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On the Use of the First-Person Pronoun 'we' in Final-Year Master Projects of South Algerian EFL Students

Bachir Bouhania

Department of English-University of Adrar-
Algeria

bouhaniabachir@univ-adrar.edu.dz
bouhaniabachir@gmail.com

حول استخدام ضمير المتكلم "نحن" في مشاريع
الماجستير في السنة النهائية لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية
بوصفها لغة أجنبية في الجنوب الجزائري

بشير بوهنية

قسم اللغة الانجليزية- جامعة ادرار- الجزائر

bouhaniabachir@univ-adrar.edu.dz
bouhaniabachir@gmail.com

المستخلص

Abstract

Literature on the use of the first-person pronoun in abstracts and conclusion sections of final-year projects is limited. In case of Algerian Master students, it is too scant. The present paper aims at filling this gap through a study concerned with students' and engagement in their final projects (memoirs). This quantitative study examines the use of "we" and its various types, "our- us-I, my, the researcher" in memoirs chosen at random from the d-space portal of the University of Adrar, southern Algeria. Sixty-five papers, submitted in the fields of linguistics or didactics between 2015 and 2020 and representing nearly half of the whole memoirs' depository at the library's d-space, constituted the corpus of study. The descriptive analytical analysis of the findings has shown that the pronouns "we" (exclusive), "our" (inclusive), and the ambiguous "us" are highly employed in general conclusions (GCs) than they are in abstracts. The results clearly suggested that the students' use of the personal pronouns in GCs rather than in abstracts reflects their awareness to their implications in the paper not only as writers, but also as main researchers, thinkers and interpreters. The conclusions and interpretations have ultimately called for further studies with regard to their pedagogical and academic significance.

تعد الدراسات التي أجريت حول استعمال ضمير المتكلم في مستخلصات واستنتاجات مشاريع المرحلة النهائية في جنوب الجزائر محدودة لا سيما تلك التي تتعلق برسائل الماجستير، ولغرض سد الفجوة البحثية أجرى الباحث دراسة كمية تركز على تفصي استعمال الضمائر والكلمات الآتية: (أنا)، الباحث، (نحن) بأنواعها المختلفة، (خاصتنا)؛ التي تعكس دور الطلاب وانخراطهم في مشاريعهم النهائية (مذكرات). ولتحقيق هذا الهدف تم اختيار عينة عشوائية متمثلة بخمس وستين ورقة (مستخلص أو استنتاج) في مجال اللغويات والتدريس من بوابة d-space التابعة لجامعة أدرار- جنوب الجزائر محددة بين عامي ٢٠١٥- ٢٠٢٠. حيث تمثل هذه العينة النواة الأساسية لمجموعة الدراسة؛ إذ إنها تمثل ما يقرب من نصف مستودع المذكرات بأكمله في مساحة D للمكتبة. وبناء على التحليل الإحصائي بينت الدراسة أن ضمير "نحن" (المحدد و غير المحدد) و ضمير التملك "خاصتنا" بصورة عامة تستعمل بشكل كبير في الاستنتاجات العامة أكثر مما هي عليه في المستخلصات. وتشير النتائج أيضاً إلى أن استعمال الطلاب للضمائر الشخصية في الاستنتاجات العامة بدلاً من المستخلصات يعكس وعيهم بمعناها في الورقة ليس فقط بوصفهم كتاباً ولكن أيضاً بوصفهم باحثين ومفكرين ومترجمين رئيسيين. وقد أوصت الدراسة إلى إجراء مزيد من الدراسات في هذا الصدد نظراً لأهميتها التربوية والأكاديمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أدرار، ضمائر المتكلم، الكتابة الأكاديمية، اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية، مذكرات

Keywords: Academic writing, Adrar, EFL, first-person pronouns, memoirs



1. Introduction

Writing academic papers requires that the writers respect the well-established norms of academic writing such as rhetorical conventions (Hyland, 2004). In their inspiring paper, Hyland and Jiang (2017) explained that, as a genre, the overt use of the first-person pronoun characterizes EFL/ESL authors for whom the use of first-person pronouns does not have the same load and value as in other countries. South Algerian EFL master students confront this problem, too. They have to handle that serious issue in their final-year projects, particularly the one concerning their authorial stance towards the research project.

Starting from the above-mentioned theoretical background, this descriptive research aims at examining Adrar university EFL Master students' position and engagement through the use of interpersonal (Hyland and Tse, 2004) and metadiscourse markers (Hyland, 1999) like "we=I" and equivalents in memoirs (final-year projects). In particular, the study investigated the use of the personal pronouns to find out which one superseded the other in the abstracts and general conclusions (GCs) submitted in linguistics and didactics. Additionally, inclusive "our", exclusive "we", and ambiguous "us" were examined along the "other" possibilities: the *researcher*, possessive pronoun "my", and object pronoun "me".

Accordingly, the study posits a few research questions (RQs) that are set to investigate the usage of "we=I" in abstracts and GC sections of Algerian EFL Master2 memoirs. These questions are as follows:

- RQ1: What is the amount of use "we=I" in students' abstracts and GCs?
- RQ2: What is the frequency of the use of "we" types in both sections?
- RQ3: Which one supersedes the other?
- RQ4: What are the other alternative usages to "we=I"?

The present paper aims accordingly to investigate the use of the plural personal pronoun "we" and its equivalents "our" and "us" by

Master2 EFL students at the University of Adrar in the south of Algeria. The objectives of the study are:

- a) measuring the amount and frequency of the use of "we=I" in abstracts and GCs of memoirs,
- b) gaining familiarity with the novice author's stance and involvement in research, and
- c) achieving new insights into this academic genre.

The rationale for investigating the variable use of "we" in abstracts and GCs is to shed light on this phenomenon not as a problem, but as a methodological and ethical issue regularly and persistently confronted by authors and co-authors. Implications and significance of the study encompass both research and pedagogy.

In terms of research, the findings call attention to the existence of variable move structures in abstracts and general conclusions (Wang, Tseng, & Johanson, 2021) that enable novice writers claim their authorship of the discoveries in an objective and acceptable manner. Moreover, the conclusion of this research and others might inspire decision-makers at the Ministry of higher education to change the standards of academic writing in Algeria.

On the pedagogical level, particularly in research methodology, findings encourage students to declare their personal involvement in the writing process of their papers. Variable writing styles and rhetorical strategies such as plural personal pronoun "we=I" are devices that allow the young authors request self-representation (Hyland, 2001b) in their products.

2. Theoretical Background

The present section introduces research on the use of the first-person pronoun "we" as a stylistic device to novice writers' self-mention and personal involvement in the study and its findings. The literature illustrates the idea that, to young writers like students, the use of "we=I" is a way to set their persona (Martínez, 2005) and to express themselves openly all throughout the paper, most particularly in abstracts and GCs.



2.1 Academic Stance

During methodology class, EFL students learn that the use of the first-person pronoun “I” must be avoided. It has also been circumvented in memoirs because it is academically too exclusive, too distractive, and more importantly too informal (Krapivkina, 2015). However, the use of the first-person plural pronoun “we” is well received, since it shows students’ self-effacement, gratitude to the supervisors and participants, and solidarity and engagement with readers and the scientific community.

The pronoun “we” stands for a total objectivity on the part of the young writers; it mirrors their use of formal style, mastery of academic writing, and “avoidance of the personal voice” (Coffin et al., 2003). Yet, some students find themselves in a dilemma between the subjective personal tenor and the objective academic attitude towards the subject of their research. Highlighting the writer’s attitude becomes problematical to those EFL Master students who want to emphasize their involvement, personality, and participation through the use of the pronoun “I” rather than the inclusive “we”.

In other words, and contrarily to Coffin et al.’s (2003) statements, some students feel the need to set their independent voice. Hyland and Jiang (2017) confirmed that when they say: “Overall, however, the convention of avoiding the first person to convey an impersonal stance, once a hallowed principle for style guide writers and science authors, now seems to be less rigidly adhered to...” (p.12)

The literature on the use of “non-I” writing style shows that academia is not yet settled on the question of personal and impersonal authorial posture. In other words, the writer’s personal attitudes and assessments (Hyland & Jiang, 2018; Hyland & Zou, 2021; Wang, Tseng & Johanson, 2021) are still debatable. Even the APA Style book (2020) does not have a final pronouncement concerning the use of the personal pronoun; rather it is full of contradictory views.

2.2 First-Person Pronouns in Memoirs

On the whole, the first-person pronoun ‘I’ is infrequent in academic papers, but more frequent in philosophical ones (Hyland, 2001a). Scientific papers, such as those of computer sciences, witnessed a widespread use of “we” for both authors and co-authors. However, electrical and electronic engineers frequently use “I” to establish who did what and how? (Swales & Feak, 2012).

The personal pronouns “I” and “we” can also be used interchangeably to identify the researcher’s achievement and personal contribution to knowledge, which is the case for sociology papers (Harwood, 2005a). Depending on the role it plays, the personal pronoun may refer to writers and readers (Hyland, 2001b; Harwood, 2005b), or to the author’s/authors’ perspective.

The first personal plural pronoun “we” has a pragmatic interpersonal function that of “expressing speaker or writer stance” (Ismail, 2012, p.1265). It is classified by Hyland and Tse (2004) as an *interpersonal* discourse marker used by authors to create a relationship with readers through shortening the distance between them. It is also frequently used to “establish and maintain rapport” (Ismail, 2012, p.1264) with readers. This is evident in the amount of “we” uses in GCs where the writers invite their readers to share with them their findings and conclusions.

The objective of the current research is to investigate the use of the personal pronoun “we” in abstracts and GC sections of EFL Master memoirs submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master degree in Linguistics and Didactics. Specifically, this research focuses on the interchangeable use of “we”, and its alternative equivalents “our” and “us”, by south Algerian EFL novice writers to set their authorial standpoint and self-promotional tenor in both abstracts and GC sections.

2.3 Abstracts in Academic Writing

Academic abstracts follow the IMRaD (Introduction (purpose), Methodology, Results and Discussion) model to organize the theoretical



background, research instruments, findings, and the conclusions in a quasi-linear manner (Bouhania, 2018). The structure is also known as I, P, M, R, and D which stands for Introduction, Purpose, Method, Results, and Discussion (Can, Karaback Qin, 2016, p. 11).

Salager-Meyer (1990) asserted that there is a tight link between the organization of the abstract and the move categories, i.e., introduction-methods-results-conclusion in a typically linear order. Day (1994) confirmed the ideas of Salager-Mayer when he said: "The abstract should (1) state the principal objectives and scope of the investigation, (2) describe the methods employed, (3) summarize the results, and (4) state the principal conclusions." (p. 30). The latter four structural moves, as Can et al. (2016) maintained, contribute to have good abstracts; yet, their linearity is not always respected, nor it is promoted by teaching materials.

Many deviations occur in abstract sections for one reason or another. The writer's avoidance of unfolding and discussing the results is one cause. Writers may not conform to the norms of IMRaD, follow the introduction-methodology-discussion trend, and neglect the results (Bouhania, 2018). Some others simply divert from the norm to avoid any iterations and deviance of the order of moves (Can et al., 2016)

Abstracts must be brief and succinct; they must inform about the source of inspiration of the author, a gap in the literature or a sheer observation of naturally occurring phenomena. The methodology employed is also an important part of the abstract section, for it outlines the procedure, methodology, and research instruments employed by the researcher. The results must report and/or summarize the findings. Finally, the discussion is the section of the abstract where the author, relying on the findings, argues with other researchers, indicates possible future studies, discusses the research limitations, and most importantly underscores the paper's contribution to knowledge (Swales & Feak, 2012).

The importance of the abstract depends on the impression it leaves on the readers, since it is the first lines of the whole dissertation, paper and/or thesis that peer reviewers and examiners inspect. The abstract must attract the attention of the person who reads through its clarity and conciseness. In a few words, abstracts need to stimulate readers' saliva, and cause a positive first impression on them. Otherwise, reviewers and examiners judge the paper as not worth reading just because of the negative effect of the abstract (Hyland, 2009; Ren & Li, 2011).

Novice writers are well aware of the impact of abstracts on readers. Hence, they need to master the use of rhetorical features, stance and metadiscourse markers, such as the first personal pronouns. The latter, one might say, help academic writers "compose effective abstracts" (Can et al., 2016).

Adrar university master students respect the IMRaD model while writing the abstract section of their memoirs. Yet, they render their authorial identity through the personal pronoun "we" which, in this case, is exclusive and refers to the student alone. The next instance exemplifies this idea: "Before we tackle the field work...we introduced...where we described...and then we discussed...we also referred to ...In addition to that, we focus on..." (Student 1, 2015).

There are abstracts where students use exclusive "we" next to inclusive "our" and ambiguous "us" to refer to their supervisors, or to their peers in cases of binomial memoirs. The next example illustrates this case:

We are going to give a clear picture about the use of these loans in various contexts... Since our issue is with grown-up people, we shall observe them when speaking. Then, we try to interview them. We will ask our informants to pronounce ... Most of our respondents are non-educated this pushes us to ask them in Arabic and translating the results into English...we are going to bring factors which distinguish the grown-up people and their use of French...we



will discuss the grown-up people opinions about French language use.” (Student 2, 2019)

Besides, it has also been mentioned that “we intend to investigate student’s motives and knowledge about slang. We included a questionnaire for extracting results, which is a highly effective tool for constructing a descriptive analysis” (Student 3, 2019).

2.4 General Conclusions in Academic Papers

GCs reflect student’s “authoritative professional persona” (Hyland & Jiang, 2017) and authorial posture through their use of the personal pronoun “we=I” and its three types. This is illustrated by the next example:

It is also an attempt to clarify the reasons for which this specific segment of our society is directed towards such a use. The fact that this phenomenon is spreading in our community in the recent years compels us to investigate it from a sociolinguistic point of view. Furthermore, the lack of research in the field made us interested in tackling this phenomenon. In our hypothesis, we assumed that ...to answer our research questions, we opted for three main research instruments: First, we conducted structured interviews with the participants. Then we distributed words lists of... (Students 5&6, 2019)

In GCs, students assumed their engagement and commitment to their findings. Conclusions, as Hyland (2004) maintained, are “essentially persuasive” (p.84); hence, novice writers who want to take credence for their work and ascertain their assurance vis-à-vis the study methods, results and findings, use GCs for self-mention and self-promotion.

3. The Analytical Part

3.1 Methodology

To study Master2 EFL students’ use of the plural personal pronoun “we” in abstracts and GC sections, this research started with collecting the corpus of study, then choosing the appropriate methods of data analysis, and finally reporting, interpreting and discussing the results.

3.2 Corpus and Data Collection

Various studies dealt with the use of the personal pronoun “we” in terms of collocation, grammatical category, and statistical significance (Hyland & Jiang, 2016). For example, Kuo (1999) reported the frequent use of “we” in scientific journal articles to emphasize not only the authors’ contribution, but also their solidarity with their readership, or in Halliday’s words (1973, as cited in Hussein, Khalil, & Abbas, 2018, p.1481) and (2005) ‘interpersonal’ function and reader-in-text category, respectively. Personal pronouns help writers to “construct academic credibility” (Hyland, 2001a), assert their thoughts and organize their discourse. They also create an “impression of closeness and solidarity between reader and writer” (Mauranen, 1992) and allow to maintain a successful interaction with readers (Hyland, 1999).

Studies concerned with the use of “we = I” in a variety of disciplines of academia, divide the personal pronoun into exclusive, inclusive and ambiguous “we” (Harwood, 2005b, Hyland & Jiang, 2018). Nevertheless, how Adrar university students make use of “we” types is rather imprecise. To answer this question, a corpus was selected at random from the d-space portal of the University of Adrar. That electronic depository consisted of dissertations, memoirs and theses submitted at the level of the university’s library by master and doctoral students. In this study, only master memoirs were picked up to collect data quantitatively. Randomness consisted of selecting all the memoirs reported on the first page of each promotion at the level of the d-space portal. As such, the chance of being selected was given to any final-year project found on the page. It is important to note that the memoirs are neither arranged in an alphabetical order, nor in a thematic sequence, but following the submission dates of the projects.

Starting from 2015 onward, master students must submit memoirs in paper and in electronic (CD) formats. It is in the summer of 2017 that the Algerian Ministry of Higher



Education (MESRS) imposed that all abstracts of final projects be written in three languages (Arabic, English, and French). By the same decree, the ministry allowed students to write binomial memoirs. Table 1 details the corpus, the types of memoirs (single or binomial) throughout the academic years 2015-2020:

Table 1

Details of the EFL Memoirs Submitted from 2015 to 2020 and Their Authors

Years/types	Single memoirs	Binomial memoirs	males	females
2015	12	00	03	09
2016	13	00	05	08
2017	06	04	01	13
2018	09	01	01	09
2019	06	04	03	11
2020	06	04	02	12
Total	52	13	15	62
Percentages	80	20	19.48	80.51

Table 1 reports that the majority of memoirs (n=80%) submitted in linguistics and didactics between 2015 and 2020 were written by single authors. The remaining 20% of the whole selects memoirs, which are binomial in nature, shows that the tendency of working in pair is not prevalent among the young master students. Moreover, Table 1 informs that there are more female authors (n=62 or 80.51%) than males (n=15 or 19.48%).

A detailed inquiry into the type of final-year projects and their authors has revealed that the greater part of binomial dissertations was composed of females (n=10 or 20 students) and only one had a boy and a girl (n=1 or 2 students). Furthermore, the number of pair-work research papers increased each year. For instance, in 2017, three memoirs were binomial while only one was registered in 2018. In 2019, another three memoirs were submitted, and the next year, (2020), four others were accepted by the administration. In a few words, the girls were preeminent in binomial projects (n=95.45%), whereas the boys were quite absent from these papers. The breakdown of the pair-work dissertations is reported in Table 2:

Table 2

Binomial Memoirs and Their Authors

	Memoirs	Females	Males
2017	03	06	00
2018	01	01	01
2019	03	06	00
2020	03	08	00
total	10	21	01
percentages	----	95.45	04.54

Table 3

Details of the EFL Corpus of Memoirs (2015-2020)

years	Memoirs		Abstracts	
	Total	sampled	yes	no abs
2015	12	12	6	6
2016	32	13	11	2
2017	28	10	7	3
2018	24	10	10	0
2019	17	10	10	0
2020	36	10	10	0
Total	149	65	54	11
%	100	43.62	83.07	16.92

Table 3, on the other hand, displays that the corpus consists of nearly half of the overall master memoirs depository, i.e., 43.62%, and that the abstracts are noticeably and obligatorily present in all final-year projects starting from 2018 onwards. Moreover, the table informs that among the twelve projects submitted in 2015, abstract sections were missing from six (i.e., 50%) of the whole papers. This confirms that the abstracts were not obligatory but optional. Hence, the statistical analysis of this research considers data collected from memoirs containing both abstract and GC sections, i.e., 83.07% of the whole corpus of final projects. The time span chosen (2015-2020) enables spotting any changes in the use of “we” and its equivalents in abstracts and GCs.

3.3 Limitations

This research paper is set to answer a pedagogical and academic quest, namely the use of the personal pronoun “we=I” and its equivalents to give students posture and engagement in their memoirs. However, it remains a short-scale study and not an action-research. Moreover, the limitation of sampling



(65 memoirs out of 149) does not allow for the exhaustiveness of the results. Furthermore, the missing abstract sections of the memoirs submitted in 2015, 2016, and 2017 are a handicap at the statistical and interpretive levels. Such a handicap skews the findings, hinders the interpretation of data, and distorts the conclusions.

Although the study involved memoirs submitted in the fields of linguistics and didactics, it would be interesting to investigate the use of “we” and its alternative forms “us” and “our” in other disciplines where memoirs are written and submitted in English, for example in science and technology, computer sciences, etc. This will allow to comprehend how students from different grounds perceive, consciously or unconsciously, their agency in research. It is also important to note that this research and its findings are about memoirs submitted at the University of Adrar, department of English, and that the results may be quite different if it is carried out in other fields, disciplines, and universities.

3.4 Methods

The method of investigation consisted of downloading memoirs from the d-space portal of

the University of Adrar and compiling a corpus of study. The data were gathered from the abstracts and GC sections of sixty-five (n=65) final-year projects submitted during the academic year 2015 through 2020 in the disciplines of linguistics or didactics. Relevant to descriptive statistics, the technique consisted of counting the number of times “we” and its equivalent forms; “us”, “our” and “other”, occurred in the abstracts and GC sections. Then, the quantity of occurrence of each form was calculated as a score. At a later stage, a comparison of the scores of both sections took place; consequently, patterns emerged and interpretations became possible.

3.5 Data Analysis

Table 4 reports the results obtained from the different abstracts and GCs of memoirs. One can notice that in abstracts:

- the exclusive personal pronoun “we” scores high (s= 9.16); its mean value is 0.83.
- It is followed by the inclusive “our” (s=3.5), whose mean is 0.32.
- Scores of ambiguous “us” and “other” (I, my, and the researcher) are low, i.e., 0.83 and their mean values are 0.08, respectively.

Table 4
Scores for the Use of “we” and its Alternatives in Abstracts and General Conclusions

Years	Abstracts				General conclusions			
	we	our	us	other	we	our	us	other
2015	0.83	0.25	0	0	3.16	0.91	0	0
2016	1.15	0.3	0	0	2.46	0.76	0	0.23
2017	0.8	0.1	0.1	0.2	2.3	0.3	0	0.4
2018	0.4	0.6	0.2	0	1.6	0.8	0.2	0.3
2019	1.3	0.3	0.2	0	1.5	1	0.5	0.2
2020	0.5	0.4	0	0.3	4.2	2.2	1	0.5
Total	9.16	3.5	0.83	0.83	27.66	10.66	2.83	2.83
mean	0.83	0.32	0.08	0.08	2.53	0.9	0.28	0.27

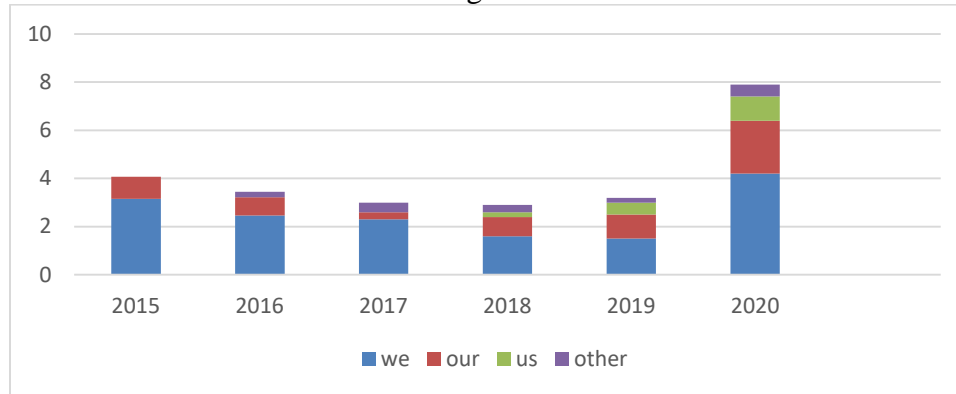
Figure 1 illustrates that in GCs:

- the exclusive “we” scores high (s=27.66) compared to “our” and “us”; its mean value is 2.53
- the inclusive “our” is the second most frequently used pronoun in GCs (s=10.66; mean=0.9)

- Ambiguous “us” and “other” (I, my, the researcher) are the least used forms (s=2.83; mean=0.27).



Figure1



Average Use of 'we' in General Conclusions of Memoirs

3.6 Comparing Results and Values

Table 5 compares the main values for the use of personal plural pronoun “we” and its equivalents “us” and “our” in abstracts and GC sections of EFL final-year projects. It informs that:

- the exclusive “we” is significantly used in GCs; averages confirm this noticeable increase in the GC sections as compared to the abstracts sections (m=2.53 vs. 0.83).
- although “our” scores second in terms of the frequency of use in both sections of memoirs, in GCs, it augments noticeably (m=0.9 vs. 0.32 in abstracts),
- ambiguous “us” and “other” (I, my, the researcher) are the least used forms equivalent to the personal pronoun “we” in both sections. Yet, they are well present in the final sections of the memoirs than in its beginnings (m=0.28 & 0.27 vs. 0.08).

Table 5

Comparison of Mean Values for the Use of “we” and its Equivalents

MEAN VALUES	WE	OUR	US	OTHER
ABSTRACTS	0.83	0.32	0.08	0.08
GCS	2.53	0.9	0.28	0.27

3.7 Evolution through Time

Table 6 illustrates that the use of pronoun “we” and its alternative forms in abstracts and GC sections evolved through time. As for abstracts, there is a variation in the scores. For instance, the highest score of exclusive “we” and the ambiguous “us” were recorded in 2019 while the inclusive “our” scored high in 2018 and the “other” (I, my, the researcher) were mainly used in 2020. In the GC sections, we can notice that all the forms of “we”, exclusive, inclusive and ambiguous, scored highly in 2020. The results are illustrated in Figure 2:

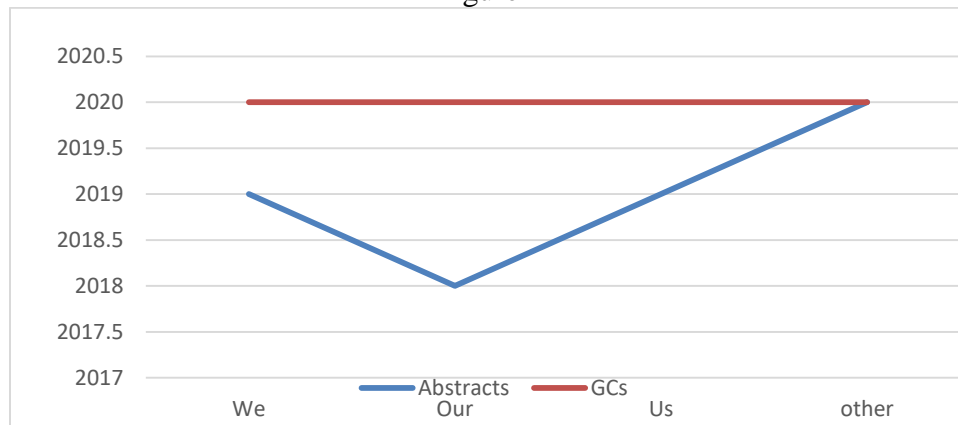
Table 6

Highest Scores of Uses of “we” and its Equivalents Throughout the Years

Pronouns/sections	Abstracts	GCs
We	2019	2020
Our	2018	2020
Us	2019	2020
other	2020	2020



Figure 2



The Highest Scores of "we" and its Equivalents Through the Years

3.8 Interpretation of Findings

The abstracts are the last part written by authors, whether novice or professional. After a hard work, students show their personal contribution not only in GCs, but also in abstracts. As such, they highlight their individual involvement to the whole work right from the outset. The comparison of the results for the use of the personal pronoun "we" and its equivalents in master memoirs reveals that:

- The overt use of exclusive "we" in both abstracts and GC sections is an illustration of students' stance as writers and researchers in their memoirs. The high frequency of the use of "we" in both sections demonstrates students' personal engagement in their research; this is well evidenced in GCs where the frequency of the use of "we" is at its top.
- Inclusive "our" in GCs can be interpreted as a mark of gratitude on the part of the students towards their supervisors' efforts in the achievement and success of the memoir. In the final part of their projects, students acknowledge that their work necessitated the help of a guide to show them the right path; hence, they show their appreciation and thankfulness to the supervisors by using the inclusive personal pronoun "our".
- Ambiguous "us" employed more significantly in GC sections than in abstracts shows that master students do not involve their supervisors at the onset of the memoir, but at

its end. This illustrates the idea that novice authors need the supervisors' back up to sustain their key findings and conclusions both theoretically and practically. The latter result contradicts former research findings, such Wang et al. (2021) who reported that ambiguous "we" was not used *at all* in the abstract sections they studied.

- The discreet use of other "we=I" equivalent forms inform about the future prospects of students' stance whereby their engagement will be more academic (for example, through 'the researcher') and more personal (for instance through the use of 'I' and 'my'). This change in attitude does also report that. Because of the intricacies of the writing and research processes, some students self-promote themselves, and give themselves credit for what they have done and achieved.
- The general tendency is that, after months of work and research, students are well involved in their GCs than they are in abstracts. Though abstracts are written last, they reveal their uncertainty and lack of assurance with respect to their personal involvement in the work.

From another angle, progress in the use of "we" and its equivalent forms through the years exemplifies changes in academic writing at the level of Adrar university EFL classes. Master students do, now more than ever, feel free to express their authorship and take credence for their hard work and relentless efforts. Yet, the



results of this research have shown that the students' use of the personal pronoun "we" along all the other forms, in both abstracts and GCs in the last years (2018-2019-2020), substantiate the fact that the novice writers have not settled on one self-promotion metadiscourse marker (Hyland, 1999), rhetorical device (Harwood, 2005a) and interpersonal marker (Hyland & Tse, 2004) to set their self-mention. They are still torn between taking credit alone (exclusive "we"), or with their supervisors (inclusive "our"), or with their readership (ambiguous "us"). These last questions ask for further studies and investigations to give a broader scope about this academic issue.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper has dealt with students' authorial stance and engagement in abstracts and general conclusion sections of master memoirs submitted in the fields of linguistics and didactics. It explored statistically the use of the personal pronoun "we" and its equivalent forms "our" and "us" and other possible ways, such as "the researcher, I, and my".

The study reports that the pronoun "we" is mostly used in abstracts and general conclusions, but in its exclusive form. When used in an inclusive manner, "our" is employed and scores second in GCs and abstracts as well. As main authors, both students and supervisors can profit from the interpretations of the results so as to encourage students' "authorial stance for self-promotion or self-mention" (Wang et al., 2021, p.17) and to set their independent voice.

The results should make methodology teachers aware of the subtleties of using personal pronouns to reflect stance and individual (or group) involvement in memoirs. The difference in the frequency of using "we", "our", and "us" in abstracts and GCs should inform teachers and supervisors that students are conscious of the intricacies of self-mentioning, self-promoting, and the shortening distance between them and their readers.

This research paper is significant to methodology teachers, memoir supervisors, and

present and future master students. It should enable learners "to position themselves appropriately in relation to their work following the conventions of the academic community." (Krapivkina, 2015, p. 1625) The significance of the results obtained out of the data lies in their pedagogical and academic value to teachers, supervisors, and students.

The results, the analysis and interpretation can be summarized as follows:

1. The general tendency is that students favor the personal pronoun "we" to set their authorial identity in abstracts and GCs.
2. The use of "we= I" is not ostensible, but is superseded by the use of the exclusive "we", for students prefer self-promotion as authors.
3. To avoid the overuse of the personal pronoun (exclusive) "we", some students make use of impersonal pronouns, such as "the researcher, this paper, the study, etc." to give their research a total objectivity in matter of authorship.
4. The use of the personal pronoun "we" and its equivalent forms increased noticeably in 2020, particularly in GCs. This proves that EFL master students at the university of Adrar were aware of the importance of assuming their authorship in their memoirs. It is also an indication to the reality that research methodology teachers and supervisors adhered, or at least started to adhere to the concept of students' personal stance (Hyland & Jiang, 2017).

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