

Exploring Authorial Identity in terms of Voice Intensity and Subject-Positioning in the Argumentative Writings of Male and Female Iranian Advanced EFL Learners

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Abstract: Academic writing is not just about presenting a set of ideas, but through the act of writing, the authors position themselves as individuals having particular identities which mostly reflect the dominant sociocultural values and practices of the discourse communities in which they are living and performing. The present study, using a mixed method approach, attempted to explore the evidences of voice and subject positioning, as reflections of authorial identity, in the argumentative writings of 41 advanced Iranian EFL learners. At first, the relationship between voice intensity and overall writing quality of the participants was assessed and the results indicated a positive relationship between the constructs. The multiple regression analysis conducted also revealed that assertiveness, as one of the main subcomponents of voice in writing, had the highest level of contribution in accounting for the writing competence of the learners. Afterwards, some representative instances of subject-positioning (i.e., ideational, interpersonal and textual) in the written texts were identified and discussed based on the ideological context of the study since it is believed that authorial identity and voice can vividly reflect the overall ideology of the specific discourse community in which they are constructed. Finally, it was suggested that raising the awareness of learners and even instructing them about the significance of authorial identity, voice and subject-positioning in writing can assist them in constructing more authentic texts in terms of idea presentation, consideration of readers and specific textual and linguistic features used.

Keywords: Argumentative Writing, Authorial Identity, Voice Intensity, Subject Positioning.

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Introduction

The earliest approaches to writing were mostly mechanic-based and were focused on the product of writing rather than the processes that writers go through. In addition, the focus was on imitating a model in terms of structure and development of the ideas; however, the newest approaches give more role to the writers' individuality and expression of their unique thoughts and ideas (Ivanič, 2004; Peterson, 2012). Through the act of writing, writers may position themselves as individuals having particular identities which mostly reflect the dominant sociocultural values and practices of the discourse communities in which they are living and performing (Hyland, 2010). In the same regard, research evidence has pointed out that "academic prose is not completely impersonal, but that writers gain credibility by projecting an identity invested with individual authority, displaying confidence in their evaluations and commitment to their ideas" (Hyland, 2002, p. 1091).

Ivanič (1998) believes that there is a strong connection between writing and a writer's identity: "writing is an act of identity in which people align themselves with socio-culturally shaped subject possibilities for selfhood, playing their part in reproducing or challenging dominant practices and discourses and the values, beliefs and interests which they embody" (p. 32). As was stated, the writers' identity is mostly constructed through their engagement in social interactions and the discursive practices they deal with in such contexts. In fact, the content of writing and how writers perform are somehow constrained and determined by the larger disciplinary community in which they interact and the writers shape their identities by performing an act of accommodation (see e.g., Englert, Mariage & Dunsmore, 2006; Prior, 1995). Despite being socially constructed, writer identity is open to constant change and development and the writers can transform their identities in response to the dynamics of both discursive practices and social interactions (e.g., Ivanič, 1998; Liming, 2012). In fact, in such ways, writers will be able to assert their distinctive "voices" based on the awareness of the context and the audience of a specific discursal act. Encouraging students to write with a strong voice which can reflect their individual identities is also an important feature of expressivist discourse of writing (Ivanič, 2004).

The notion of voice as the manifestation of authorial identity is highly conceptualized and discussed in the academic settings especially with regard to the academic writing (see e.g., Stock & Eik-Nes, 2016). Some researchers working in the field of L1 and L2 composition studies have argued that voice in the written texts expresses the essential individuality and unique socially-constructed identity of the writer and is an important quality

of good writing (Hyland, 2002; Ivanič, 1998; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Stock & Eik-Nes, 2016; Tardy, 2012). In the same vein, since writing is considered as a communicative act, writers should consider their purpose, audience and the community in which they interact. They are also expected to use appropriate linguistic and discoursal elements in presenting their values, intentions and, hence, their complex identities. Drawing on these conceptualizations, the present study attempted to explore the presence of authorial identity and intensity of voice in the argumentative writings of a group of advanced Iranian EFL learners. In addition, an attempt was made to explore how these writers position themselves with regard to the ideas they present in the texts they produce and how they structure their relationships with their readers and the rhetorical situation in which they are writing.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background

The concept of voice, as a reflection of authorial identity in writing, was previously seen as being tied to the ideology of individualism and this individualistic voice was mostly characterized by its clarity, overtness, expressiveness and assertiveness (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). However, this individualistic notion of voice is challenged and some alternative conceptualizations are provided by scholars working based on different theoretical concepts and different research interests. In the same regard, Matsuda (2001) formally defines voice as “the amalgamative effect of the use of discursive and non-discursive features that language users choose, deliberately or otherwise, from socially available, yet ever-changing repertoires” (p. 40). In fact, those who take a social-constructivist approach view voice as essentially the writer identity that is co-constructed by the writer and the readers and other social and cultural factors (e.g., Hyland, 2010, 2011; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Matsuda, 2001; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Stock & Eik-Nes, 2016). In such socially oriented perspectives, writers are considered to have multiple voices to fit different rhetorical situations and they must engage with their readers in an interaction with the written text which serve as the medium (Yoon, 2017).

Despite these conceptualizations, Tardy (2012) considers voice as “a somewhat controversial concept in academic writing” that contributes to “scholarly disputes over the role it should play in the academic writing classroom” (p. 34). In second language (L2) writing instruction, voice has received peripheral attention and has not been considered as an

important aspect in teaching writing due to reasons such as L2 learners' greater need to develop syntactic or lexical skills than voice-related skills and conceptualization of this notion as being based on an individualistic identity, which values emphatic, revelatory writing requiring assertiveness and candor, that might not be appropriate for learners with collectively-oriented cultural backgrounds (Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Matsuda, 2001) who mostly engage in communicative acts which value "the subtle, interpretive, interdependent, non-assertive, and even non-verbal [features]" (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999, p. 48). However, Zhao, and Llosa (2008) maintain that since writing has a "critical role in the assessment of students' academic achievement, the presence of an appropriate authorial voice also seems to be important in the evaluation of the quality of students' writing" (p. 154). Recently, the relevance of concept of voice to writing instruction has stimulated rich conversations among scholars and current scholarly publications in the fields of composition studies and L2 writing indicate a revived interest in voice-related issues in students' writing (e.g., Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Tardy, 2012; Zhao & Llosa, 2008; Zhao, 2012, 2017, 2018).

Related Research on Authorial Voice in Writing

Many scholars in the field of L2 writing have directed their attention towards the issue of voice in the students' writing and have experimentally investigated the presence and features of authorial identity in their texts (to name a few see e.g., Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Hirvela & Bechler, 2001; Hyland, 2008; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Zhao, 2012). In one of these studies, Hirvela and Belcher (2001) used three case studies to investigate the role of identity in instructional practices and to understand the voice-related issues that the multilingual writers may face in L2 contexts, which according to the authors' view, the entrance to such an academic writing community requires a western individualistic voice different from what they have acquired in their L1 writing. The authors attributed such difficulty to the identity conflicts that the authors may face and suggested that instead of focusing on voice as a pedagogical tool, it is better to see voice as a window to better understand the L2 writers and to have an informed L2 writing pedagogy.

Ivanič and Camps (2001) believed that all writing contains voice and makes its users have particular worldviews to present to readers. The writers can use a variety of lexical, syntactic and organizational resources to convey their ideas and represent a variety of voice

types. The researchers presented three types of subject positioning mapping onto the three macrofunctions of language (ideational, interpersonal, and textual). In order to illustrate the application of this model, they used the writings of six graduate students in British universities. They recommended that “an L2 writing pedagogy that raises critical awareness about voice can help learners maintain control over the personal and cultural identity they are projecting in their writing” (Ivanič & Camps, 2001, p. 3).

Moreover, Matsuda (2001) explored the notion of voice and its implications for L2 writing research and instruction. In order to show that voice is not limited to the western cultural ideology of individualism and can be found in collectivist cultures, he presented evidence of voice in the discursive practices of a group of Japanese learners in an electronic writing context. He focused on how these learners can construct voice by using some discursal features and suggested that the difficulties learners encounter in constructing their voice cannot be attributed to their cultural orientation. In fact, Matsuda believed that such difficulty was due to different ways of constructing voices in Japanese and English discourses and the students’ unfamiliarity with effective strategies to construct voice in English.

Furthermore, Zhao and Llosa (2008) investigated the nature and characteristics of authorial voice in writing instruction and assessment. More specifically, they examined the role of voice in high stake L1 academic writing assessment by investigating 42 anchor papers collected from the administration of a standard test. The results indicated that there was a significant association between overall writing quality and the overall voice intensity and its four variables of assertiveness, self-identification, central point reiteration and autonomy of thought. Accordingly, the authors suggested that writing instructors and program designers must be informed of the importance of voice and find effective ways to assist the learners in developing an appropriate voice and empower them to function properly in both educational and social contexts. However, this finding is in contrast to Stapleton’s (2002) and Helms-Park and Stapleton’s (2003) idea that the cases for voice in L2 pedagogy are overstated and may mislead the students and teachers that the expression of voice or presence of authorial identity is a far greater issue than presenting appropriate ideas and argumentation. In fact, they asserted that “there may not be a connection between the linguistic and rhetorical devices commonly associated with individualized voice (e.g., first person singular or intensifiers) and the quality of writing, at least with same genres and at same level of writing proficiency” (Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003, p. 245).

In another study, Jwa (2012) explored the projection and negotiation of voice in the online discourse and in relation to writing skill by analyzing the writings of two participants in an online culture-based writing website (i.e., *Fanfiction*). The researcher identified three dominant design features (intertextuality, dialogic interaction and electronic text) actualized in ideational, interpersonal and textual positionings that Ivanič and Camps (2001) proposed as being evident when authors construct a voice. The results of the study indicated that L2 writers in the study “created voices in multiple positions made available by re-purposing a pop-culture storyline or characters, communication with audiences, and digital resources” (Jwa, 2012, p. 323). In fact, the L2 writers in the constructed discourse program became aware of the fact that their role is in the constant stage of change from writer to reader, discussor, etc. and by the metacognitive power and awareness that they have acquired they can create a discourse-conscious text capable of representing their unique identities.

Canagarajah (2015), believing that classroom practice and research on voice are lagging behind theoretical conceptualization of voice, reported the trajectory of a Japanese student in negotiating the classroom affordances provided by a dialogical pedagogy to construct her desired voice. More specifically, after commenting on the components amalgamated in voice and nature of negotiations that characterize voice, the researcher intended to understand “how interlocutors (i.e., teachers, peers) mitigate their appropriation of writers’ voices in the achievement of “effect”” (p. 2). Canagarajah believed that for this to happen, teachers must pay attention to students’ investments, desires and histories that motivate them to write differently, try to facilitate understanding and engagement by setting up the course as open to negotiations, empower students to find textual representation for voice in the dominant discourses of the intended genre, teach them negotiation strategies that enable them to uptake the feedback of interlocutors, use diverse ecological resources and construct meanings from course materials and disciplinary discourses to develop a more informed, layered, and hybrid voice and present and transfer voice and negotiation strategies to other contexts of writing in response to the exigencies of local ecologies and discourses.

Arguing that few empirical studies exist that provide solid evidence to either support or refute the proposition that voice is an important concept to teach in L2 writing classrooms, Zhao (2017) empirically investigated the relationship between voice salience, as captured by an analytic rubric, and official TOEFL iBT argumentative essay scores in 200 timed L2 essays. Results showed that voice was a significant predictor of TOEFL essay scores, explaining about 25% of the score variances. In addition, the results of multiple regression

analysis indicated that ideational dimension was a significant predictor of text quality, which led the researcher to emphasize the importance of fully developed ideas with a strong commitment in constructing a strong authorial voice and a high-quality essay. Consequently, Zhao argued for the need to view voice as a construct that goes beyond the quantity of textual voice elements and to provide students with opportunities to learn idea development skills for strong voice construction.

In another study, Yoon (2017) intended to examine how the quantity and diversity of textual voice elements (i.e., hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, reader pronouns, and directives) contribute to holistic voice strength and essay quality by analyzing 219 argumentative essays written by L1 Greek-speaking EFL students. The results suggested weak correlations between textual voice features and essay quality; however, the research presented some insights about how textual voice features play a role in voice construction uniquely and/or in combination. As for implications of study, Yoon suggested that second language learners after reaching a high level of writing proficiency and developing linguistic complexity, sophistication, and accuracy need to be instructed to use a variety of textual voice elements with a focus on their different functions in order to deliver their ideas convincingly with a clear awareness of the audience.

In a more recent attempt, Zhao (2018) empirically examined the extent to which key writer background variables, such as age, gender, cultural background, and level of exposure to the target language and culture, may influence L2 writers' voice construction. The researcher analyzed 200 argumentative essays from L2 writers of various backgrounds in terms of overall voice salience and use of individual voice elements. The results of correlation and multiple regression analyses revealed that these variables had very limited, if any, influence on L2 writers' textual voice construction. In addition, among the linguistic features investigated only boosters and hedges indicated differences across writers from different L1 and cultural background. The researcher finally demands a more cautious interpretation of the role of culture in voice development and L2 writing.

On the whole, it can be stated that although we have many theoretical discussions and conceptualizations of voice in academic discourse, this concept has remained difficult to operationalize (see e.g., Matsuda, 2015) and empirical studies which have directly investigated the relationship between voice strength and quality of texts produced are very limited (see e.g., Zhao, 2017). In addition, as Zhao (2018) asserts, the "notion of textual voice construction has been and is still largely unheard of to most English as a Foreign Language

(EFL) teachers and students let alone successfully develop a voice that is appreciated by English-speaking communities” (p. 2). Furthermore, to the present researcher’s knowledge, no study has quantitatively and qualitatively investigated the instances of subject positioning and presence of voice in the Iranian EFL learners’ written texts with some implications for the writers’ identities, the academic contexts in which the texts are produced, and the sociocultural and ideological beliefs of the intended communities. Consequently, the present study embarked on a rather insightful investigation of the concepts of authorial identity, voice and subject positioning in the argumentative writings of a group of advanced Iranian EFL learners in an academic context. In fact, the researcher explored how these writers asserted their distinct voices and position their identities in the texts produced by investigating their linguistic and discursal choices. It is worth-mentioning that the present study, through the instruments and data collection procedures employed, attempted to shed some lights on both individualistic and socio-culturally-constructed notions of identity by exploring the notions of voice and subject-positionings as socially-mediated constructs. More specifically, the researcher aimed at answering the following questions:

1. Is there any relationship between the intensity of voice and the overall writing quality of advanced Iranian EFL learners?
2. How well do the subscales (assertiveness, self-identification, reiteration of the central point and authorial presence and the autonomy of thought) in authorial voice intensity scale predict the writing quality of the learners and which one is the best predictor?
3. Is there any significant difference between male and female student writers in terms of the intensity of voice (i.e., voice salience) in their writings?
4. What are the instances of different types of subject-positioning in the students’ written texts?
5. What are their the implications of the instances of subject positioning for the context in which they are produced?

Method of the Study

Participants and Setting

The necessary data were collected from 41 advanced B.A and M.A students (10 males and 31 females, with the average age of 24) majoring in English Literature and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in a state University in Iran, a country which has its own cultural and ideological values and discursive practices which influence the socialization process of

individuals and their particular worldviews. The uneven ratio of male to female participants reflects the overall imbalanced sex ratio in university entrance in the country and especially in Humanities-related majors like Language and Literature. It is worth-mentioning that the B.A students had already taken part in a college-wide proficiency test and all of them had gained scores which placed them as advanced students of English. The M.A students also had already taken part in a nation-wide entrance examination for TEFL and their acceptance in the M.A level had been judged based on the results of their performance on the general and specialized parts of that exam which necessitated having an advanced proficiency level in English. These students were also from a variety of ethnic and educational backgrounds. In addition, all the students had already passed courses in paragraph development and essay wiring and were familiar with the conventions of argumentative writing in English.

Instruments

In order to collect the necessary data, the researchers used a number of tools. The first tool was a writing prompt which asked the participants to write a five paragraph argumentative essay. This prompt required the students to offer their personal reasons and take a strong stance while presenting their ideas to defend the choice of their best friends. In fact, the argumentative mode was chosen because it is believed that the purpose of such writing is to present a position and to have an audience adopt or at least seriously consider the argument put forward, which is somehow in line with the objectives of the present study which attempts to explore and shed light on the strength of voice in the students' writing.

The second instrument was the Voice Intensity Rating Scale developed by Helms-Park and Stapleton (2003). This scale was used to identify and investigate the features of voice and their relative strength in the students' writing (see Appendix A). Various features of voice were first isolated from the literature, and those receiving repeated exposure were chosen as key elements of the 'Voice Intensity Rating Scale'. In order to test the reliability of the rating scale in a preliminary way, two raters (i.e., two doctoral candidates in a second-language education program having extensive experience in rating L2 writing samples and teaching L2 writing at university level) were first trained to use the scale and then asked to rate writing samples on their own. Their rating indicated a high level of convergence. It contained four major components, namely assertiveness, self-identification, reiteration of central point, and authorial presence and autonomy of thought. These features were equally weighted (25 points for each feature) and based on them, an overall voice intensity score was derived for each

learner's argumentative writing and was correlated with the score assigned for the quality of their writing performance derived from Paulus's (1999) essay-scoring rubric which systematically gives an analytic score for different components of writing including organization, development, cohesion/coherence, structure, vocabulary and mechanics.

The final instrument was Ivanič and Camps' (2001) model of subject-positioning which was used as a guide to analyze the linguistic, discoursal and organizational aspects of the students' texts and to qualitatively identify the instances of ideational, interpersonal, and textual positionings used (see Appendix B). In order to construct a systematic framework of different types of writer/subject positioning, Ivanič and Camps (2001) built on the three macrofunctions of language introduced and elaborated by Halliday (1985). In an exploratory study, they analyzed a group of writers' lexical, syntactic and rhetorical choices and showed how such features can reflect the writers' identities and can possibly position them as people having a particular set of ideas. In fact, drawing upon Halliday's three macrofunctions of language, they identified three types of subject positioning that may or may not operate simultaneously: *ideational positioning* which refers to having different stances towards the topics and different ideas the writers have, *interpersonal positioning* which highlights the writer's sense of authority and their relationships with the readers and, finally, *textual positioning* which considers the author's use of specific linguistic and discoursal features to organize their texts.

Procedure of Data Collection and Analysis

The present study employed a rather mixed-method research design and both quantitative and qualitative procedures were used to collect and analyze the data. At first, the participants were required to write an argumentative essay on a given topic. Then, the students' essays were collected and analyzed to identify the intensity of voice using the voice intensity rating scale. In addition, the students' overall writing quality was determined by using Paulus's (1999) essay-scoring rubric and the results were correlated with the numerical score obtained with respect to the intensity of voice for each student. Finally, Ivanič and Camps's (2001) model of subject-positioning was used to qualitatively analyze the written materials and find the instances of ideational, interpersonal, and textual positionings. The following sections provide a detailed description of the qualitative and quantitative analyses and the findings will be discussed with reference to the literature.

Findings and Discussion

The present study intended to examine the role and significance of authorial voice and subject-positioning in the argumentative writings of a group of Iranian advanced proficiency level university students. Since both quantitative and qualitative procedures were used in analyzing the data, the findings will be presented and discussed in two separate sections.

Quantitative Findings

In order to answer the first research question, the researchers correlated the overall quality of the students' writing with the intensity of voice in their written texts. More specifically, the students' writings were analyzed based on their performance on the four components of the voice intensity scale: assertiveness, self-identification, reiteration of the central point, and authorial presence and the autonomy of thought. These four aspects of voice are realized by inspecting some linguistic features since it is expected that individuals might use such linguistic and rhetorical devices (e.g., hedges, intensifiers, first person pronouns and active structures, frequency and explicitness of presentation of main/central idea and consideration alternative views) to express their authorial voice and to claim ownership of their texts (Hyland, 2002; Ivanič, 1998; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007). The presence and intensity of these features were examined in the students' texts and after assigning a total voice score for each learner, this aspect was correlated with the quality of their writings. The results of analysis presented in Table 1 revealed that there was a strong, positive correlation between the two variables ($r=.796, n=41, p <.0005$) with high voice intensity associated with a higher quality in writing. In other words, beside other factors which might affect the quality of students' writing, the presence of voice and its intensity can also account for a portion of the students' competence in writing a high-quality argumentative text which requires writers to either concede to or refute the counter-arguments surrounding an issue and present their own convincing stance or position. This finding is in line with the one found by Zhao and Llosa (2008) and Zhao (2012) and confirmed the importance of voice as a factor which can highlight the presence of the author in the written text and can strengthen the power and persuasiveness of the assertions in the argumentative writing mode. Furthermore, this finding shows that the student writers have been able to successfully create and convey their individual identities through their written texts which, according to Ivanič's (1998) assertion, such secure writing identities are highly essential in the students' ability to develop an argument and express ideas effectively.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics and Results of Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficient for the Students' Voice Intensity and Writing Quality*

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	Sig. (two-tailed)
Voice intensity	41	88.97	12.33	.796	.000
Writing quality	41	37.28	4.97		

However, contrary to these assertions, Helms-Park and Stapleton (2003) have found that there is no direct relationship between the quality of writing and the intensity of voice in the argumentative writing. They attributed this finding to the fact that the components of the voice intensity scale may not have the capability to sufficiently capture the essence of voice which encompasses features like sound, rhythm, energy, and individuality of a writer. They also argued that the features included in the scale may not be able to capture the essence and appropriateness of voice within a particular genre and specific micro-context of each individual's written text. Helms-Park and Stapleton (2003) believed that voice is an integral aspect of academic writing and communication, but the great emphasis that has been attributed to this feature compared to other aspects of writing such as the content is highly unwarranted and there needs to be a balance in this regard. Despite of being a true assertion, Hyalnd (2010) believes that the concept of writer identity and its presence in the academic texts can be considered an important feature of judging the adequacy and quality of the students' ideas in written texts and the qualitative investigation and identification of these features can provide some insights about the dominant ideology of a community and the reasons that individuals take specific stances towards an issue. The differences in the findings and assertions regarding the notion of voice can be due to the abstract and culture-specific nature of this concept which adds to the complexity of its inspection.

In order to respond to the second research question in terms of identifying which aspect of voice (that is, assertiveness, self-identification, reiteration of the central point and authorial presence and the autonomy of thought) has the highest level of contribution to the writing quality of the learners, a set of values under Standardized Coefficients are reported (see Table 2). As it is seen in Table 2, the assertiveness ($B=.697$, $Beta=.482$, $t=2.574$, $p<.05$) made a stronger contribution to explaining the writing quality of the learners, which can be justified in terms of the association between assertiveness and argumentative genre of writing which requires the learners to take a stance with regard to their ideas and issue of concern and use strong assertions to defend their position. However, the dominance of assertiveness in the writings of Iranian EFL learners contradicts the findings of studies conducted in contrastive

or intercultural rhetoric tradition which have indicated that writers from collectivist cultures overall would sound less assertive than writers from Western individualist cultures, due to the emphasis on being modest in those oriental cultures (e.g., Hinkel 1997; Hyland & Milton, 1997; Wu & Rubin 2000). Nevertheless, Zhao (2018) found that key writer background variables, such as age, gender, cultural background, and level of exposure to the target language and culture, had very limited, if any, influence on L2 writers' textual voice construction.

Table 2. *Coefficients of Multiple Regressions*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		95% Confidence Interval for B			Correlations		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero Order	Partial Part	
(Constant)	9.724	4.385		2.218	.033	.831	18.617			
Assertiveness	.697	.271	.482	2.574	.014	.148	1.247	.781	.394	.251
Self-identification	-.015	.304	-.010	-.050	.960	-.632	.601	.698	-.008	-.005
Reiteration	.307	.343	.229	.894	.377	-.389	1.003	.756	.147	.087
Author presence	.274	.355	.159	.773	.445	-.445	.994	.714	.128	.076

a. Dependent Variable: Writing Quality

In order to see how much of the variance in the dependent variable (writing quality) is explained by the construct of voice, the R Square (multiplied by 100) in the model summary table is obtained. According to Table 3, 65% of the variance in total reported writing competence is explained by the independent variables, which confirms the significance of voice in writing. In fact, the presence of a notable authorial voice has long been considered as a defining trait of successful writing in many English-speaking countries and communities and this feature has been treated as an important concept in various composition textbooks, writing curricula, and even writing assessments at different educational levels (Zhao, 2018).

Table 3. *Model Summary of the Standard Multiple Regression*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.810	.656	.618	3.07377

Moreover, to assess the statistical significance of the results, the ANOVA table was used. This tests the null hypothesis that multiple R in the population equals 0. Based on the information presented in Table 4, the results reached a statistical significance (*Sig.* = $p < .05$). Consequently, we can have trust in the findings of the current study.

Table 4. *The ANOVA Table of the Standard Multiple Regression*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	649.394	4	162.349	17.183	.000
	Residual	340.130	36	9.448		
	Total	989.524	40			

In order to answer the third research question, the mean voice intensity scores of the two groups of learners (male vs. female participants) were compared to identify which group had provided a more intense voice in presenting and organizing their ideas. In fact, the linguistic and discoursal features of the students' writings were qualitatively analyzed to identify the instances of four components of the voice intensity scale: assertiveness, self-identification, reiteration of the central point, and authorial presence and the autonomy of thought. After assigning a total voice score for each learner, an independent sample *t*-test was run to indicate whether there were any significant differences between male and female participants in the intensity voice in their written products (see Table 5).

Table 5. *Descriptive Statistics and Results of Independent Samples t-test for Male vs. Female Voice Intensity Scores*

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (two-tailed)
Male	10	83.50	16.85	.122	39	.107
Female	31	90.74	10.21			

* $p=.554 > 0.05$

As the results in Table 5 indicate, there was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of male ($M=83.50$, $SD=16.85$) and female ($M=90.74$, $SD=10.21$) students' voice intensity in the written texts ($t(39)=.122$, $p=.107$). This finding points to the fact that both groups of writers have presented a rather equal voice in their writings and have effectively made use of the available resources to present their ideas. Zhao (2018) also found that gender, as one of the key learner background variable along with writers' age, L1 or cultural background, do not have a strong influence on L2 writers' voice construction in English argumentative essays; this finding is in line with evidence from other studies that employed a more qualitative approach (e.g., Canagarajah 2015; Matsuda 2001). The finding of present study can be also justified and explained with regard to the sociocultural norms and dominant values of the society in which the participants are living and socializing, especially its focus on collective interests of the community. In fact, the constraints imposed on the writers by context-specific ideologies and the writers' own personal and social

experiences might oblige them to adopt a distinctive voice and present their own unique identities while dealing with special issues at hand or expressing their ideas (Hyland, 2002).

Qualitative Findings

In order to answer the final research question, a qualitative analysis of the students' written texts was conducted to identify and elaborate upon the representative instances of three types of self-representation or subject positioning (namely, ideational, interpersonal and textual positioning). The research conducted on the issue of voice and identity has indicated that there are a variety of ways that writers present themselves into their texts (e.g., Hyland 2002, 2008; Ivanič, 1998; Ivanič & Camps, 2001). Most of these researchers claim that the authors mainly construct their unique identities by using the culturally available resources in the context that they live, the discourse communities in which they practice and the ideologies they identify themselves with. In the present study, the student writers' lexical, syntactic and rhetorical choices were examined to see how "they are drawing on voice types that had consequences for their identities, positioning them as sounding like members of social groups or as particular types of people" (Ivanič & Camps, 2001, p. 10). In this model of self-representation, ideational positioning refers to the ways in which the presentation of ideas and selection of specific linguistic features position the writer as a person with a particular set of ideas and worldview. Through such self-representation the authors may convey different interests and values by using specific evaluative lexical items or other syntactic features and align themselves with particular ideologies. In fact, through presenting their specific ideas, values, preferences and beliefs derived from the discourse communities they live and act, the writers want to be seen as unique individuals and this feature can give the text a kind of liveliness and strength. For example, in one of the examples, the writer (Ali) is defending the choice of his friend by resorting to some common and similar features in the community.

Ali: ...there are some other factors that can be noted to similar religious, cultural and political beliefs. I think that similarity in religious beliefs is the most significant factor because religious beliefs affect most of person behaviors.

Many other students have also emphasized such similarities in ideas and worldviews which indicate how the dominant ideology of a society can affect the individuals' stances towards different issues:

Javad: *In my opinion these reasons are the major ones which help me to choose someone as a good friend. A) engaging in the same/similar affairs, B) cultural closeness, C) closeness of thought D) closeness of interests, ideas &...*

Hadi: *I have some reasons for choosing them. First they are really kind and generous. Second they are loyal and truthful and they can keep my secrets and speech without telling them to others. The last reason is that they are religious and come about their religious affairs....*

In the following example, by using some evaluative lexis such as *fresh* and *new* and expressions such as *open my eyes to*, Hamid asserts his unique stance towards the topic and emphasizes the role of friendship in shaping his values, beliefs and life experiences.

Hamid: *I believe having a best friend to share things with can also help me bring fresh perspective to life and learn new things about myself. The things I share with my best friends can open my eyes to new ideas and ways to think about the world around me. When I get stuck in my routines, I try to see what he is up to, because it's nice to learn about things I may not have thought about doing.*

In another instance of ideational positioning, the author resorts to a worldview and justifies the choice of her friend based on this view. Then, she attributes this power in her friend to a spiritual and divine source.

Sahar: *Spending time with her makes me feel I have to be strong, too. Having a strong spirit and personality nowadays plays a crucial role in today's society and life, with so many difficulties and problems. We have to be super powerful to grapple with them and this strength I think is divine. If we really believe in our merciful, compassionate God and if we believe that what happens to us is best hence he knows what's best, we will be more patient and strong*

Almost all the instances cited show the effect of discursive and ideological practices of a community on the individuals' representation of self and understanding of others. In fact, most students have tried to show a strong commitment to the topic through full development of the central idea (point of view) with adequate use of effective examples and details (Zhao, 2017).

In the interpersonal positioning domain, the writers use special linguistic features to communicate their ideas and establish their relationship with the readers of the text which could range from affinity to authority. The degree of assurance and certainty in providing ideas by using various tones and more specifically using engagement markers could be

indicative of this aspect of positioning. In fact, according to Hyland (2001) “writing is a social act, and every successful text must display its writer’s ability to engage appropriately with his or her audience” (p. 569). As was stated, based on social-constructivist approach view, voice is considered as an essential writer identity that is co-constructed by the writer and the readers (Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Matsuda, 2001; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Stock & Eik-Nes, 2016).

In the corpus of data examined, some student writers, in order to balance the significance and originality of their ideas, have adopted a negotiation style with their readers and somehow have tried to engage them in their own assertions. In fact, according to Hyland’s (2001) and Ivanič’s (1998) ideas, in order to reach such a purpose and construct an appropriate and credible identity, the authors must make use of a variety of devices such as self-mention, engagement markers and other interpersonal metadiscourse features. For example, the use of first person plural pronouns in the following sample shows how the author has tried to engage her reader(s):

Maryam: *We all know how important friends are. All of us have stages of our life when we really need a friend. There are friends we go out with, friends we go to the movies with and friends we head the gym with. But despite having a pal for every occasion having a best friend is a bonus in life.*

In fact, in this dimension, the writer can reveal himself or herself in the writing either directly or indirectly, and by sharing personal background and experiences attempts to give the reader a clear sense of who the writer is as a unique individual and thus engages the readers (Zhao, 2017). However, the evidence suggests that few students in the sample have been aware of the reader-writers’ interactions and this feature has been somehow neglected by most of the authors, which may be due to the topic they have been supposed to write about that had a highly personal nature. In addition, the genre which these authors have written in (i.e., the argumentative mode) and the requirement for asserting their individual ideas may have made them to mainly focus upon presenting their own ideas and seek less agreement with the readers but to persuade them to believe in their assertions and accompany them.

As for the textual positioning, word choice, language use and organization of ideas were examined to see how the writers position themselves in relation to the mode of communication (i.e., conventions of essay writing) since the textual aspect of the writing is highly important because the writer’s identity is mostly shaped in connection with the textual mode of communication (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). In the same regard, almost, all the student

writers have observed the conventions of (argumentative) essay writing in terms of presenting the moves such as conceding or refuting the counterarguments and presenting a strong argumentative proposition and attempted to reach textual coherence (i.e., clear connections between propositions and sections) in presenting their ideas. According to Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) ideas, "as students make meaning through registers and genres within the confines and possibilities of the context of situation and culture, they attempt to manage audience and social purpose, making text production and consumption a social and dialogic process" (as cited in Bunch & Willete, 2013, p. 144).

In the following instance (as one example among the many representative samples), Fatemeh has chosen to write in a rather simple "*I write like I speak*" mode to simply convey her ideas by using everyday language and expressions:

Fatemeh: *I prefer to describe one of my friends that our friendship has been started from eight years ago and now she is my alter ego. I met her at university. First she didn't seem to be sociable and I think she had an introvert characteristic because she didn't talk much and always had some notes with herself for reading. In contrast with her I was a nutty girl that didn't take anything serious and study was just a fun for me...*

Another dominant feature of textual positioning which was also observed in the previous instances was the special use of transition markers and cohesive devices to ease the flow of ideas and guide the readers in the texts.

Elaheh: All of us know man is a gregarious creature, and prefer to live with other people and in fact, man is incomplete without this characteristic. Therefore, he needs friends to interact with hem and consult them about their problems. In fact, for example another reason for my choice was our common views about religion, culture and even our common favorite courses. In my opinion, a good friend gives us self-esteem. At the end I believe that all people should be cautious about choosing their friends because their choice affects their future life in terms of education and profession and generally a good friend gives identity to us. Then, there should be similarity in ethics, culture, family background.....

One worth mentioning point here is that the instances of positioning and self-representations are not presented separately, but rather we see many instances of simultaneous positioning (i.e., the textual, ideational and interpersonal features are used

together) based on which the students present their ideas by using specific linguistic features and at the same time try to engage the readers by accounting for the role of audience in their writing and trying to write in a way that is interesting, sophisticated, and eye-catching to the readers (Zhao, 2017). For instance, in the following example, Sarah is presenting an ideological assertion in a reader-considerate voice which is indicative of the fact that these features work in tandem and reinforce each other to assist the writers in presenting their unique ideas.

Sarah: ...different important criteria for me to choose her as close friend are her personal characteristics such as honesty, good behavior, religious beliefs, political position and some other characteristics. I think it is necessary to explain more about some of these criteria.being educated is the other reason for me in selecting my friends.....As a conclusion it can be said.....

Finally, it should be asserted that since identities are socially constructed and mediated by language, writers should conform to the conventions and employ the discourse features of the communities to which they belong. But this does not mean that people should be limited to an expected set of idea-presentation or behaviors. In fact, there exists some freedom for the negotiation of ideas and maneuvering of individual identities by constructing texts which not only present unique ideas but also are reader-considerate and are aware of the dominant ideologies of a community.

Conclusion

Authorial identity is one of the most central ideas being addressed more strongly in the rather current applied linguistics research on writing and academic style. Ivanič (1998) considers this feature as a mean by which writers assert their presence in the texts as the owner of ideas, beliefs and opinions by using “appropriate rhetorical choices that would enable them to establish an authorial identity that would satisfy the conventions of the target community and display an understanding of the stylistic requirement of membership of that discourse community regarding attribution and stance” (as cited in Solocomb, 2011, p. 2). In fact, authorial identity is the sense writers have of themselves as authors and the textual identity they construct in their writing. This sense is captured and presented by the notion of voice. In spite of some cautious remarks about the significance of voice in academic writing which are mostly stated by scholars such as Helms-Park and Stapleton (2003), many scholars have investigated

how the voice is represented in the academic writing (e.g., Hyland, 2002; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Tardy, 2012; Zhao, 2012, 2017, 2018, to name a few).

In the same vein, the present study attempted to explore the association of voice with writer identity, quality of the written product and how the choice of linguistics and rhetorical features can position the writer as having a particular set of ideas or worldviews and how they interact with the readers of the texts produced. Based on the findings of the study which indicated a positive relationship between writing quality and voice intensity, it can be suggested that Iranian students should learn to take the ownership of their written texts and freely but systematically present their discourse-appropriate identities. In addition, since many instances of subject-positioning reflected the dominant sociocultural and ideological values of the country and even sometimes the constraints imposed by these values in asserting and demonstrating a strong individualized voice, the students need to be informed how their life histories and experiences about the world (i.e., the particular rhetorical context in which one is writing), the type of genre convention within a particular discourse community and the topic at hand can give an alive and fresh voice to the ideas presented in their written texts. Moreover, in writing courses, the instructors should highlight the complexity and context-dependent nature of writing, raise students' awareness about the legitimacy of individual variations and stylistic idiosyncrasies in their language use and encourage the learners' agency in the act of writing and teach them how to avoid constructing passive and neutral stances. Also, the students should be motivated to adopt an active voice in constructing meaning, and through their choice of appropriate and context-specific linguistic and rhetorical devices, create an effective and authentic authorial identity, consider the readers in their idea presentation and, hence, improve the voice salience and overall quality of their written texts. However, the most important precaution regarding the finding of the present study is that most of the analyses, especially in the qualitative part, are the researcher's own interpretation of the students' intentions in choosing specific words and structures and presenting particular ideas in the act of writing; therefore, conducting interviews and individual conferences with the student writers might have provided better insights regarding the reasons and justifications for their specific choices. In addition, future studies must engage in an in-depth exploration of voice dimensions in Iranian EFL contexts in order to identify categories of voice and aspects of subject-positioning that are more relevant to the context and, if possible, design instruments that more effectively target the dominant ideologies of the society to be used while assessing the present and strength of

voice in the writings of Iranian EFL learners. Finally, further studies must be conducted to see how EFL students' writing proficiency level can influence the intensity of voice and might impede or facilitate the use of subject-positioning elements in writing.

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Appendix A. Voice Intensity Rating Scale

Feature	Level	Criteria
Assertiveness	20-25	Displays strong commitment to assertions. Hedges are rarely or never used to soften the author's claims. Intensifiers are usually used to strengthen the author's claims.
	15-19	Displays fairly strong commitment to assertions. Hedges are seldom used to soften the author's claims. Intensifiers are sometimes used to strengthen the author's claims.
	10-14	Opinions are conveyed fairly mildly. Hedges are occasionally used to soften the author's claims. Intensifiers are seldom used to strengthen the author's claims.
	0-9	Opinions are conveyed very mildly. Hedges are usually used to soften the author's claims. Intensifiers are rarely or never used to strengthen author's claims.
Self-identification	20-25	First person singular is frequently used. Active voice constructions are preferred to passive and impersonal constructions to express the author's personal opinions.
	15-19	First person singular is occasionally used. Active voice constructions are generally preferred to passive and impersonal constructions to express the author's personal opinions.
	10-14	First person singular is seldom, if ever, used. The author's personal opinions are expressed mainly through passive and impersonal constructions.
	0-9	First person singular is never used. The author's personal opinions are expressed only through passive and impersonal constructions.
Reiteration of the central point	20-25	The central point is restated frequently and clearly.
	15-19	The central point is stated more than once in a fairly clear to very clear manner.
	10-14	The central point is stated once in a fairly clear to very clear manner
	0-9	The central point is either not stated or is not stated directly
Authorial presence and autonomy of thought	20-25	The reader feels that the author is expressing his or her special views on the topic, and separates these views from opposing ones. A very strong sense of individuality is displayed in the writing.
	15-19	The reader feels that the author is mostly expressing his or her special views on the topic. A fairly strong sense of individuality is displayed in the writing.
	10-14	The reader feels that the author often does not separate his or her own ideas from those of other people's. A somewhat weak sense of individuality is displayed in the writing.
	0-9	The reader feels that the author generally does not separate his or her own ideas from those of other people's. There is little or no sense of individuality displayed in the writing.

Appendix B. Ivanič and Camps (2004) Model of subject-positioning

TYPES OF POSITIONING	IN RELATION TO	LINGUISTIC REALIZATIONS
Ideational positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different interests, objects of study, methodologies; • Different stances towards topics: values, beliefs and preferences; • Different views of knowledge-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Lexical choice in noun phrases. ii. Classificatory lexis iii. Generic references iv. Evaluative lexis v. Syntactic choice vi. Verb tense vii. Verb type viii. Reference to human agency ix. Generic or specific references x. First person reference
Interpersonal positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different degrees of self-assurance and certainty; • Different power relationships between the writer and the reader. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Evaluation ii. Modality iii. First person reference iv. Mood
Textual positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different views of how a written text should be constructed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Noun phrase length ii. Mono- vs. multisyllabic words, iii. Linking devices iv. Semiotic mode

