Research Article

An Intercultural Comparison of Authors' Self-mention and Identity Construction in English Agricultural Abstracts by Chinese and International Writers

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Authors' self-mention is unavoidably used in research articles; however, there are still controversial views on their use. The current study aimed to find out what types of self-mentions were employed by Chinese and non-Chinese writers to construct different authorial identities and explore the similarities and differences.

Methodology: A corpus-based comparative analysis was conducted on agricultural research abstracts written by Chinese and non-Chinese writers to compare three types of entities using Chi-square and Antconc.

Results: It was revealed that abstracts by Chinese writers and non-Chinese ones were significantly different in their use of first-person plural forms and their determiners, research-oriented nouns, and discoursal nouns. Further, it was shown that different authorial identities as a researcher, discourse constructor, and arguer were constructed by human entities and inanimate entities with some preferred main verbs in specific tenses and voices.

Conclusion: The present study showed that Chinese writers differed significantly from international writers in using self-mentions and authorial identities due to different views on personal involvement, pragmatic considerations, cultural background, and writing environment. It was also found that personal involvement coexists with the impersonality of the abstract in using self-mentions in abstract writing. The current study can be conducive to abstract writing for novice writers and second language learners in choosing different self-mentions to construct different authorial identities.

1. Introduction

Abstracts, as independent discourses, serve as stepping-stones for further reading the whole paper. They are traditionally considered impersonal; thus, such writing should avoid using self-mentions. However, various papers on academic writing over the last few decades suggest that academic writing should not be considered impersonal or completely objective. Although the conflicting view on impersonality or objectivity remains, much research has been conducted to reveal that writers interact with their readers, including specialists in a particular field, to highlight their contribution to the field and construct their plausible membership in their disciplines (Hyland, 2005; Swales, 1990). Swales (2004) also believes that research article (RA) writers need to show their authorial identities

to highlight their substantial and original contribution to a discipline since RAs are written in a competitive setting. Writers cannot avoid projecting a particular impression of themselves into the discourse to show their relation to their readers, disciplines, and arguments. Abstracts, as a genre of academic writing, certainly reflect the interactions between the reader and the writer, and the debate on the impersonality or objectivity of abstracts has always been a hot issue in academic writing (Martín & León Pérez, 2014).

Self-mentions, as a strategy to construct authorial presence, are essential devices to make personal claims or sets of claims to enhance the writer's interactions with the reader and attract the reader's attention to their work

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(Harwood, 2005). The research into authorial presence has become a hotly debated issue in the works of discourse analysis of different academic genres and disciplines (e.g., Hyland, 2001; Swales, 2004) and in more cross-culturally oriented comparative research on writing between native and non-native speakers of English (e.g., Charles, 2006). The focus on authorial presence remains unchanged; however, the strategies for realizing it still need further clarification.

Some journals recommend that abstracts in agriculture should be written in a passive voice without using the author's self-mentions, not to mention the implied or concealed entity or research-oriented entities. For instance, the Journal of Northwestern A & F University (Natural Science Edition) recommends summarizing the points in the abstract in the third person. Moreover, the Rules for Abstracts and Abstracting GB6647 (1986; stipulation 6.7) stipulate that the third person should be used in writing abstracts. These recommendations and regulations serve as guidelines for Chinese writers to write abstracts; however, they may mislead novice writers' abstract writing.

Most importantly, current school teaching offers few clear instructions on how to use self-mentions in writing abstracts (Hyland & Tse, 2004; Ivanic & Camps, 2001). However, in some universities, academic writing may have been taught under the framework of the CARS model and MOVE structure proposed by Swales (2004). In view of the recommendations, regulations, and current school teaching of writing, this paper aimed to identify the differences in self-mentions in abstracts by Chinese and international writers in agricultural engineering. Simultaneously, the study was designed to show how different types of authorial identities were constructed by different self-mentions and whether abstract writing was objective. International writers' identities, distinguished by the first authors' names in the case of multi-authored papers and confirmed by their affiliation names, are hereafter referred to as international writers.

1.1. Review of the related literature

Self-mentions, as a powerful rhetorical device to display a writer's contribution to a field and a strategic approach to constructing an author's identity, have been explored from various angles. Hyland (2001) regards self-mentions as the use of first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives to present propositional, affective, and interpersonal information. Hyland's (2005) model of self-mentions, including the first-person pronouns "I, me," "we, us," possessive pronouns "my, our," and nominal subject pronouns "mine, ours," reflects self-mentions in the writer-oriented features of stance in his model of intersubjective positioning. Additionally, Liu (2011) proposes the third-person noun phrases "the authors" and the abstract entities "the paper/study/article" as self-mention markers in linguistics. Hunston (2000) distinguishes three options for the self as the source of a proposition; using 'averred,' no contribution is made to a source by the writer (e.g., it was suggested); using 'emphasized,' attributing a proposition to

the writers themselves (e.g., we argue); and finally using 'hidden,' borrowing another entity to show a proposition (e.g., This article examines). Hyland and Tse (2005) categorize three types of evaluation sources, namely human, (the author or other humans), abstract entity (inanimate sources), and concealed sources ("it" extraposed structure as a formal subject). Charles (2006) presents a network of source use as clause type, including human, non-human, and its types, by which he analyzes reporting clauses in politics and materials, showing how stance can be constructed by various source choices from a cross-disciplinary perspective. The classification of self-mentions varies with different genres and research subjects. Despite the variation in theoretical frameworks for studying an author's identity, the focus of authorial presence remains on genre analysis, disciplinary variation, and culturally-oriented comparison of writings by native and non-native English-speaking writers.

The comparative study of self-mentions has been conducted with different cultural backgrounds. Wu (2013) finds that English and Chinese writers prefer to use first-person pronouns and third-person nouns (e.g., the writer, the researcher) in linguistics when constructing different authorial identities as researchers. More cross-cultural oriented research on self-mention characteristics has been performed, including the comparison of self-mentions between English and Italian (Molino, 2010), Turkish (Can & Cangir, 2019), French and Norwegian (Fløttum et al., 2006), and Chinese (Hu & Cao, 2015). In contrast, few studies have examined self-mentions in abstracts with Chinese and English cultural backgrounds (e.g., Cao & Xiao, 2013; Dong & Qiu, 2018).

Many scholars have conducted interdisciplinary studies of self-mentions (e.g., Lancaster, 2016; McGrath, 2016). The interdisciplinary research covers the disciplines of, to name a few, both social science—anthropology and history (McGrath, 2016), economics (Lancaster, 2016), language studies (Chen, 2020), applied linguistics (Molino, 2010), and natural science-electrical engineering (Hyland, 2000), biomedical science (Carciu, 2009), and agricultural engineering (Tavakoli Gheinani & Tabatabaei, 2017). However, few studies have been conducted on self-mentions in abstracts of agricultural engineering articles so far, although some authors have discussed the use of self-mentions in science and engineering (Hyland, 2008; Swales & Feak, 2012). The self-mention markers are still limited, so the authorial identity has not been studied thoroughly and systematically.

Personal pronouns and their determiners can reflect authorial presence; textual markers, such as the researcher, author, and "it + be + pp/adj." structures, can also reflect authorial identity indirectly or implicitly. Furthermore, self-mentions in abstracts, as a micro version of academic writing, naturally reflect the author's identity and presence. Although self-mentions have been studied in such genres as research articles (Chen, 2020; McGrath, 2016), research article abstracts (Friginal & Mustafa, 2017), and introduction parts in academic writing (Shaw, 1992), they require further study in abstracts, especially those in

agriculture, since abstracts are a different genre from RAs and other parts of RAs.

Although Swales (2019) has criticized that the circumscribed textual studies of stance and engagement have been over-explored in the English for academic purposes (EAP) field, abstracts, as an independent part of EAP, have not been explored thoroughly compared with parts of RAs such as introduction, results, and conclusions. McGrath (2016) finds that "I" is used more frequently in anthropology article abstracts than in history article abstracts. Friginal and Mustafa (2017) comparatively study U.S-based and Iraqi RA abstracts across four disciplines, agriculture, nursing, engineering, and languages, finding that U.S-based and Iraqi writers structure their abstracts differently, specifically in four aspects. Genre-specifically, El-Dakhs (2018) concludes that more self-mentions are used in RA abstracts than in PhD theses, as theses and RAs are two different genres in the scientific community. Tavakoli Gheinani and Tabatabaei (2017) compare agricultural engineering abstracts by Iranian and native English scholars to identify differences in the use of moves and to determine the obligatory and optional moves of the abstracts. Research on abstracts concentrates on the rhetorical structure and interdisciplinary comparison; in contrast, abstract-specific research on self-mentions in agriculture has only been covered partially.

Still, there are some unsettled issues in self-mentions in abstracts. Hyland and Tse (2005) find that more than 65% of all examples of show, demonstrate, and prove are used to express certainty in hard science abstracts. McGrath (2016) analyzes main verbs with only "I" as the subject of a sentence in anthropology and history. Main verbs have not been explored thoroughly with self-mentions. In addition, "it" structures with self-mentions are still controversial. Biber et al. (1999) find that "It"-clauses, especially those followed by an extraposed "to"-clause, are unusually frequent in academic writing as opposed to other registers. Hyland and Tse (2005, p. 133) hold that "the use of dummy subjects in connection with extraposition was widespread in MA/PhD dissertation abstracts" in electrical engineering, computer science, applied linguistics, biology, business studies, and public administration. Charles (2006) finds that it subject has by far the highest frequency in materials, while Hyland (2008) notices that experts use fewer introductory it patterns than MA and PhD students in published journal articles and MA/PhD theses in business studies, electrical engineering, applied linguistics, and microbiology. Peacock (2011) investigates "it" patterns with to-infinitive and that-clauses in eight disciplines except for agriculture. However, "it" structures are unknown in agriculture-specific abstracts.

Given that main verbs and "it" structures have been studied in other disciplines except for agriculture, the hard sciences abstracts in other disciplines may somehow be representative of the characteristics of agricultural abstracts. However, no evidence shows that self-mentions and authorial identities in agricultural abstracts follow the same rules as in other hard sciences disciplines. Little is known about the main verbs and "it" structures in

agricultural abstracts by Chinese and international writers. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze these markers systematically from a cross-cultural-oriented view to show how Chinese and international writers adopt different strategies to construct their different authorial identities in agricultural abstracts.

The research intended to find out the distribution characteristics of self-mentions in the abstracts written by Chinese and international writers and the different authorial identities realized by self-mentions and main verbs. This paper was devoted to seeking answers to the following problems:

1. How are various authorial identities realized by different self-mentions in the abstracts?
2. Do authors' self-mentions affect the objectivity of abstracts?

2. Methodology

2.1. Corpus

For the purpose of comparing self-mentions between Chinese and international writers, the abstracts written by Chinese writers are chosen from the Journal of China Agricultural University, Journal of Northwestern A & F University (Natural Science Edition), and Journal of Nanjing Agricultural University, which are among the leading agricultural journals in China. After careful reading, we have taken 100, 98, and 151 abstracts from the three journals, respectively, based on the abstracts' availability, and made a corpus of a total of 349 abstracts. The abstracts in the corpus are numbered, and they include the paper title, author's information, and keywords. For the sake of convenience, the corpus is named CHC in the following. The abstracts by international writers from the US, Canada, UK, Australia, and Ireland, are selected from two journals, Advances in Agronomy and Agronomy Journal, accessed in Web of Science, from which 345 abstracts were chosen to be compared with those written by Chinese writers to make a corpus named INC. These journals are selected because they are among the most reputable journals in agriculture; therefore, they can be representative of Chinese and international abstracts. All the abstracts, dated from 2014 to 2018 and ranked by citation frequency, are distinguished by the author's information to ensure the abstracts are written by experienced writers. For each abstract in the corpus, only the content was retained. As the differences between the two corpora in the paper title, author's information, and keywords do not affect the concordance results after being tested and reconfirmed, we keep them for reference. In view of the possible influence of single-authorship and multi-authorship on our research results, it was reconfirmed that the abstracts in the corpora are multi-authored except for two abstracts, No. 177 and No. 199, in INC. As the self-mentions in the two abstracts occurred only a few times and did not affect the overall results, they were also retained.

Table 1 shows that the two corpora are comparable in the number of abstracts, the average sentence length per abstract, and the overall length. The abstracts from the

Table 1.

Overview of Corpus of Abstracts by Chinese Writers and Corpus of Abstracts by International Writers

Corpus name	Quantity of abstract	Average sentences/abstract	Average sentence words/sentence	Average words/abstract	Total words
CHC	349	10	31	306	106816
INC	345	9	29	261	90055

Note. CHC = Chinese corpus; INC = International corpus

Journal of Northwestern A & F University (Natural Science Edition) are expected to be written with four moves, namely objective, method, result, and conclusion; therefore, the move indicators in this journal are retained. All the abstracts in both corpora are peer-reviewed, thus representing the Chinese and international writers' abstract writing.

As the abstract encoding in CHC was originally Windows 936, Notepad (Ho, 2018, v7.5.6) was used to convert the encoding. TreeTagger for Windows 3.0 (Liang, 2013; Schmid, 1994) was employed to tag the corpora, and AntConc (v.3.5.8, Anthony, 2019) was used to obtain different self-mention entities, the voices and tenses of words, and their contexts.

First, all the sentences with the involvement entities were matched with AntConc concordance, and then a corpus was created with the sentences. Python program was used to extract the sentences with involvement entities to confirm the sentences generated by AntConc. The following codes, for example, were used to extract the sentences with "we":

Python codes:

```
from nltk.tokenize import sent_tokenize
from nltk.tokenize import word_tokenize
import codecs

def sentence_finder (text, word):
    sentences = sent_tokenize(text)
    return [sent for sent in sentences if the word in word_tokenize(sent)]

file_eg = open (r'filepath/filename.txt', encoding="gbk").read()
sent = sentence_finder(file_eg, 'we')
print(sent)
```

Considering that nouns representing involvement entities may have different contextual functions in a particular sentence, they were distinguished by the tagging of words and then confirmed manually to delete those that did not represent involvement. Main verbs with involvement entities, the tenses, and voices of the verbs, were distinguished using the patterns generated by PatternBuilder (Liang et al., 2010) (v1.0), and then the patterns were used in AntConc concordance in Regex mode to search and were finally confirmed with Notepad in regular expression search mode. For example, the generated patterns "\S+_VV\w*\s" were used to search for any lexical verb, "\S+_VV\s" for the base form of lexical verbs, "it_PP\s(\S+_MD\s)(\S+_VH\w\s)\S+_VB\w\s(\S+_RB\w*\s)\S+_JJ\w\sthat_IN\s" for "it" patterns, and "\S+_VB\w*\s(\S+_R\w*\s)*\S+_VVN\s" for passive voice.

2.2. Self-mention and author's identity

Self-mentions sources were analyzed based on the classification of evaluative 'that' by Hyland and Tse (2005), the network of source use in reporting clauses by Charles (2006), Hunston's (2000) analysis of the self, and the self-mention categories by Liu (2011). Table 2 shows self-mentions with the risk and involvement of the reader. The categorization of the involvement entities was based mainly on the multi-authorship of the abstracts and the systematic considerations of the entities.

Regarding the previous studies on the author's identity (Hyland, 2001; Fløttum et al., 2006; Wu, 2013), the author's identities in the current study were categorized into three groups, namely researcher, discourse constructor, and arguer. The author's identity as a researcher is often shown by authorial self-mentions and reporting verbs, and it is characterized by main verbs such as analyze, examine, calculate, assume, consider, find, study, explore, and penetrate as shown in examples (1) and (2).

(1) *Here, we examine the opportunities for improving the yield and nitrogen use efficiency (NUE) of irrigated rice in northeastern China by optimizing nutrients and increasing the transplanting density* (INC #332).

The author's identity as a discourse constructor could often be realized by verbs, such as describe, present, discuss, focus on, propose, put forward, illustrate, summarize, begin, and return to. These words can be used to introduce the experimental process or describe charts or tables, thus helping readers comprehend the structure or content of the paper.

Table 2.

Classification of Self-mentions, Involvement, Risk, and Markers for Involvement

Involvement/risk	Involvement entity		Marker of involvement
High			
	Human entity	First person pronoun & determiner	we, us, our
		Third person noun	author, writer, researcher
	Inanimate entity/abstract noun	Research-oriented noun	study, research
		Discoursal noun	paper, thesis, article
low	Concealed entity	"It" extraposed structure	It be + adj/PP

(2) *We propose steps in fitting nonlinear models as described by a flow diagram and discuss each step separately, providing examples and updates on procedures used.* (INC #141)

The author's identity as an arguer could be distinguished by words, such as believe, think, expect, argue, claim, dispute, reject, support, etc., which are used to present the author's positive, neutral, or negative views, opinions, or attitudes on the given facts or information obtained in the text. For example, (3) *We believe that this system has the potential to be adopted in other countries* (INC #288). In the examples (1), (2), and (3), the author's identities as researcher, discourse constructor, and arguer could be realized by the self-mention "we" followed by the main verbs "examine", "propose", and "believe", respectively. AntConc was used to search for the self-mentions and the main verbs followed by them to conclude the author's identities contextually, as verbs may have different meanings in different contexts. The main verbs, as Fløttum et al. (2006) defined, refer to the dominating content verbs, with auxiliaries, modal verbs, and other modalizing and hedging elements being neglected for the identification of author's identity. In a sentence like "*I would like to focus on...*", "focus" was considered the main verb. The main verbs were generated by the software's wordlist, and they were then grouped manually based on the subjects and their contextual meanings and confirmed by a second researcher to ensure that the classification was coherent with the classification criteria. The spaces between the involvement entity and the main verb were not considered, provided that the entity and main verb were in one main clause. The frequencies of main verbs were not normalized, and Chi-square test was used to explore whether there were significant differences between the two corpora.

To indicate the differences in the usage of self-mentions and authorial identities between Chinese and international writers' abstracts, chi-square was employed to obtain the significance and p-value, whereby the symbols "+" and "-" mean "overuse" and "underuse" in the corpus compared with the reference corpus, and the signs *, **, and *** mean being significant at the levels of 0.05, 0.01, and 0.001, respectively. The levels of significance are tabulated in Table 3.

Table 3.
Indication of Chi-Square Value, Wording, and Summary

P value	Wording	Summary
< 0.0001	Extremely significant	****
0.0001 to 0.001	Extremely significant	***
0.001 to 0.01	Very significant	**
0.01 to 0.05	Significant	*
≥ 0.05	Not significant	ns

3. Results

3.1. Overall number and differences of self-mentions

The numbers and differences of all types of self-mentions in both corpora are shown in Table 4.

N-freq. in Table 4 represents the normalized frequency per 10,000 words, making it easier to find the differences between the two corpora. The Chi-square data indicated a significant difference between Chinese and international writers regarding the use of self-mentions as a whole (X^2 =85.4673, p < .000). Of all the categories of self-mention entities, the inanimate entity had the highest frequency, of which the research-oriented nouns took the greatest portion, and the chi-square data revealed that both groups of writers had significant differences in research-oriented nouns and discoursal nouns, the chi-square data being 18.2854, 15.9573 for the former and latter, respectively. For human entity self-mentions, Chinese and international writers' abstracts were different in that Chinese writers used fewer first-person plural self-mentions than international writers. Of all types of entities of self-mentions, the most significant difference between the two groups of writers' abstracts was for human entity (X^2 = 167.5357). Chinese writers never used third-person nouns and concealed entity, while a few international writers did employ these entities.

Of all the most frequently used self-mentions, both groups of writers have a strong preference for research-oriented nouns as their first choice, while CHC writers prefer discoursal nouns as their first choice and then the first-person pronouns; in contrast, INC writers prefer the first-person pronouns, and then discoursal nouns. CHC writers use three times as many discoursal nouns as INC writers, while INC writers use nearly 6.5 times as many the

Table 4.
Number and Differences of All Types of Self-Mentions

Types of entities	Sub-types of entity	Number in CHC(raw)	N-freq.	Number in INC(raw)	N-freq.	X^2	P
Human entity	1st person plural	42	3.93	230	25.76	165.3495	0.000***-
	3rd person noun	0	0.00	2	0.22	2.3723	0.124 -
	Sub-total	42	3.93	232	26.10	167.5357	0.000*** -
Inanimate entity	Research-oriented noun	253	23.69	306	33.98	18.2854	0.000*** -
	Discoursal noun	69	6.46	23	2.55	15.9573	0.000***+
	Sub-total	322	30.15	329	36.53	6.0495	0.014* -
Concealed entity	"It" structure	0	0.00	4	0.44	4.7446	0.029* -
Total		364	34.08	565	62.74	85.4673	0.000***-

Table 5.
Data of Frequency of Each Self-Mention and Chi-Square in Corpus of Abstracts by Chinese Writers and Corpus of Abstracts by Internation Writers

Types of entities	Sub-types of entity	words	Number in CHC(raw)	N-freq.	Number in INC(raw)	N-freq.	X^2	P
Human entity	1st person plural	we	28	2.62	191	21.21	151.9307	0.000 ***-
		us	1	0.09	4	0.44	2.3643	0.124 -
		our	13	1.22	35	3.89	14.2843	0.000 ***-
		sub-total	42	3.93	230	25.54	165.3495	0.000 ***-
	3rd person noun	author	0	0.00	0	0.00	/	/
		writer	0	0.00	0	0.00	/	/
		researcher	0	0.00	2	0.22	*2.3723*	*0.124 -*
		sub-total	0	0.00	2	0.22	*2.3723*	*0.124 -*
	Human entity		42	3.93	232	25.76	167.5357	0.000 ***-
Inanimate entity	Research-oriented noun	study	198	18.54	182	20.21	0.7102	0.399 -
		research	55	5.15	124	13.77	39.9699	0.000 ***-
		sub-total	253	23.69	306	33.98	18.2854	0.000 ***-
	Discoursal noun	paper	66	6.18	17	1.89	21.3496	0.000 ***+
		thesis	0	0.00	0	0.00		/
		article	3	0.28	6	0.67	1.5876	0.208 -
		sub-total	69	6.46	23	2.55	15.9573	0.000 ***+
	Inanimate entity		322	30.15	329	36.53	6.0495	0.014 *-
Concealed entity	"It" structure	It is pp/adj	0	0.00	4	0.44	4.7446	0.029 *-
Total entities			364	34.08	565	62.74	85.4673	0.000 ***-

first-person pronouns as CHC authors. Furthermore, CHC writers show less variety in using self-mentions in that they never use any form of the third-person nouns and the concealed entity. In view of the small number of first-person singular pronouns and the concealed entity, the greatest difference between CHC and INC writers lies in the use of third-person nouns.

3.2. Specific distribution and differences of self-mentions

In order to gain a micro-view of the specific distribution of self-mentions in the abstracts written by Chinese and international writers, each self-mention was examined, and a comparison was made between the two corpora on the condition that the sparse data were excluded since the Chi-square result based on them may be misleading somehow. The data of frequency and chi-square are shown in Table 5. Of all the three types of self-mentions, the human entity shows the most significant difference between the abstracts by Chinese and international writers (X^2 = 167.5357). The chi-square test for the first-person singular with the exclusion of the third-person nouns was 165.3495. Specifically, the use of the first-person plural form and its determiners "we" and "our" reflected the difference, and the chi-square data of 151.9307 and 14.2843 prove the difference, respectively. This difference was significant since only exclusive plural first-person pronouns and possessives were taken into consideration, and the overall chi-square result was not affected by the small number of first-person singular. The data demonstrated that Chinese writers underused the first-person plural self-mentions, compared to their international counterparts on the whole. Chinese writers did not use the first-person singular, the third-person nouns, and concealed entities. Similarly,

international writers utilized a few of "I", "researcher", and "it-structure".

For the inanimate entity, there were significant differences between Chinese and international writers regarding the use of research-oriented nouns in their abstracts. Although the Chi-square test result was 18.2854, this was not as significantly different as in the human entity. One difference lies mainly in the research-oriented noun 'research'. The chi-square value of 39.9699 indicated that Chinese writers used such self-mentions less than international writers. The other difference was related to the use of the discoursal noun 'paper'. The obtained results indicated (X^2 =21.3496) that Chinese writers used more discoursal nouns, compared to international writers. Although there was a significant difference in the overall use of research-oriented nouns, there were also some similarities in the use of the research-oriented noun 'study'. The Chi-square data of 0.7102 (p < .399) indicated that both groups of writers preferred this type of self-mention. Another similarity between the two groups of writers was that they did not use the discoursal noun 'thesis' as a self-mention, and employed fewer 'articles' as self-mentions. As for the concealed entity, Chinese writers did not use 'it' structure in their abstracts, and international writers wrote a few of such entities.

3.3. Different authorial identities constructed by different self-mentions

Based on the self-mentions and main verbs in the abstracts, three types of authorial identities constructed by different self-mentions were analyzed. As shown in Table 6, the overall chi-square data (X^2 = 36.1220) indicated that Chinese and international writers were

Table 6.
Main Verbs Used for Constructing Authorial Identities

Corpora	Number in CHC (raw)	N-freq.	Number in INC (raw)	N-freq.	X^2	P
Total	274	25.65	361	40.09	31.6671	0.000 ***-

Note. CHC = Chinese corpus

significantly different in choosing all types of main verbs to construct all three types of authorial identities. The main verbs used for constructing authorial identities are listed in Table 6.

For the authorial identity as a researcher, Chinese writers preferred to use 'investigate,' while international writers opted for 'conduct' to construct their identity as a researcher. The chi-square values of 21.6382 and 7.6299 for the latter and the former, respectively, show a significant difference in their use of the main verbs (Figure 1). Results on 'conduct' showed that of all the 46 occurrences of 'conduct' in INC, there were 30 in passive voice, of which 28 were in the simple past tense, 1 in the present perfect tense, and 1 in the simple present tense. However, there were 12 in passive voice and past tense in CHC, demonstrating that both groups of writers had the same preference for the usage of tense and voice of 'conduct'. One of the typical authorial identities to show the simple past tense and passive voice of the main verb 'conduct' is presented in example (4).

(4). A simulation study was conducted to assess the likely effect of genotypic variation in limited-transpiration rate on the yield performance of maize at a regional scale in the United States. (INC)

Further concordance revealed that among all the 46 instances of 'conduct' in INC, the research-oriented nouns 'study' and 'research' and human entity self-mention 'we', occurring 29, 7, and 10 times, accounted for 63.0%, 15.2%, and 21.7%, respectively, and were selected for constructing the author's identity as a researcher. In contrast, in CHC, research-oriented nouns 'study' and 'research' and discoursal nouns occurred 7, 2, and 6 times, accounting for 46.7%, 13.3%, and 40%, respectively, serving for the authorial identity as a researcher. The word 'investigate' was used in the active voice in CHC, with 21 instances in the present tense and 12 in the simple past tense. Further concordance of the corpus demonstrated that research-oriented nouns 'study' and 'research', 28 and 2 times, respectively, accounting for 90.9%, were used to realize the authorial identity as a

researcher. Additionally, discoursal noun 'paper' and human entity 'we' self-mentions, accounting for 6.0% and 3.0%, respectively, also functioned for the authorial identity as a researcher. In INC, the same was true of the active voice, with 7 instances in the simple present tense and 4 in the simple past tense, indicating that the two groups of writers had the same preference for the voice and tense for 'investigate'. Example (5) shows the simple present tense and active voice of the main verb 'investigate'.

(5). This study aims to investigate the effect of energy restriction and compensation on growth performance-related hormones and meat quality of Hu sheep (CHC).

Further concordance showed that research-oriented nouns 'study' and 'research', occurring 8 and 1 times, respectively, were used to realize the authorial identity as a researcher, and human entity 'we', used twice, served the same function. Although horizontally, the two groups of writers had the same preference for the tense and voice of the two words, respectively, they did prefer to use 'conduct' in the passive voice and, contrastingly, opted for 'investigate' in the active voice. Overall, both groups of writers in CHC and INC indicated no significant difference in the authorial identity as a researcher (p >.05, Figure 1).

As shown in Table 7, more differences existed in the authorial identity as a discourse constructor between Chinese and international writers. At the significance level of .05, the two groups of writers employed the word 'present' differently, with international writers using it more frequently than Chinese writers. At the significance level of .01, Chinese writers used 'compare' less frequently than international writers. At the significance level of .001, the difference between the two groups of writers was extremely significant in these four words of 'aim', 'review', and 'use' with chi-square values of 22.5461, 15.5319, 14.8587, and 13.3332, respectively. Meanwhile, the data also showed that Chinese writers preferred to use 'aim' while international writers used more of the other two words. Considering that the use of small p-values with very small sample sizes may
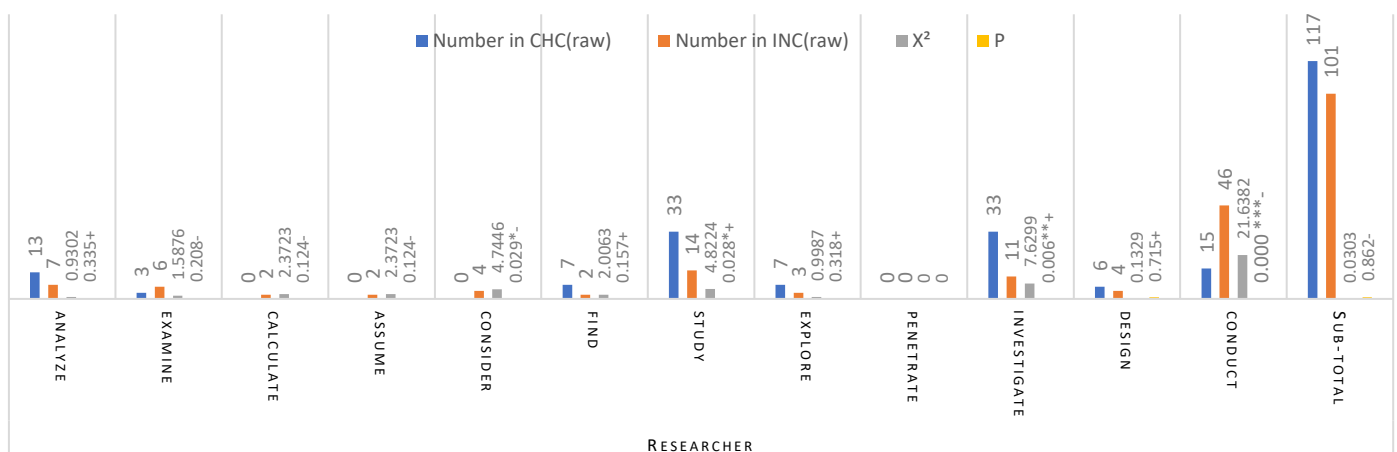

Figure 1.

Main Verbs Used for Constructing Authorial Identity as a Researcher

Table 7.

Main Verbs Used for Constructing Authorial Identity as Discourse Constructor

Verb marker	Number in CHC(raw)	N-freq.	Number in INC(raw)	N-freq.	X²	P
describe	1	0.09	2	0.22	0.5292	0.467 -
present	6	0.56	14	1.55	4.742	0.029 *-
discuss	1	0.09	15	1.67	14.8587	0.000 ***-
focus	2	0.19	13	1.44	10.1225	0.001 **-
propose	3	0.28	5	0.56	0.9051	0.341 -
put forward	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0
illustrate	0	0.00	4	0.44	4.7446	0.029 *-
summarize	4	0.37	10	1.11	3.7218	0.054 -
begin	1	0.09	1	0.11	0.0146	0.904 -
attempt	0	0.00	3	0.33	3.5584	0.059 -
aim	41	3.84	5	0.56	22.5461	0.000 ***+
provide	17	1.59	15	1.67	0.0165	0.898 -
use	11	1.03	31	3.44	13.3332	0.000 ***-
understand	10	0.94	10	1.11	0.146	0.702 _
develop	7	0.66	8	0.89	0.3482	0.555 _
review	7	0.66	27	3.00	15.5319	0.000 ***-
compare	5	0.47	16	1.78	7.8448	0.005 **-
base	10	0.94	9	1.00	0.0202	0.887 -
Sub-total	126	11.80	188	20.88	25.2984	0.000 ***-

be misleading, the words 'illustrate', 'focus', and 'discuss' were excluded at the significance levels of .05, .01, and .001, respectively. However, the frequency of 13 revealed that international writers used 'discuss' much more frequently than their Chinese counterparts. The overall chi-square value of 25.2984 for the authorial identity as discourse constructor indicated that Chinese and international writers had an extremely significant difference in this aspect. Chinese writers underused this type of main verbs, compared to international writers.

In order to find out what types of self-mentions were used to realize the authorial identity as discourse constructor, four main verbs of 'discuss', 'aim', 'use', and 'review' were analyzed (Figure 2). As can be seen, 'discuss' was used in relatively large quantity by INC since the number may affect the analysis result if excluded from consideration.

As shown in Figure 2, both groups of writers used inanimate entities to construct the authorial identity as discourse constructor. Chinese writers employed more research-oriented nouns, accounting for 73.33% of the total, than international writers, while international writers utilized more discoursal nouns instead. For human entity self-mentions, Chinese writers rarely used this type to construct the authorial identity as discourse constructor; in contrast, international writers employed the self-mention 37 times, accounting for 47.44% of the total, to construct the identity as a discourse constructor.

Among all the authorial identities, the authorial identity as arguer indicated fewer differences between the two groups. The chi-square data of 24.9943 (p < .000) signifies the extremely significant difference between them and Chinese writers' underuse of the word 'evaluate' compared with international writers (Figure 3). Further concordance of the word and self-mention shows that Chinese writers used the research-oriented noun 'study' 7 times to realize the identity of arguer, while international writers used human entities additionally, of which they utilized
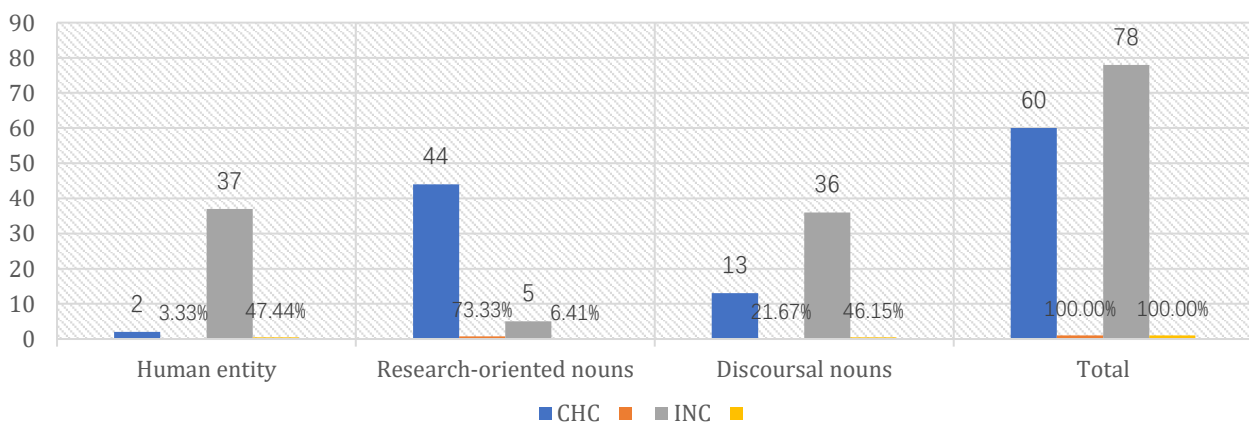

Figure 2.
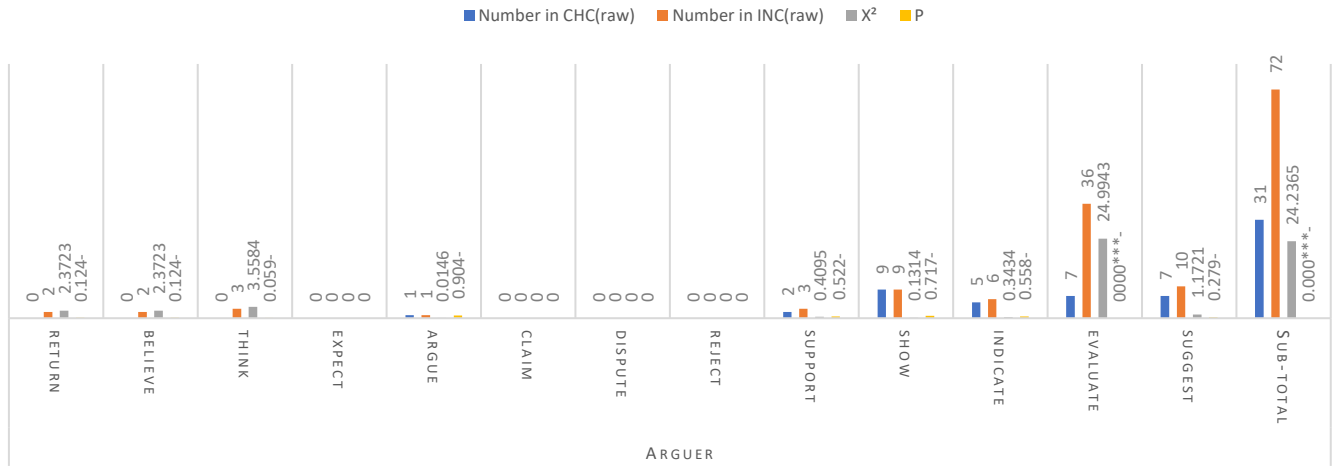*Discourse Constructor Realized by Self-mentions*

Figure 3.
Main Verbs Used for Constructing Authorial Identity as Arguer

human entities 9 times and research-oriented nouns 27 times (study 25 times, research 2 times), accounting for 25% and 75% of the total, respectively. The two groups of writers never used the four words of 'expect', 'claim', 'dispute', and 'reject' to construct the authorial identity as arguer. Instead, they preferred to use 'show', 'indicate', 'support', and 'suggest'. The obtained result indicated that Chinese and international writers were significantly different in choosing the main verbs to construct the authorial identity as arguer ($p < .05$).

Various main verbs were used to realize different authorial identities due to different writers' lexical preferences, or sentence structures or voices. The findings of the research on verbs' voice and tense were not in agreement with a study by Shaw (1992) which reported that past tenses were used with active voice due to the different genres of the research materials. The study by Shaw (1992) addressed the thesis introductory chapters in agriculture, biology, and biochemistry, while the current study was performed on the RA genre of agricultural abstracts. It is confirmed by the research of El-Dakhs (2018) that research article abstracts are an independent genre. Of note, the current study did not focus on the causes for selecting

different main verbs further since we are merely studying main verbs to construct different authorial identities.

On the whole, Chinese writers used self-mentions to construct the discourse constructor identity most frequently, followed by the identity as a researcher, and the identity as arguer, accounting for 45.99%, 42.70%, and 11.31%, respectively. The same could be applied to international writers, who constructed the three types of authorial identities, accounting for 52.08%, 27.98%, and 19.94%, respectively. Chinese writers underused all three types of authorial identities, compared with international writers, as the chi-square data of 31.1667 ($p < .000$) suggested. The data are shown in Figure 4.

Regarding the strategies employed by both groups of writers, a greater difference exists, as shown in the following Figure 5.

Chinese and international writers show significantly different preferences for all three types of self-mentions ($p < .000$). They used human entities quite differently, as the chi-square value of 60.3461 ($p < 0.000$) proves. Chinese writers underused human entities to construct the authorial identity as a researcher, discourse constructor, and arguer, while international writers used
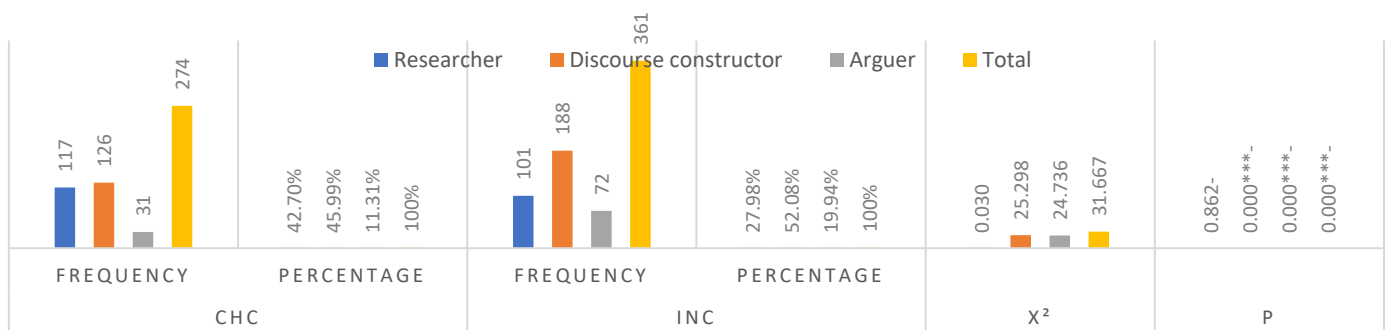

Figure 4.
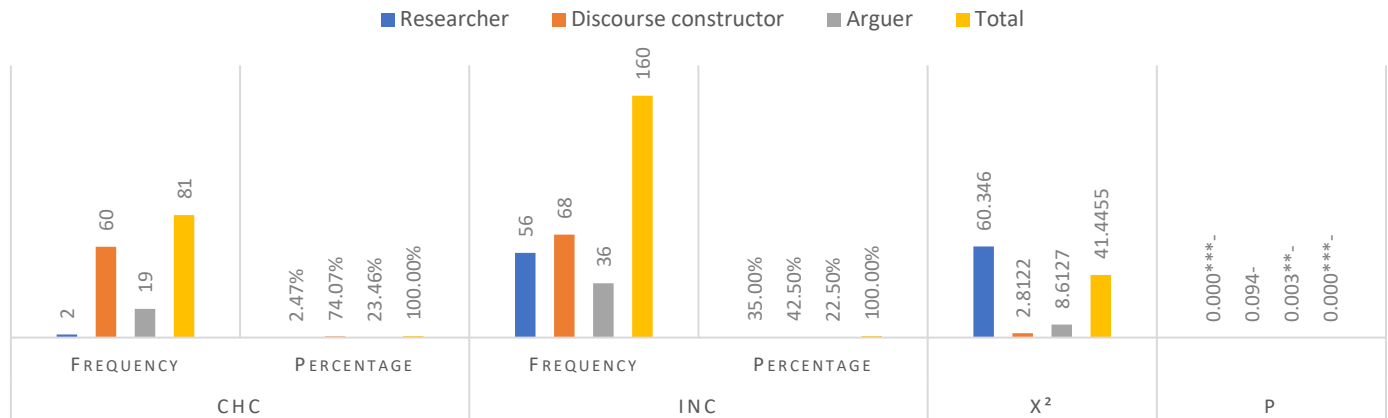*Authorial Identity Number and Percentage*

Figure 5.
Self-mentions Constructing Identities with Extremely Significant Differences

4. Discussion

more human entities and discoursal nouns to construct different authorial identities. However, both groups had the same preference for research-oriented nouns, especially study and research, indicating that both groups of writers share the same understanding of these words.

As discussed, human entities can be used to promote interactions between the writer and the reader, making the abstract more subjective. The research results show that abstracts by international writers may be more subjective than those by Chinese writers since international writers use more human entities than Chinese authors. However, the preference of both groups of writers for research-oriented nouns suggests that they tend to make the abstracts objective, as they select medium-level involvement entities to construct different authorial identities.

Risk and involvement in writing may be one of the causes for different selections of self-mentions. Generally, the use of personal pronouns is typically viewed as the primary option for signifying a high degree of author involvement and risk with the reader, while hidden entities represent the least involvement and risk. Meanwhile, inanimate entities suggest a moderate level of involvement and risk between the author and the reader. This research on self-mentions and authorial identities has indicated that both groups of writers prefer to use medium-level risk self-mentions, especially research-oriented nouns, to first construct the authorial identity as a researcher. Then, they choose discoursal nouns and human entities to construct the authorial identity as a discourse constructor and arguer. Medium-level risk self-mentions are used most frequently because both groups of writers may believe that academic writing should be neutral to achieve objectivity, making it more easily accepted by most readers. This study supports Molino's (2010) view of objectivity as an important aspect in dealing with inter-personality in academic writing, and agrees with the idea that the impersonal and objective style arises from the need for scholars to conform to the writing tradition of their academic community, as suggested by scholars, such as Shaw (2003) and Shaw and Vassileva

(2009). Another reason may be that they hope to strengthen the impression of a researcher, as research-oriented nouns may suggest their identity as researchers. The fact that Chinese writers use more discoursal nouns overall may indicate that they emphasize more on structural organization than their international counterparts because Chinese writers may think discoursal nouns serve as a better replacement for human entities to reduce the risk of the author's involvement. The view that discoural nouns are prioritized to minimize author involvement compared to their international counterparts has also been confirmed in some other studies (e.g., Liu, 2011).

High-risk self-mentions are used more frequently by international writers rather than by Chinese writers, which may be caused by various factors. On the one hand, international writers, mostly influenced by individualistic culture, tend to show their personal identity as they are willing to highlight their contribution to the writing (Swales, 2004). On the other hand, Chinese writers are restricted by regulations in GB6647-1986, which guide them into using fewer personal pronouns and human entities as some publishing institutions require. Consequently, this writing guidance may influence their writing habits. Unconsciously, Chinese writers are influenced by the prevailing traditional culture of modesty (Chen, 2020), in which they are supposed to hide their personal identity; therefore, they deliberately choose to substitute other entities for human entities. The multi-authorship of both corpora has a certain effect on the choice of first-person pronouns and possessives, for which more plural forms of first-person pronouns are adopted than singular forms. This is due to the motivation to establish credibility using self-promotion, as per Harwood's (2005) view. There are only three occurrences of "I" in No. 177 and 199 in INC since these two abstracts are single-authored. We have excluded the influence of low frequency in our research since we do not consider the first-person singular pronoun and its determiners.

Low-risk self-mentions with extraposed "it" structures occur occasionally but are never used to construct the authorial identity by both Chinese and international writers. This finding partially agrees with Hyland's (2008) research that expert writers use fewer "it" structures than thesis

writers, although other researchers (Biber et al., 1999; Charles, 2006) conclude that dummy "it" subjects are used more frequently. This might be because this type of self-mention is too weak in this particular discipline for writers to show their identity and highlight their contribution to the writings; therefore, both groups of writers never use this device to construct their authorial identity. Further research based on larger corpora might obtain different results.

The different choices for self-mentions may also be interpreted from the pragmatic perspective of Yule's (2000) politeness theory, which posits that linguistic interactions are social interactions, in which face should be considered for face wants and self-image in public; therefore, participants have to determine positive face or negative face in an interaction in most English-speaking contexts. A positive face needs others' acceptance, likes, or recognition as a member of the same group. In abstract writing, when new ideas are proposed, they may threaten the face of other scholars, or even the whole academic circle, so it is necessary to mitigate the negative influence by adopting face-saving strategies, such as using inanimate entities to present new points indirectly, so as to give the reader's face and show respect for others as well, thus making it easier for ideas to be accepted. Thus, the pragmatic consideration of positive face wants is another reason both types of writers choose medium-risk self-mentions instead of high-risk ones.

However, the research partly supports Wu's (2013) finding that first-person pronouns and third-person nouns are used for constructing the authorial identity as a researcher in linguistics for Chinese writers, which may be due to the disciplinary difference in corpus sources, as this study chooses abstracts in the agricultural field. Meanwhile, it also supports the view of Becher and Trowler (2001) regarding the style's relation to the epistemological belief of the disciplinary community to which writers belong. Additionally, Hyland's (2005) view that the presence or absence of explicit author reference is generally a conscious choice by writers to adopt a particular stance and disciplinary-situated authorial identity is further confirmed in abstract writing in agriculture.

5. Conclusion

Chinese and international writers use research-oriented nouns, discoursal nouns, and human entities to create authorial identities as researchers, discourse constructors, and arguers, but employ different self-mention strategies for each identity. Researcher identity is mainly built by using researcher nouns and discoursal nouns, with human entity self-mentions like "we" also serving this purpose. Chinese writers use more research-oriented nouns for discourse constructor identity, while international writers use more discoursal nouns and first-person plural forms like "we" and "our." As arguers, Chinese writers rely on the research-oriented noun "study," while international writers use nouns such as "study" and the human entity "we." Writers from different cultural backgrounds prefer different main verbs when constructing various authorial identities. The study suggests that objectivity remains a priority in agricultural

abstract writing, with varying self-mentions indicating different degrees of authorial personal involvement.

The study indicates that Chinese and international writers use different strategies to construct authorial identities due to variations in diction, author involvement, cultural backgrounds, and writing environments. This leads to Chinese writers using more human entities, discoursal nouns, and first-person singular forms or concealed entities in authorial identity construction. Chinese writers should consider employing diverse self-mention strategies in abstract writing. Furthermore, abstract writing instruction in Chinese universities should emphasize the use of self-mentions to create different authorial identities effectively.

This study aids writers in using various self-mentions to construct different authorial identities. Although a larger corpus would better represent typical self-mention features and authorial identities, the research highlights different strategies used by writers from diverse backgrounds in writing agricultural RA abstract. Future research can investigate concealed entities' functions and sub-clauses using larger abstract corpora.

Declarations

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