

Personal pronouns & academic writing: a multidisciplinary corpus-based critical pragmatic approach to EAP

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Although EAP textbooks and style manuals tend to have little to say about the role of personal pronouns in academic discourse, I draw upon a multidisciplinary corpus of research articles to show pronouns are in fact multifunctional and worthy of attention. For instance, they can act as a discourse guide to the reader (*I* will discuss x, then *I* go on to argue that y'); they can clarify terms or methodological assumptions ('For clarity, *we* use the term x'); they can recount the research process (*I* collected data from x...Once themes began to emerge from the interviews, *I* validated them by y'); and they can help the writer underscore the innovation and novelty of their research ('No one has ever done x. In this paper *I* aim to do just that'; '*We* have extended the ideas of Smith & Jones in this paper').

In addition, EAP course books give students the idea that academic discourse is homogeneous, that there is an easily defined model of 'good writing' that is equally valid for every discipline from Physics to Philosophy. Yet my corpus shows that different disciplines tend to use different pronouns for different reasons. In the light of these findings I will present EAP pedagogical materials taking what I call a multidisciplinary corpus-based critical pragmatic approach. The *multidisciplinary, corpus-based* elements of my materials give postgraduate learners information from corpus studies about these disciplinary preferences, showing, for instance, that in the case of single-authored papers, Physicists prefer *we*, while Business & Management authors prefer *I*. The *pragmatic* aspect of the materials comes from the fact that learners are being given Anglo-American norms of pronoun use which they can model their own writing on, while the *critical* aspect of the materials asks the class to discuss the potential sanctions of flouting, or indeed, conforming to, the dominant conventions.