduction).

When *explaining procedures*, writers report on the steps they followed in their research (example 10).

(10)

a. For comparison, **I** also **tape-recorded** spontaneous conversations […]. [JS3]

b. […] **ho** raccolto campioni di errori, in lingua italiana, commessi da studenti anglofoni […].
[RILA2]

[[…] I collected mistakes in Italian made by Anglophone students […].]

This function is the second most frequent use in the English corpus (5.2 hits per 10,000 words). The same cannot be said for the Italian corpus (2.1 occurrences) where scholars emphasise their role as researchers less than half the times Anglo-American writers do.

The discourse function of *making claims and elaborating an argument* encompasses knowledge claims (example 11) and explicit statements of opinion on the part of writers (example 12).

(11)

a. In summary, [...] **I conclude that** the 'extra meaning' contributed by use of the EPC is a conventional implicature [...]. [Lin1]

b. **Proponiamo**, vista la natura particolare della struttura semantica di *potere*, che […]. [LL3]
[Given the particular semantic configuration of the verb *potere,* we suggest that […].]

(12)

a. At any rate, **I believe** that the choice between the non-reductionist and [...] reductionist hypotheses does not have a crucial bearing on the discussion to follow […]. [Lin2]

b. **Credo** che la teoria dell'omonimia sia ancora una volta da preferire per due ordini di ragioni.
[LL1]
[I believe that the theory of homonymy should be preferred in this context, too, for two reasons.]

This function represents the second most frequent use of personal authorial references in the Italian corpus (3.1 occurrences per 10,000 words), and it is attested at approximately the same frequency as in English (3.7 instances). This finding is rather surprising, considering that in all the other uses, Italian linguists tend to be considerably less visible than their Anglo-American colleagues. What is more striking is that Italian writers choose to be visible when the risk of performing face-threatening acts is particularly strong: it is when making claims and taking a position that disagreement and criticism are more likely to affect the validity of the writer's arguments (Hyland, 2002, pp. 1103). In other words, it appears that compared to Anglo-American writers, Italian linguists tend to downplay their role in research when announcing their goals or purposes and explaining procedures; on the other hand, they emphasise their subjectivity almost to the same extent as their English-speaking colleagues when making claims and presenting their opinions.

The remaining discourse functions are *referring back to the text* (example 13), *providing definitional clarifications* (example 14) and *stating assumptions* (example 15). These uses of personal authorial references are rather infrequent in Italian.

(13)
a. **I** observed in section 5 that *say* in the current corpus has the highest overall zero rate of all verbs. [ELL2]
b. Come **ho** sottolineato più volte in queste pagine, i valori più piccoli di HI-A2 e HI-A3 […]. [RID3]
[As I have pointed out on many occasions in this paper, the lowest values of HI-A2 and HI-A3 […].]

(14)

a. **I have decided to use Overstreet's term** "general extenders" in order not to proliferate the terms that are used to refer to them. **I define** them, again like Overstreet (1999:3), as a class of expressions […]. [JS1]

b. Dal momento che, comunque, tale restrizione non sembra per ora essere stata accolta dalla letteratura sull'argomento [...], **ci serviremo** della terminologia tradizionale. [SGI3]

[However, because this restriction seems not to have been accepted in the literature yet, […] we will use the traditional terminology.]

(15)

a. **I assume** provisionally a conservative view, that these highly frequent forms in constructions with zero complementizer have become routines, but that this need not entail any syntactic reanalysis. [ELL2]

b. A tale scopo **assumiamo** che in italiano l'ordine non marcato delle relazioni grammaticali sia SVO […]. [SSL3]

[For this purpose, we assume that in Italian the unmarked order of grammatical relations is SVO […].]

The functional analysis of personal authorial references suggests that the tendency of Italian writers to use fewer personal references than Anglo-American writers concerns all major discourse functions, albeit to a different extent. This situation is particularly evident for the functions of *announcing goals or purposes* and *explaining procedures*.

5.2 Impersonal authorial references

The discourse functions which are most often realised by means of passive and *si* constructions are listed in Table 6. This taxonomy is based on the findings from the corpus. In both English and Italian, the highest number of occurrences of impersonal

authorial references is attested for the function *explaining procedures* (example 16). In Italian, the majority of instances (91 hits out of 147) is realised by means of the periphrastic passive (example 16b); however, a number of examples (56 hits out of 147) feature *si* constructions (example 17). Despite the relatively high incidence of use of impersonal forms in the Italian corpus for this function (7.2 occurrences per 10,000 words), the English corpus displays higher frequencies (8.1 occurrences).

(16)

a. A list of 45 potentially productive search items **was compiled** based on those listed in grammars […]. [AL2]

b. Per ogni vocale del corpus **è stato creato** uno spettro FFT a 512 punti. [RID3]

[For each vowel in the corpus, a 512 point FFT spectrum was created.]

(17)

Con l'inserimento della domanda n. 12 **si è voluto** sollecitare, un po' provocatoriamente, l'opinione degli interpellati. [RID2]

[The inclusion of question n. 12 was intended to spur the opinion of the participants, in an admittedly provocative way.]

In English a relatively large number of passive constructions is used to make reference to the examples, tables or diagrams which *illustrate the data* (example 18).

(18)

a. The data are divided into four categories, which **have been summarized** in (27). [SL2]

b. In corsivo **vengono invece riportati** i vari sottotipi semantici […]. [AGI2]

[On the other hand, the different semantic sub-types are reported in italics.]

Admittedly, the number of instances related to this function of impersonal authorial references may depend on the number of visual elements in a paper, which, in turn, may vary according to the type of research. However, this use of passive and *si* constructions correlates to what metadiscourse scholars (see Hyland, 2005a) call "endophoric markers" (e.g. *in Table 2*, *below*). Since cultural variation seems to exist in the extent to which writers intrude with metadiscourse comments (Mauranen, 1993), thus placing the responsibility for successful communication on themselves rather than the readers (Hinds, 1987), it is possible that certain academic communities place less emphasis on the need to relate examples, tables and graphs to the argument being developed in the text. This might explain why the function of *illustrating data* is more than two times less prominent in Italian than in English. More research is needed, however, to further elucidate the role of culture in the way writers incorporate examples and visuals into their texts.

Another function of impersonal authorial references which is more frequent in English than in Italian is that of *announcing goals or purposes*. The passives found in English to fulfil this function may generally be explained in textual terms, the passive being used either to topicalise the object (e.g. *Four clause types **will be distinguished** in the analysis [...].* [L3]) or to guarantee a linear textual development (e.g. *[...] the question remains as to what the real restrictions on the Ezafe construction are [...]. These questions **will be discussed** in section 4.* [JL3]). In Italian, *announcing goals or purposes* is almost equally realised by means of periphrastic passives and *si* constructions. The choice of the periphrastic passive in Italian does not necessarily imply the topicalisation of the object. In fact, in some contexts the textual impact of periphrastic passives is similar to that of *si* constructions and active clauses, because in all these structures the object follows the verb and appears in rhematic position

(examples 19 and 20).

(19)

Nella sezione 6 **verrà** infine **data** <u>una rappresentazione bidimensionale</u> che renda conto in modo unitario delle regolarità emerse. [AGI2]⁴
[Finally, in section 6 a bidimensional representation will be provided, which accounts for regularities in a uniform way.]

(20)

In questa sede **si porterà** anzitutto <u>l'attenzione</u> sul verbo più rappresentativo […]. [SGI3]
[In this paper, attention will be first of all paid to the most representative verb […].]

The reason for using the periphrastic passive in Italian in these contexts seems to have to do with the need to background the agent in order to guarantee an impersonal and objective tone which is expected in Italian in formal registers such as scientific writing (Bazzanella, 1991, pp. 375).

The functions expressed by impersonal authorial references which are more prominent in Italian than in English are *stating results* and *referring back to the text*. Both functions are generally realised by means of *si* constructions, as illustrated in (21) and (22) respectively (see discussion in section 6).

(21)

Nei dati di dialetto walser analizzati non **si sono** effettivamente **trovati** esempi di "switch" all'interno di un sintagma verbale negativo. [IJL2]
[Indeed, in the Walser dialect data no example of "switch" within a negative verb phrase was found.]

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⁴   The object is underlined.

(22)

I valori dei due parametri a cui **si è accennato** mostrano le stesse tendenze […]. [RID3]

[The values of the two parameters mentioned above show the same tendencies […].]

The functional analysis of impersonal authorial references indicates that despite similar overall frequencies, impersonal resources may be more or less frequent in one or the other corpus depending on the discourse function. For instance, impersonal authorial references are more frequent in English for the functions of *announcing goals or purposes* and *illustrating the data*, while they are more frequent in Italian for the functions of *stating results* and *referring back to the text*.

6. Comparison between personal and impersonal authorial references in English and Italian

Tables 7 and 8 indicate that a divergence can be observed in the total number of occurrences of personal and impersonal authorial references. While in my corpus Anglo-American writers overall favour the use of exclusive first-person pronouns as an interpersonal strategy, Italian writers prefer a more detached interpersonal style by opting predominantly for passive and *si* constructions.

Tables 7 and 8 also show that a similarity between the two corpora can be noted in the distribution of linguistic forms across discourse functions. In both English and Italian personal authorial references tend to be associated with *announcing goals or purposes, providing definitional clarifications* and *making claims and elaborating an argument*. On the other hand, impersonal authorial references are normally associated with *explaining procedures; illustrating data;* and *stating results*. The sole exception is the function of *referring back to the text* which is realised by means of personal forms

in English and impersonal constructions in Italian.

Despite the similarity of the two corpora in the tendency to favour the same interpersonal strategy across most discourse functions, differences exist in the "strength" of form/function associations. In particular, when the discourse function is associated with impersonal constructions in both languages, the preference for this interpersonal strategy seems more marked in Italian. On the other hand, when the function correlates with personal authorial references in English and Italian, the preference for these forms is less marked in Italian. These discrepancies may in part explain the lower incidence of use of personal authorial references in the Italian corpus noted above (section 4.1).

An example is the function of *explaining procedures*. This function is less frequent in the Italian corpus (13.3 total occurrences – i.e. 5.2 + 8.1 – per 10,000 words in the English corpus vs. 9.3 in the Italian one); however, the correlation between *procedures* and impersonal authorial references is stronger in the Italian corpus. While in English 61% of occurrences are realised by means of impersonal references, in Italian the percentage is higher, i.e. 77%. Therefore, it appears that compared to Anglo-American linguists, Italian writers comment less extensively on their procedural steps and they are less likely to emphasise their role as researchers by means of personal authorial references.

On the other hand, if we consider the function of *making claims and elaborating an argument*, this use is slightly less frequent in the English corpus (a total of 3.9 occurrences per 10,000 vs. 4.0 occurrences in Italian). However, the correlation between this function and personal authorial references is stronger in English (95% vs. 77%). These results have to be evaluated by taking into account normalised figures, which are extremely similar in the two languages. Therefore, it could be argued that in

order to meet the expectations of international readers, Italian writers are not required to modify the frequency with which they intervene with their claims and opinions; they probably simply need to increase the number of personal forms and decrease that of impersonal forms. Nevertheless, even the small discrepancies in the preference for one interpersonal strategy over the other and the slightly higher presence of these speech acts in Italian contribute to an overall impression of a more objective and detached interpersonal style in Italian.

It should be pointed out, however, that not all discourse functions present the characteristics illustrated above with regard to the markedness of form/function associations. As regards the function of *announcing goals or purposes*, Anglo-American and Italian linguists have similar preferences in terms of the choice between personal and impersonal authorial references. In both corpora, 68% of authorial references are personal, while 32% are impersonal. This result indicates that despite the lower frequency of personal authorial references in the Italian corpus, Italian linguists favour the strategy of subjectivity over that of objectivity in direct proportion to Anglo-American linguists. Therefore, with regard to this function, the discrepancy between Linguistics papers in English and Italian does not lie in the choice of interpersonal strategy, but in the fact Italian writers intervene to a minor extent in their papers by using the resources analysed here in rhetorical moves stating their research objectives and previewing the organisation of the article.

Yet a different picture is observed for the function of *referring back to the text*. Not only is this function more frequent in the Italian corpus (4.3 total occurrences out of 10,000 words vs. 3.3 occurrences in English), but the two groups of writers seem to favour opposite interpersonal strategies, i.e. subjectivity in English (63% of personal references) and objectivity in Italian (76% of impersonal references). This result needs

to be interpreted in the light of the actual use of impersonal authorial references. In English, more often than in Italian, retrospective metadiscourse includes full "restatements" (Bunton, 2005, pp. 215) of the issue being investigated, the methods adopted, the results obtained and the claims made in the paper. In these contexts, Anglo-American writers tend to employ the personal pronoun *I* in order to stress their authorial role (example 23). This often occurs in the Conclusion of the paper.

(23)
In this paper **I have argued** that the initial appeal of the "radical orphanage" approach to NRCs is illusory. [JL1]

On the other hand, Italian writers prefer to insert retrospective comments in subordinate clauses, such as relative clauses, or in parenthetical clauses, which simply signal that the element being commented upon has already been mentioned (example 24). When Italian linguists refer back to the text in this way, they generally opt for the strategy of impersonality and use *si* constructions.

(24)
L'idea, come **si è detto**, era di poter arrivare a "sottrarre" le misure corrispondenti ad attività diverse […]. [LL2]
[The idea, as has been said, was to manage to "subtract" the measures corresponding to different activities […].]

So far it seems that in *referring back to the text* the English and Italian corpora differ with respect to both the type of retrospective metadiscourse and the choice of interpersonal strategy. However, in my corpus, when Anglo-American writers use

retrospective metadiscourse to simply signal that something has already been mentioned, they, too, seem to favour impersonal constructions (example 25).

(25)

As **was said** earlier, the analysis of the Ezafe construction sketched in this paper implies that […]. [JL3]

Therefore, the English and Italian corpora seem not to differ so much in the choice of interpersonal strategy as in the type and frequency of retrospective metadiscourse act being made, which has an impact on the overall incidence of use of authorial references.

From the comparison between personal and impersonal authorial references in each language corpus it appears that the choice of interpersonal strategy interacts with the frequency of occurrence of specific speech acts. On the basis of the data obtained in this study it is not possible to establish whether a particular function tends to be more or less frequent in one language corpus or the other because only the more extreme, polarised rhetorical options were analysed. However, the data presented here certainly suggest that the rate of occurrence of speech acts needs to be taken into account, particularly for pedagogical purposes.

7. Concluding remarks

This paper has presented an analysis of personal and impersonal authorial references as contributing to the interpersonal dimension of academic writing. In particular, I compared English and Italian Linguistics RAs in terms of 1) the use of first-person subject pronouns in English and first-person inflected verbs in Italian, and 2) the passive voice in both languages and *si* constructions in Italian.

Personal forms are found to be less frequent in Italian Linguistics RAs. The

analysis of discourse functions showed that all uses of personal references are responsible for this result, though to a different extent. Impersonal forms, in contrast, are attested at a similar frequency in English and Italian. However, differences seem to exist at the level of individual discourse functions: impersonal forms are more frequent in Italian for some uses, such as *referring back to the text*, while they are more frequent in English for other uses, such as *illustrating data*.

The comparison between personal and impersonal forms in each language corpus revealed that differences in frequencies are due to the interaction of the choice of interpersonal strategy, subjectivity or objectivity, with the degree to which academics intervene with specific speech acts in their RAs. For example, for the function of *explaining procedures*, Italian writers should not only increase the incidence of use of personal structures, but also intervene more extensively with methodological comments. The results in this paper also suggest that such interaction varies depending on individual discourse functions. This study, therefore, underscores the importance of considering individual uses rather than simply overall frequencies.

Future research on this topic should take into account a number of issues which were not addressed in the present work. Some of the results obtained here might have been influenced by the possible differences in logico-argumentative and experimental RAs. The present findings should therefore be tested on a corpus which distinguishes between these two sub-genres. This study could be extended by investigating other forms of personal and impersonal authorial references, such as possessive pronouns and metonymic expressions. In addition, a similar analysis of papers written in English by Italian writers could reveal whether aspects of the native writing culture are actually transferred to texts in English. Finally, it would be interesting to replicate this study in other disciplines in order to gain a better understanding of the complex interplay

between "large" national culture and "small" (Holliday, 1999) disciplinary cultures.

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Appendix A. Research articles in the corpus

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167.

Table 1

Corpus for analysis

	Anglo-American sub-corpus	Italian sub-corpus	TOT
Total number of words	237,408	202,984	440,392
Average text length	7,914	6,766	7,340

Table 2

First-person references in the corpus. Raw and normalised frequencies: (raw frequency/corpus size)

10,000

	LIN-EN		LIN-IT	
	Raw	Norm.	Raw	Norm.
First-person references	629	26.5	295	14.5

Table 3

Number of articles employing the various types of personal authorial references

	LIN-EN	LIN-IT
"I"/"Io"	25	14
Editorial "We"/ "Noi"	1	0
"We"/ "Noi" (*pluralis majestatis*)	0	6
Mixed strategy	0	5
None	4	5
TOT	**30**	**30**

Table 4

Incidence of use of passive and *si* constructions. Raw and normalised frequencies per 10,000 words

	LIN-EN		LIN-IT	
	Raw	Norm.	Raw	Norm.
Periphrastic passives	451	19.0	171	8.4
Si constructions	0	0.0	209	10.3
TOT	**451**	**19.0**	**380**	**18.7**

Table 4

Table 5

Raw and normalised frequencies per 10,000 words of personal authorial references according to discourse function.

DISCOURSE FUNCTION	LIN-EN		LIN-IT	
	Raw	Norm.	Raw	Norm.
Announcing goals or purposes	246	10.4	90	4.4
Stating assumption	27	1.1	3	0.1
Providing definitional clarifications	30	1.3	13	0.6
Explaining procedures	124	5.2	43	2.1
Making claims and elaborating an argument	87	3.7	63	3.1
Referring back to the text	50	2.1	21	1.0
Other	65	2.7	62	3.1
TOT	**629**	**26.5**	**295**	**14.4**

Table 6

Raw and normalised frequencies pr 10,000 words of impersonal authorial references according to

discourse function.

DISCOURSE FUNCTION	LIN-EN		LIN-IT	
	Raw	Norm.	Raw	Norm.
Announcing goals or purposes	116	4.9	43	2.1
Explaining procedures	193	8.1	147	7.2
Stating results	12	0.5	56	2.8
Illustrating data	72	3.0	26	1.3
Referring back to the text	29	1.2	68	3.3
Other	29	1.2	40	2.0
TOT	**451**	**18.9**	**380**	**18.7**

Table 7

Normalised frequencies per 10,000 words and percentages of personal and impersonal authorial

references according to discourse function in the Anglo-American sub-corpus.

DISCOURSE FUNCTION	Personal		Impersonal	
	Norm.	%	Norm.	%
Announcing goals or purposes	10.4	68%	4.9	32%
Stating assumption	1.1	79%	0.3	21%
Providing definitional clarifications	1.3	100%	0.0	0%
Explaining procedures	5.2	39%	8.1	61%
Making claims and elaborating an argument	3.7	95%	0.2	5%
Stating results	0.4	43%	0.5	57%
Illustrating data	0.2	8%	3.0	92%
Referring back to the text	2.1	63%	1.2	37%
Other	2.1	75%	0.7	25%
TOT	**26.5**	**58%**	**18.9**	**42%**

Table 8

Normalised frequencies per 10,000 words and percentages of personal and impersonal authorial

references according to discourse function in the Italian sub-corpus.

DISCOURSE FUNCTION	Personal		Impersonal	
	Norm.	%	Norm.	%
Announcing goals or purposes	4.4	68%	2.1	32%
Stating assumption	0.1	100%	0.0	0%
Providing definitional clarifications	0.6	72%	0.2	28%
Explaining procedures	2.1	23%	7.2	77%
Making claims and elaborating an argument	3.1	77%	0.9	23%
Stating results	0.9	25%	2.8	75%
Illustrating data	0.1	7%	1.3	93%
Referring back to the text	1.0	24%	3.3	76%
Other	2.0	72%	0.8	28%
TOT	**14.3**	**44%**	**18.6**	**56%**