

# Projecting an academic identity in some reflective genres

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## Abstract

Research on academic writing has long stressed the connection between writing and the creation of an author's identity (Ivanič, 1998; Hyland, 2010). Identity is said to be created from the texts we engage in and the linguistic choices we make, thus relocating it from hidden processes of cognition to its social construction in discourse. Issues of agency and conformity, stability and change, remain controversial, however. Some writers question whether there is an unchanging self lurking behind such discourse and suggest that identity is a "performance" (see for instance Butler, 1990) while others see identity as the product of dominant discourses tied to institutional practices (Foucault, 1972). All this has been of particular interest to teachers and researchers of EAP because students and academics alike often feel uncomfortably positioned, even alienated, by the conventions of academic discourse. They sometimes complain that the voice they are forced to use requires them to "talk like a book" by adopting a formal and coldly analytical persona.

In this paper I want to explore how we construct an identity in three rather neglected academic genres where the requirements of anonymity and impersonality are more relaxed. In thesis acknowledgements, doctoral prize applications and bio statements, writers are exempted from formal conventions of disciplinary argument and have an opportunity to reveal something of how they want to be seen by others. My question is: What use do they make of with these opportunities?

**Keywords:** identity, academic writing, thesis acknowledgements, doctoral prize applications, homepages.

## Resumen

### *Proyectando una identidad académica en algunos géneros reflexivos*

Desde hace mucho tiempo las investigaciones sobre escritura académica han subrayado la conexión entre escritura y la creación de una identidad de autor

(Ivanič, 1998; Hyland, 2010). Se dice que la identidad se crea a partir de los textos que tratamos y las opciones lingüísticas que elegimos, reubicando así dicha identidad desde los procesos ocultos de cognición hasta su construcción social en el discurso. Con todo, los asuntos relativos a agentividad y conformidad, estabilidad y cambio continúan siendo cuestiones controvertidas. Algunos autores ponen en duda si existe una actitud de auto-acecho inamovible tras el discurso y sugieren que la identidad es una “actuación” (véase por ejemplo Butler, 1990), al tiempo que otros entienden la identidad como el producto de discursos dominantes fuertemente apegados a prácticas institucionales (Foucault, 1972). Todo esto ha resultado ser especialmente interesante para los docentes e investigadores de inglés con fines académicos ya que tanto los estudiantes como los propios académicos no se sienten cómodos o incluso con frecuencia sintiéndose un tanto alienados, ante las convenciones del discurso académico. Éstos suelen denunciar que se ve obligados a utilizar una voz que les hace “hablar como un libro” adoptando una personalidad formal, fría y analítica.

En el presente trabajo pretendo estudiar cómo construimos una identidad en tres géneros académicos bastante olvidados en los que los requisitos de anonimato e impersonalidad son menos estrictos. En las secciones de agradecimientos, en las solicitudes de premios y en las bionotas se les exige a los autores de aplicar las convenciones formales habituales para argumentar lo propio en una disciplina y se les ofrece la oportunidad de manifestarse del modo en el que quieren ser vistos por parte de otros. Mi pregunta es: ¿Cuál es el uso que hacen de estas oportunidades?

**Palabras clave:** identidad, escritura académica, agradecimientos en tesis, solicitudes de premios doctorales, páginas digitales.

## Identity and the construction of personal credibility

First I need to say something about my understanding of “identity”. Contemporary perspectives see identity as part of a social and collective endeavour rather than something achieved in isolation. Essentially, “we are who we are” through participation in our social groups and the ways we are linked to situations, to relationships, and to the rhetorical positions we adopt in our routine interactions with others. Identity thus involves “identification” with some community, taking on and shaping its discourses, behaviours, values and practices to construct a self both distinct from and similar to those of its members. These individual and collective identifications are symbolized in language so that speaking and writing in community-specific ways proclaims membership of a group and of culture. This identification to

the group, however, is a complex process as we cannot simply proclaim who we want to be and hope this identity will stick. How we choose to express ourselves must resonate with group members so that our claims to be one of them are seen as credible and valid.

Put more directly, identities are constructed out of the rhetorical options our communities make available, so that we gain credibility as members and approval for our performances by aligning our language choices with those of our social groups. We “position” ourselves in relation to others using these discourses and in turn are positioned by these same discourses (Davies & Harré, 1999). The idea of positioning is therefore a means of seeing how language can represent people in particular ways and, at the same time, how it can be used to negotiate new positions. While we become who we are only in relation to others, adopting the modes of talk that others routinely use, identity also means assembling a performance using the language and values we bring to the group from our social backgrounds. Community Discourses, and their social ideologies, therefore assist the performance of identities by providing broad templates for how people see and talk about the world. Our identities draw heavily on these schema as they both shape and enable particular “speaking positions” and disable others (Baynham, 2006).

In one sense, then, identity means constructing credibility – as students, teachers, nurses, fishmongers, or whatever. It involves negotiating a self which is coherent and meaningful to both the individual and the group. This means, of course, that identity is not simply a matter of personal choice. We cannot just be whoever we want to be. But it also means that we are not just prisoners of our social groups. In particular, while academic contexts privilege certain ways of making meanings and so restrict what language participants can bring from their past experiences, we can also see academic conventions as a catalogue of options which allow writers to actively accomplish an identity through discourse choices. Similarity and differences are therefore entangled in each other, and both are socially constructed in language. We come to invest in particular positionings so that we act like someone in that position and “become like that kind of person” (Wortham, 2001: 9). In Bakhtin’s (1981) terms, his or her word echoes those of others in that positioning.

In the rest of this paper I want to focus on how students and academics represent themselves in genres which foreground identity in the activity of writing. By briefly examining the relatively peripheral genres of thesis

acknowledgements, doctoral prize applications and bio statements, I hope to reveal some of the ways that academics work to manufacture credibility in their dealings with others.

## 2. Identity in thesis acknowledgments

I begin with a genre which initially seems to have little to do with identity. Acknowledgements, however, are central to the academic practice of reciprocal gift giving and, for students, offer an opportunity to give credit to institutions and individuals who have contributed to their thesis in some way and to make a favourable impression on readers. So while acknowledgements can act as a means of recognizing debts and achieving a sense of closure at the end of a long and demanding research process, they also reveal the writer as someone with a life beyond the page; an individual among academics.

Acknowledgements are common in published articles (Cronin, McKenzie & Rubio, 1993), but they are more than a simple catalogue of indebtedness and the expression of thanks is not an entirely altruistic business. Ben-Ari (1987), in fact, comments on the role of acknowledgements in constructing a professional identity through their strategic role in “careering”. This is achieved through the author’s management of his or her relations to the disciplinary community and affiliation to particular research groups, leading figures or academic orientations. The opportunities which acknowledgements offer for building an identity linked to relationships with others appears not to be lost on post graduate students. In a corpus of 240 acknowledgements accompanying Masters’ dissertations and PhD theses written by Hong Kong students in six disciplines (Hyland, 2003 & 2004), I discovered that students use this channel to not only recognize assistance and support, but to construct a particular persona.

One way of doing this was to mention supervisors, who appeared in every acknowledgement, revealing the intellectual, and often emotional, obligation writers feel towards them:

Example 1:

I would like to thank Dr. Mun Fai Leung, my supervisor, for his patient guidance.

As my adviser, Prof. Christopher Candlin, whose interests in life’s big issues within academia and beyond it, has provided constant inspiration as I progressed into my work.

Ranging from the blandly formal to the near reverent, the thanks offered to supervisors and other academics, some perhaps only peripheral to the research, may also project a relationship beyond the thesis. This is most pronounced in PhD acknowledgements in the sciences and engineering, where winning the protection and goodwill of established figures is often vital for gaining post-doctoral grants, a lab to work in, or a teaching position. More directly relevant to the public construction of an academic self, however, is the fact that who we identify with contributes to who we are, or are seen to be.

In the hard sciences the creation of knowledge is heavily dependent on the collaborative exchange of materials, information, and unpublished results which enmesh the researcher into networks of reciprocal obligations. The effective construction of a credible academic persona therefore depends on who you know. Mentioning key figures can both gain the writer important credit and help project a scholarly persona, as these students seemed to realise:

Example 2:

The acknowledgement is an important section for creating good impression.  
(Electronic Engineering PhD interview)

Some of the comparative results are from other labs and I will put these people in the acknowledgements. Some of these are from important people in the field and it is a good idea to include them.

(Biology PhD interview)

The elaboration of self-identification draws upon “a wide palette of accessories in the human world” (Jenkins, 2008: 71) and so who we express a connection with or have relationships with says something to others about us.

Less obviously, perhaps, we can also see the construction of identity in the acknowledgement of individuals and institutions who have provided resources such as data, technical help and financial support, in completing the research process. While research often crucially depends on this kind of support, we can also see the textual production of an academic self in the detailing of thanks for the paraphernalia of academic success such as prizes, prestigious scholarships, company sponsorships or travel grants. These examples give some flavor of this:

Example 3:

The research for this thesis was financially supported by a postgraduate studentship from the University of Hong Kong, The Hong Kong and China Gas Company Postgraduate Scholarship, Epson Foundation Scholarship, two University of Hong Kong CRCG grants and an RCG grant.

(Computer Science PhD)

This project was generously supported by funding from Hong Kong Polytechnic University's Staff Development Committee. Support has been forthcoming, too, from Cathay Pacific Airways in the form of complimentary air travel, which has allowed me to attend a number of overseas conferences and thereby bring the research to the attention of a wider audience.

(Applied Linguistics PhD)

While the writer may feel obliged to refer to his or her funding agency, an examiner is unlikely to remain unimpressed by the writer's obvious confidence and undoubted academic credentials.

Similar rhetorical intentions perhaps lie behind acknowledging individuals for organising conferences, reviewing articles, and collaborating on publishing projects. Particularly prevalent in the sciences, where work practices are more likely to transcend the immediate research site and offer greater opportunities for collaboration in research papers and conference presentations, such gratitude clearly serves to enhance the writer's professional credentials:

Example 4:

A special acknowledgment is extended to Y.K. Leung at Stanford University for providing spreading resistance analysis and to Prof. Simon Wong for reviewing my IEDM paper.

(Electronic Engineering PhD)

Portions of this thesis represent joint work with Francis Lor, which appear in the following papers: "Linear-Time Algorithms for Unspecified Routing in Grids," in the Proceedings of International Conference on Algorithms; (...) and "Efficient Algorithms for Finding Maximum Number of Disjoint Paths in Grids," in Journal of Algorithm.

(Computer Science PhD)

It is not difficult to see the textual construction of an academic self in these apparently innocent appreciations from a grateful graduate. They help mark

the writer out as an individual whose academic talents have already been recognized and who may therefore be a deserving candidate for further honours.

In the human sciences, on the other hand, students sought to promote an academic identity by positioning themselves in relation to their subjects:

Example 5:

I would like to acknowledge the invaluable help rendered by my subjects, the elderly diabetic patients follow-up at the Alp Lei Chau and Tang Chi Ngong out-patient clinic, who spent time to participate in this study without immediate benefit to themselves.

(Public Administration PhD)

Finally, I am most indebted to the 517 companies that were willing to return my questionnaire with their responses.

(Business Studies PhD)

Quite clearly, it is unlikely that the subjects themselves are likely to read these acknowledgements. But these texts are written for another audience altogether as they can communicate quite subtle rhetorical intimations of professional commitment and academic competence. They hint at the authority and involvement of the writer and of trials overcome to professional readers.

While students are able to carefully create a disciplinary persona in their acknowledgements, the fact that almost 40% of the thanks in the corpus were to friends and family suggests that the genre also provided them with the chance to project a more human face and a social identity. The fact that over 90% of these thanks identified family and friends by their full name, occasionally with an honorific, once again reflects the public nature of this discourse and underlines the writers' intention that the recipients are clearly identifiable to outside readers. It indicates a clear awareness of audience and perhaps an opportunity for the writer to represent him or herself as a social person which is not available in the dissertation proper:

Example 6:

Gratitude expressed to all my research teammates including Miss Irene Kung, Miss Charlotte Yim and Mr. Z. Q. Fang. Their humour and spiritual support smoothed my research progress.

(Biology PhD)

My heartfelt gratitude especially to my two mentors, my mother, Mrs. Gita Vyas and my father, Late, Dr. V. K. Vyas who said that I could do whatever I set my mind to.

(Applied Linguistics PhD)

More significantly, though, references to the tensions and hardships of research are common at this point in these acknowledgements. The writer is here able to provide a picture of an individual with a life affected by a commitment to research which has had consequences for his or her private life and identity. Alluding to the struggle and ultimate triumph over the difficulties of graduate study helps display core academic values of modesty, generosity and gratitude which help define the public face of their discipline:

Example 7:

Most importantly, I would like to thank my parents and my dearest wife, Rowena Chui. Without their support and great encouragement, I cannot concentrate on my work and overcome the difficulties.

(Computer Science PhD)

Last, but definitely not the least, I am greatly indebted to my family. It was my parents' unconditional love, care, and tolerance which made the hardship of writing the thesis worthwhile.

(Public Admin PhD)

So while writers become more human, and perhaps more sympathetic to readers, they do not lose sight of the need to project a credible and academically distinctive identity. These statements recognizing friends and relations mark the writer out as a real, individual person. At the same time, however, they also index shared belonging through participation in a community ritual which signals a change of status and seeks recognition as a community member.

It is clear, then, that acknowledgements are not merely random lists of thanks. Here writers attempt to demonstrate competent participation in a disciplinary community, promoting themselves as familiar with the norms and practices of their discipline, and deserving of the qualification sought.

### 3. Identity in prize applications

The alignment of the self with particular academics and disciplinary values is done more directly by making claims for the value of one's research. But

while academics gain recognition and status through their published work, graduate students have not yet reached this stage. Their dissertation is often the only textual artefact which testifies to their scholarly credentials and supports their claim to an academic identity. The promotion of their work in applications for prizes therefore takes on particular significance in the manufacture of credibility. In this section I explore how writers accomplish this rhetorical task, investigating 70 supporting statements submitted over three years for a doctoral prize in Education awarded by a UK university.

The prize application is actually a complex set of genres which comprise an abstract of the thesis, a recommendation from the supervisor, and a supporting statement from the applicant. Because, in this case, the judges do not read the entire thesis, the supporting statement is the most important text for the construction of identity, and for this prize applicants were asked to submit a text of up to 300 words evaluating the research. Preparing these statements typically poses a serious challenge to applicants because of their unfamiliarity with the conventions of the genre and the expectations of its audience. This is both an occluded and un-researched genre which bears little similarity to previously studied persuasive texts such as applications for jobs (Bhatia, 1993), graduate school places (Ding, 2007) and grant proposals (Koutsantoni, 2009).

So, neither students nor judges have expertise in this kind of writing, although some guidance is provided in the call for applications:

The Doctoral Thesis Prize celebrates outstanding post-graduate work at this university. It is awarded to the author of the thesis who, in the opinion of the judges, best demonstrates originality, contributions to the field, clarity of argument and potential impact. A prize of £3000 will be awarded to the winner.

The rubric explicitly asks applicants to evaluate the academic merit of their work, the sub-text being that applicants should not only highlight the significance of their research, but in so doing provide evidence of their discursive competence and a disciplinary persona.

Almost all applicants followed the application guidelines and focused on the contribution and impact of their research, with originality and commentary on the argument less often mentioned. While these features represent the professional stock-in-trade of any self-respecting academic, they are rarely asked to reflect and comment on their texts directly. Years of study in

doctoral research, however, have enculturated these students into the ways of their discipline and as a result we find them demonstrating disciplinary membership through the use of specialized terminology and the mention of celebrated theorists:

Example 8:

This thesis works within Geographical and Environmental Education and Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) to address matters pertinent to ‘philosophy of education’ (notably psychology, comparative philosophy and postmodern and critical theorising). The study is a multidimensional, multiscalar and holistic conceptual enquiry into the nature of ‘human-place’ relations with a view to suggesting crucial dimensions of a *‘place-based education’*.

These extracts display considerable expertise in manipulating specialist frames and addressing central concerns in educational research, presenting a competent identity as a disciplinary insider.

But while their graduate training encourages a scholarly perspective on this task, the prize also inclined these writers toward a promotional rather than critical perspective on what they had done. The task is not made any easier by the fact that over 70% of the applicants for the prize were international students. As Swales and Feak (2004: 229) observe, audience expectations for personal statements are often “more shaped by local cultural values and national academic traditions than is the case with more technical writing”. Consequently, some arguments seemed a tad naïve:

Example 9:

Prof X and Dr. Y stated in my viva that my thesis is a contribution to knowledge and that they have learned a lot from my work.

All arguments in my thesis are clearly set out, informed by existing literature and supported by empirical evidence.

When you consider the contribution of my work to the field of education studies in Ireland and its ongoing impact you will be quite impressed with my research work.

The cause of difficulty may lie in the conflicts inherent in trying to combine a promotional and an academic genre, selling one’s research after years of creating appropriately tentative arguments.

Despite this, however, most applications displayed considerable rhetorical sophistication as the writers sought to persuade the judges of the value of their research and the credibility of their academic credentials. This was largely achieved through a series of moves which addressed the criteria of the prize and underlined the contribution (example 10), impact (example 11) and originality (example 12) of their research:

Example 10:

My thesis contributes to global literature in the field of research methodology in general and Sri Lankan literature in particular.

Example 11:

Furthermore, publications arising from my thesis have already received favourable comment. I have no doubt that the publication of the thesis itself and the lecture series already begun will excite academic debates on research methodology.

Example 12:

This thesis was groundbreaking in that it was the first study to look at the non-formal learning of novice teachers in medical settings.

While some formulations here might suggest the writers' novice status, there is clearly an attempt to position work in the wider understandings of the field and so align themselves with its members.

These doctoral graduates also displayed their claims to an academic identity by highlighting expertise in various areas of research. One indication of an academic identity, for instance, is to suggest one's contribution to the development of theory and research methodologies:

Example 13:

My approach is to examine the seldom-heard accounts of professionals working with these families using an innovative synthesis of theoretical ideas from discursive psychology, Foucauldian discourse analysis, critical disability and childhood studies.

I employed a modified version of the 'circuit of culture' – a theoretical model which holds that meanings are distributed across a series of key moments from product production through to consumption. This original descriptive-cum-analytical framework combines elements of content, discourse and social semiotic analysis.

The use of the first person here is clearly not a casual or neutral choice. It functions to display a professional competence by suggesting that, in other hands, things could have been done differently.

A final way these writers took on the voice of competent academics was by employing evaluative lexis that drew on discipline-shared estimations of worth. While expressions of affective “appreciation” (Martin & White, 2005) such as “good”, “beautiful”, “terrible”, etc. are rare, a great deal of evaluation is embedded in the values of a social group’s estimations of what is positive or negative. Evaluation, in other words, is concerned with the construction of communities of shared values and assessments; it invokes particular positions to persuade community members to see things in a certain way. To simplify Hunston (1993), we can distinguish two broad categories through which evaluation is manifested: status and value. Status reflects the writer’s degree of certainty and commitment towards a proposition, i.e. its modality; while value refers to quality on a “good-bad” scale.

As we might expect, prize applications overwhelmingly impart a status of certainty to their content. This is a discourse of assurance which aims to leave readers in no doubt of the worth of the thesis with little space for the hedging of research writing. Typically statements are made categorically and are often boosted in a number of ways to impart an assurance to the subject matter:

Example 14:

As such it offers a sturdy theoretical framework and a clear methodological path through rich data. The work culminates in a strong argument regarding ...

My work represents a huge contribution to scholarly work in education and has secured an important foothold in the research into gender.

This robust stance means that writers offer readers a confident positioning of themselves towards their work, generating an enthusiasm which hopefully the panel of readers finds infectious.

The expression of value in these texts reflects the shared concerns of the community and what it believes to be important. In this genre these always draw on positive items and place great emphasis on a few key semantic classes. While research articles tend to bestow value on entities such as accuracy, consistency, simplicity, and usefulness (Hunston, 1993), these texts

stress those features mentioned above of novelty (example 15) and importance (example 16), together with clarity (example 17) and scholarliness (example 18). These examples (*italics added*) indicate just some of the lexis that writers drew on to make these evaluative claims:

Example 15:

It provides an *original* contribution to the study of educational accountability, understood in a comparative and cross-cultural perspective, which is considered *relatively neglected* in this field.

Example 16:

This Thesis will *make a major contribution* to these debates.

Example 17:

It constructs, however, a *clear* and continuous argument through these multiple engagements.

Example 18:

I address these complex issues and tensions in a *scholarly* manner.

These post-graduate students, reflecting on their research to apply for a prestigious and financially rewarding prize, attempt to represent themselves and their work within disciplinary frameworks of understanding. By taking a positive and promotional position on their completed research, they seek to persuade the panel of judges of their own credibility as academics as much as the particular value of their theses. Writing like a disciplinary expert is, therefore, more than mastery of particular disciplinary genres such as research articles or theses. It is a process that involves control of an entire semiotic system of rhetorical resources.

#### 4. Identity in article bio statements

While a great deal of identity research focuses on what people say about themselves in formal interviews with academics, this approach is highly contrived. Most of the time we are not performing identity work by narrating stories of ourselves to complete strangers from the local university, we are presenting ourselves through our understandings and reworking of available genres. A more mundane way of doing autobiographical work is found in the short personal bio statements which accompany research

articles. Bios are authentically produced, naturally occurring texts constructed for a genuine purpose; a site where academics stake a claim to a certain version of themselves for their peers and institutions.

This is probably the most explicit public assertion of self-representation in scholarly life. It sits in stark contrast to the prescribed anonymity of the article itself, which has been stripped of identifying information for blind peer review and generally approximates to conventions which discourage too much personal exposure. Here we find a space where, in 50 to 100 words, authors are able to reflexively craft a narrative of expertise for themselves, albeit within the tight constraints of a relatively unvarying genre. The bio, then, is a key opening for academics, both novice and experienced, to manage a public image through the careful recounting of achievement. It is an opportunity to make a claim for a particular identity. The following comments relate to a corpus of 600 bios taken from articles in three disciplines, Applied Linguistics, Electrical Engineering, and Philosophy, and also controlled for gender, with 100 bios by males and females in each discipline (Hyland & Tse, forthcoming).

Overall, the results show that different journals vary in their requirements. Word length is, in fact, a distinguishing feature of bios across disciplines with those in Engineering about twice as long as those in Applied linguistics. The gender of the writer also appears to influence the length of texts with males tending to say more about themselves than women. The frequency counts, shown in Table 1, also reveal something of the ways that academics construct their identities in this genre in terms of both what they say (moves) and how they say it (process types).

Moves	Totals	Per 1000 words	Process types	Totals	Per 1000 words
Employment	577	12.1	Relational	1,330	27.9
Research	475	10.0	Circum	138	2.9
Education	296	6.2	Intensive	856	18.0
Publications	283	5.9	Possessive	365	7.7
Achievement	88	1.8	Material	1,103	23.2
Comm services	84	1.8	Mental	58	1.2
Personal profile	50	1.1	Verbal	54	1.1
			Behavioural	2	0.0
			Existential	1	0.0
TOTAL	1,853	38.9		3,907	82.0

Table 1. Overall frequencies of moves and process types in bios.

Looking first at the move structures of these texts we can see that writers overwhelmingly mentioned employment in their bios, always stating their

current post, and together with research interests this comprised over half of all move types in the corpus. In terms of representing these experiences, “how” they conveyed these moves, writers used relational and material process types to discuss themselves in 95% of all clauses. The dominance of these process types stresses the importance of what the individuals claimed to “be” and what they “do”.

Relational process types predominantly clustered in what Halliday (1994: 119) calls “intensive” types, where a writer claims to “be” something, such as an assistant professor, a doctoral student or specialist in some field or other. These made up two thirds of all relational processes, with possessives, where writers stated they “had” some form of experience or research interest, comprising another 27%. Circumstantial processes, where the process includes attribute of some kind, such as what the writer is “interested in” or an institution he or she is “affiliated with”, were also present in these texts, but these were far less common.

Looking at these results in more detail, it may be surprising that gender is a relatively insignificant factor in influencing how writers represented themselves in bios with both move and clause level decisions being broadly similar in the bios of men and women. Perhaps the main difference here is that male academics tended to foreground what they had formally accomplished by way of publications (example 19) and service to the academic community (example 20):

Example 19:

Dr. Mohanty is an author of 70 peer-reviewed top-notch journal and conference publications, many of which have been nominated for best paper awards. They have received worldwide citations, a total of approximately 150, till date.

(Electrical Engineering)

He holds nine honorary degrees and 14 academic medals and has published a thousand books.

(Philosophy)

Example 20:

He is a member of the editorial board of the International Journal on Data Warehousing and Mining and has served on more than 40 program committees including ...

(Electrical Engineering)

He coordinates the Computer Connection at the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication, serves as list and reviews editor for *H-DigiRhet*, and has recently joined the editorial staff of *Enculturation: A Journal of Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture*.

(Applied Linguistics)

Publications form a key aspect of academic identity claims as both the promotion of knowledge and the establishment of reputation depend on them. Many women, however, did not mention publications at all and simply offered a list of their educational experiences and professional qualifications.

It could be that these differences are related to rank rather than gender. Philosophy and electronic engineering in particular continue to be largely male-dominated fields where men are more likely to be heads of labs and assume posts of greater responsibility such as holding chairs and editorships (Tse & Hyland, 2008). This potentially gives them a greater volume of “product” to include in their bios. The data, in fact, show an upward curve in the mention of research, employment, publication and achievement moves in traversing across the status cline. Senior scholars, in particular, were significantly more likely to discuss both their research interests and publication outputs. At the other end of the scale, research students largely used the opportunity to set out an educational background. In the absence of a clear publication record, they sought to manufacture a credible disciplinary identity by highlighting the fact they had taken a higher degree at a prestigious university. These credentials are also often supplemented, especially by females, by a specification of the writer’s research interests, as here:

Example 21:

Hua Luan is currently a Ph.D. student in School of Information, Renmin University of China. Her research interests include data warehousing, data mining, ...

(Electrical Engineering)

Charlotte Cobb-Moore is a doctoral candidate at Queensland University of Technology. Areas of research centre around young children’s social interactions, with particular focus on their enactment of governance and ...

(Applied Linguistics)

There are also differences in the process types employed by writers of different rank, with the proportion of relational forms increasing and

material forms decreasing with rank. Relational processes dominate writers' choices among the academics and students as bios are a genre which has something to say about the author, and what they mainly have to say is "who he or she is". It is interesting, moreover, that senior academics were twice as likely to select "identifying" over "attributive" choices:

Example 22:

Arnold Berleant is Professor of Philosophy (Emeritus) at Long Island University. He has been President of the International Association for Aesthetics, Secretary-Treasurer of the American Society for Aesthetics, and Secretary-General of the IAA, and is the author of six books that elaborate a field theory of aesthetics

(Philosophy)

She is the author or co-author of over 40 technical papers and is the holder of two patents.

(Electrical Engineering)

Identifying options signal that this is an important part of who writers see themselves to be, so uniquely "identifying" the writer. Students and non-professorial faculty members, on the other hand overwhelmingly selected attributive options, signaling class membership rather than a unique identity:

Example 23:

She is an independent scholar.

(Applied Linguistics)

Osamu Sawada is currently a PhD student in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Chicago.

(Applied Linguistics)

Here writers make claims to be seen as one of many rather than as one; so their status is part of a wider group and not an exclusive position or distinctive aspect of their persona.

While status and gender influence the decisions authors make in writing a bio, the decisive factor in these choices appears to be discipline. Table 2 shows that the gender distributions of self-representation are relatively balanced within each discipline compared with some significant differences across fields.

	App Ling		Elec Eng		Philosophy		Total
	F	M	F	M	F	M	
Employment	16.6	16.4	8.7	8.0	15.3	14.4	12.1
Research	14.2	11.9	9.7	8.7	10.4	7.0	10.0
Education	5.6	4.7	9.1	7.3	4.5	3.4	6.2
Publications	5.6	7.8	2.1	2.1	11.1	12.6	5.9
Achievement	1.5	1.4	2.2	3.3	0.8	0.4	1.8
Comm Services	1.0	1.2	1.9	2.6	1.4	1.5	1.8
Personal Profile	0.7	0.5	1.4	1.5	0.6	0.9	1.1
TOTAL	45.3	43.9	35.1	33.4	44.0	40.1	38.9

Table 2. Moves by disciplines and gender (per 1000 words).

Perhaps the most striking difference is the importance engineers give to education, a category which they use to claim expertise in an area of study, thus promoting a scholarly insider-competence in esoteric skills and knowledge:

Example 24:

Hyouk Ryeol Choi received the B.S. degree from Seoul National University, Seoul Korea, in 1984, the M.S. degree from Korea Advanced Technology of Science and Technology (KAIST), in 1986, and the Ph.D. degree from Pohang University of Science and Technology, Pohang, Korea, in 1994.

(Electrical Engineering)

This perhaps reflects a more apprenticeship-based system of research training in the hard sciences where inexperienced academics enjoy greater opportunities to play a fuller role in the research and publishing process as part of a lab-based team even while pursuing their studies. Research is typically less individually conceived and independently conducted here than in the soft knowledge fields and so for many engineers educational training is a significant aspect of their career profile and therefore tends to be given more attention in their bios than writers in applied linguistics and philosophy.

Applied linguists, in contrast, give greater prominence to their research interests with this move comprising about a third of all moves in their bios:

Example 25:

Tanke specializes in contemporary Continental philosophy, with a special interest in the works of Michel Foucault and Jacques Ranciere.

(Applied Linguistics)

Jennifer deWinter's scholarship unpacks traditional and new media convergence within global markets. She is particularly interested in ...  
(Applied Linguistics)

This not only stakes a claim for academic credibility through familiarity with areas of current interest, but also aligns the writer with a particular camp of like-minded individuals. Philosophers, on the other hand, prefer to highlight their publications. In philosophy research is spread out over a broad range of topics with long range solutions, slow publication times and books as preferred modes of dissemination (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Because of this perhaps, publications take on a particular significance which is very different from the hard sciences where publication is frenetic and multiply authored.

Decisions at clausal level also reflect broad disciplinary preferences. Applied linguists, for example, were more likely to represent their work as an act of discovery and cognition through mental processes (*italics added in the examples*):

Example 26:

Her recent work *examines* the intersections of civic rhetoric and digital spaces.  
(Applied Linguistics)

He *investigates* writing skill in classroom and workplace settings ...  
(Applied Linguistics)

This adds a more reflective and studious shade to a bio than other options, representing the writer as a thinking academic rather than as an intellectual worker grinding out a quota of papers and presentations. Engineers, in contrast, and particularly male engineers, used more verbal forms to present themselves as arguers and discussers:

Example 27:

She is now *lecturing* at Sanjesh College of Computing and Statistics, Tehran, Iran.  
(Electrical Engineering)

He *proposes* the use of selectively grown epitaxial layers ...  
(Electrical Engineering)

Like mental processes, verbal choices highlight human agency, bringing the role of the writer, lecturer or presenter to the forefront and so helping to construe the author explicitly in his or her scholarly role.

The greatest disciplinary variations, however, were in the ways writers employed relational processes, and in particular philosophers' use of identifying relational clauses. Explicitly naming oneself as something or other is a significant aspect of identification and philosophers did this twice as frequently as applied linguists and nearly four times more than engineers. This option stresses a unique position for the writer and emphasizes an individual contribution:

Example 28:

Jeanne Openshaw is Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Edinburgh

(Philosophy)

He has been President of the International Association for Aesthetics, Secretary Treasurer of the American Society for Aesthetics, and ...

(Philosophy)

The prevalence of this pattern in Philosophy may be due to the particularly individualistic ethos of the discipline which encourages writers to put their personal stamp on what they write. Research practices which stress interpretations and arguments as the creative insights of the author offer a way of positioning oneself in relation to colleagues which is very different to the self-effacing ideology which sees results as the collective endeavours of a team simply reporting experimental outcomes.

## 4. Conclusions

Every text projects an identity claim, but context plays a decisive role in how such projections are enacted. Any individual's presentation and interpretation of self will vary from one situation to another depending on the purpose of the encounter, the audience, and the individual's relationship with that audience. To summarise the argument: we can see individuals negotiating their identities within the interactional order, mobilising rhetorical and interactional competencies within particular contexts, communities and genres. Identity results from the command of an "idiom", or mastery of a community repertoire, which we appropriate and shape to our own needs and personal preferences to best present ourselves to valued others. We locally construct an identity through relationships between the self and community using the texts and language forms that these

communities make available. In this paper I have focused on three reflective genres to throw the importance of textual context into sharp relief.

I have also deliberately chosen to focus here on some relatively modest and unexplored sites of identity construction. But while they may be seen as among the more peripheral discourses of the academy, they are also ones where writers are able, indeed are virtually required, to display a self-conscious and reflective representation of self. Here the arts of impression management are revealed most clearly as writers have the time to compose a picture of how they would like to be seen while being relatively unencumbered by the constraints of more formal genres of academic writing. In acknowledgements, prize applications and bios, academics reveal their expertise and craft a credible persona in a variety of ways. Seeking to achieve specific promotional goals and drawing on particular views of audience, on an understanding of academic values, and on a knowledge of appropriate rhetorical practices, these writers manage to project a carefully considered and rhetorically machined identity likely to appear credible to others.

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