International Teaching Assistants’ Identity Roles Represented through Self-Mentions in Teaching Demonstrations

Idée Edalatishams

1. Introduction

International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) are considered a vital part of the teaching mission in many colleges and universities across the United States. Schools usually provide them with training in teaching skills and methods, classroom culture, duties and responsibilities, and language skills to ensure they have a successful teaching experience. Varying at different schools, these training programs not only help ITAs develop skills required to fulfill their teaching duties, but also influence their views of themselves as teachers. Gradually, ITAs build confidence in their teaching abilities and construct identities as professionals in the higher education community. However, being non-native speakers of the language of the academic community creates obstacles for their identities to be represented (Zheng, 2017). Some ITAs might find it difficult to make themselves understood because of their limited lexical and grammatical knowledge or due to their accents (Rubin & Smith, 1990). Some others might lack the competence required to use certain lexicogrammatical features in specific discourse situations. All these language proficiency issues affect the way ITAs see their identities and how their students perceive them.

1.1. Perspectives on identity

Identity can be simply defined as “a certain kind of person” an individual can be in a given context (Gee, 2000, p. 100). It can be viewed as being associated with nature, institution, discourse, and affinity. Nature Identity is defined by forces over which individuals have no control, e.g., being an identical twin or having a certain disorder. Institution Identity relates to the position granted to an individual by the authorities and through the rules and regulations of an institution, e.g., being a faculty member at a university. Discourse identity refers to what traits and accomplishments an individual is recognized for in a discourse community, e.g., as a community activist or a gang member. Finally, Affinity Identity is defined by a set of experiences and practices an individual shares with other members of a kinship group, e.g., as a Star Trek fan. Gee (2000) emphasizes the coexistence and complex interrelationship between these identities in each individual but does not deny the fact that one identity might be predominant at any given time. Looking at ITAs as professionals in the academic community, we might argue that their most prominent identity is the one defined by the institution.

Other definitions of identity can offer additional perspectives on prominent ITA identities. Self-image, in Farrell’s (2011) words, is a sense of self that individuals in any profession construct and reconstruct throughout the course of their careers. This self-image includes individuals’ interpretations of the professional activities they participate in and the roles they enact but is also influenced by others’ views of these roles (Duff, 2017; Cheung, 2017). As this self-image is embodied in individuals’ professional role identity, it can be argued that ITAs’ identities need to also be explained in the context of their teaching profession and the discipline they teach in. Therefore, in addition to the roles and responsibilities defined by the institution, ITAs’ interactions with students and other members of the academic community can impact their identities.

* Email address: edalati@iastate.edu

In yet another categorization for identity types, Tang and John (1999) have proposed a three-fold framework for role identities. They describe societal roles as roles that people are known to have in the society and are defined by their family relationships, nationality, and sometimes occupation. Discourse roles are based on the communities people are a member of and communicate with at a certain time, such as a student in the academic discourse community or a patient in the medical discourse community. Finally, genre roles are those adopted by members of a discourse community when performing in a specific genre within that community. In the case of ITAs, Tang and John’s societal and discourse roles can be considered similar to their professional roles as teachers. Genre roles, however, offer an additional perspective to examine the ways in which ITAs project their identities in their professional role within the academic speech genre e.g., through giving lectures in class or having conversations with students during office hours.

These definitions and categorizations of identity (with the exception of nature identity) are based on the understanding that identity is entirely socially constructed in the context of interactions with others, as opposed to being prediscursive, i.e. internally existing before its formation and representation in the social world (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). This social view of identity has roots in social psychology, particularly in Stryker’s (1980) structural symbolic interactionism that aimed at understanding the relationship and influences between society and self (Stryker & Burke, 2000). This frame resulted in the development of the identity theory which aims at answering questions about role choice behavior (Stryker, 2007). This identity theory assumes that although human beings can make choices, the constraining effect of the society on their actions is also undeniable. In this sense, human beings’ interpretations of the situations in which they interact with the society shape not only their actions and interactions but also their self-images. Moreover, this social view entails the study of language in the context of its relations with society and culture and leads to the assumption that, in Miller’s (2003) words, “we are positioned by and through our language use” (p. 26). Benwell and Stokoe (2006) summarize this shift in the understandings of identity from prediscursive to discursive:

identity has been relocated: from the ‘private’ realms of cognition and experience, to the ‘public’ realms of discourse and other semiotic systems of meaning-making. Many commentators therefore argue that rather than being reflected in discourse, identity is actively, ongoingly, dynamically constituted in discourse. (p. 3)

1.2. ITAs’ teacher identity

Teacher identity is a well-researched topic within the area of professional identity, with many studies focusing on teachers in general (e.g., Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Cohen, 2008; Stranger-Johannessen, & Norton, 2017), and many others on language teachers in particular (Amin, 1997; Barkhuizen, 2016, 2017; De Costa & Norton, 2017; Farrell, 2011; Golombek and Jordan, 2005; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). The common theme in this literature is that teacher identities “change, short-term and over time—discursively in social interaction with teacher educators, learners, teachers, administrators, and the wider community, and in material interaction with spaces, places and objects in classroom, institutions, and online” (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 4). ITA identities are no exception with regard to such changes. Their constantly changing identities as both graduate students and teachers can be impacted by their desire and commitment to speak English, or what Norton (2013) calls investment. At times, ITAs’ lack of investment in the practices and policies adopted by the target language community might be due to the discrimination they face in that community. For example, Rubin (1992) found that undergraduate students’ ratings of ITAs as well as their listening comprehension of the topic were affected by whether they were presented with a picture of a Caucasian or an Asian instructor at the time of listening to the lecture. Rubin also found that students’ backgrounds as well as several attitudinal variables such as ITAs’ degree of accentedness have a negative effect on students’ perceptions of ITAs’ identity. Fitch and Morgan’s (2003) focus group interviews with undergraduate students revealed that ITAs’ identity was built in a negative light, with oral communication difficulties as the main reason. Other negative views towards ITAs involved pedagogical issues such as classroom management, clarity in explanations, and grading. However, the authors rightfully acknowledged that there is no accurate means of identifying whether these negatively perceived identities resulted from the undergraduate students’ personal difficulties in the
subject matter, xenophobia, or complaints students universally have against teachers’ speech clarity, teaching approach, class management, and grading.

Much of the research on ITA identity has intended to inform ITA training practices in order to improve ITAs’ performance as perceived by their undergraduate students (Fitch & Morgan, 2003; Manohar & Appiah, 2016; Rubin, 1992; Rubin & Smith, 1990; Zheng, 2017). These studies have mainly had a qualitative focus on ITA experiences through case studies and narratives. LoCastro and Tapper (2006), for instance, focused on ITAs’ performance and their level of accommodation to the U.S. education system and found that ITAs make a lot of effort to balance their professional, institutional, and personal roles. These studies of ITA identity further uphold the view on teacher identity as a complex matter that cannot be easily understood as it constantly “changes, self-organizes and adapts to the environment” (Menezes, 2017, p. 260). Cohen (2008) believes that this complexity can be addressed through the frame of role identities which simply looks at individuals’ identities in each of the roles they fulfill in their social lives.

Focusing on professional identity roles, Farrell (2011) examined implicit and explicit references experienced ESL college teachers made to their different identity roles while participating in group discussions and interviews. Results of his analysis revealed several identity roles that he clustered into three major categories: 1) teacher as manager, who controls everything in class, sells the institution and the teaching method, and keeps students entertained and interested; 2) teacher as acculturator, who socializes with students outside of class and provides them with help and care; and 3) teacher as professional, who collaborates with other teachers and constantly learns about teaching (see Appendix B for Farrell’s more detailed breakdown of sub-identities in these three categories). He further placed these identity roles along a continuum where some roles are ready-made and created by institutions and others are defined and negotiated by each individual teacher.

The complexity of role identities further increases in the case of ITAs as they work in environments where the prominent language of communication is different from their first language (Miller, 2003). Nevertheless, ITAs’ teacher-role identities can best be studied through their use of language in teaching situations, because, as Miller puts it, “language use is a form of self-representation, which implicates social identities” (p. 3). Research on ITA identity as perceived by their students has also emphasized the role of ITAs’ language proficiency in their students’ perceptions of them (Bailey, 1983; Li, Mazer, & Ju, 2011; LoCastro & Tapper, 2006). However, not many studies have focused on specific lexicogrammatical features through which identity is projected. Chiang (2016) took a linguistic approach on ITAs’ identity negotiation during office hours, specifically looking at how students used different types of sentence completion to assist their ITAs’ discourse at certain times during office hour interactions. He linked these sentence completions to the students’ perceptions of the ITA’s identities and found that while students mostly acknowledged the ITA’s command over the topic, the frustration brought by the communication difficulties usually resulted in their negative views of the ITA.

Use of first-person pronouns is a linguistic channel through which identities can be projected. Although widely studied in academic writing (e.g., Berman, 1992; Hyland, 2001; Ivanič, 1998; Tang & John, 1999; Wiśniewska, 2011; Wu & Zhu, 2014), first-person pronoun use for self-representation has been rarely examined in academic speech. Use of these pronouns is considered a “valuable rhetorical strategy” for speakers to construct their various identities and for listeners to decode them (Zareva, 2013, p. 73). The choice between explicit use of pronouns versus implicit representation of self significantly influences the impression speakers make on their listeners. Speakers can utilize first-person pronouns such as I, me, and mine not only to demonstrate their authority as knowledgeable and credible members of the academic community, but also to identify as insiders who engage with their listeners (Hyland, 2001).

Zareva (2013) looked at presentations given by graduate students in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) with respect to their self-mentions using singular first-person pronouns I, me, mine and the determiner my. Her study partly relied on Farrell’s (2011) framework for professional role identities but found other role identities represented through self-mentions. In addition to those identities represented in academic writing, speakers projected institutional identity roles by referring to their personal experiences to explain the content and by identifying as a member of the academic community. They also assumed speech event roles to manage the speech event of class presentations.
Literature on teacher identity is significantly lacking on studies of teachers’ identity projection through the use of lexicogrammatical features such as first-person pronouns. Even more neglected in this area is how ITAs utilize such linguistic elements to project their identities as professionals in the academic community. The importance of this research lies in the need to understand how ITAs’ use linguistic features to build their identity both as professionals who have authority over the classroom and as members of the academic community who have command of the topic. A successful teaching and learning experience is contingent upon ITAs’ ability to develop teacher identities that can be positively perceived by their students. In order to account for the wide range of identity types that can be represented in ITAs’ speech, the current study draws upon frameworks from both written and spoken academic English to ITAs’ use of first-person singular pronouns I, me, and mine, and the determiner my for self-representation. One framework has been developed by Tang and John (1999) who examined academic writers’ projection of identity in their use of first-person pronouns and the my determiner. I used this framework to understand the similarities and differences between identity types present in written and spoken academic English. Additionally, I used Farrell’s (2011) framework of experienced ESL teachers’ identity roles. Although not focused on self-mentions, this established framework is based on experienced teachers’ identity types and can therefore provide a solid basis for my analysis of novice ITAs’ identity types. Finally, Zareva’s (2013) examination of identity types projected in TESOL graduate student presentations guided the current analysis. Zareva combined Tang and John’s (1999) academic writing identities framework and Farrell’s (2011) professional role identity framework and found additional identity types such as institutional role identities and speech event roles in student presentations. Combining these three frameworks enabled me to examine ITA speech with reference to genre roles, professional identity roles, and institutional identity roles. As corpus-based techniques provide a much less biased approach than qualitative analysis of a small number of texts (Baker, 2006), I adopted a corpus-based approach to examine self-representations in a corpus of ITA speech in teaching demonstrations. The following research questions guided my analysis of ITA data in this study:

1. What academic genre identity types are projected through ITAs’ use of first-person singular pronouns and determiners in teaching demonstrations?
2. What professional identity types are projected through ITAs’ use of first-person singular pronouns and determiners in teaching demonstrations?
3. What institutional identity types are projected through ITAs’ use of first-person singular pronouns and determiners in teaching demonstrations?

2. Methodology

2.1. The corpus

In this study, I used an existing corpus of ITA speech from mini-lectures given as part of an oral English proficiency test taken at a major Midwestern research university. Generally, international graduate students who are offered or considered for a teaching assistantship position at this university have to take this test, which is comprised of an oral proficiency interview (OPI) and a teaching simulation section (TEACH). For the purposes of this study, I used only the TEACH corpus which includes orthographic transcriptions of 5-minute mini-lectures that ITAs gave in the tests administered from 2006 to 2012 (N=149). Each ITA chose the topic for their mini-lecture from a list of topics in different disciplines provided to them. Their teaching demonstrations were video-recorded and later transcribed by the university ITA Program staff. This corpus is not classified based on scores or placement; in this study, it is only used to represent the language ITAs at different levels of oral English proficiency used in teaching demonstrations. Since all ITAs were given exactly 5 minutes for the task, the transcriptions of mini-lectures are similar in length (M=574 words per text).

2.2. Data coding and analysis

In order to find instances of the first-person singular pronouns I, me, and mine as well as the first-person singular determiner my in the data, I conducted searches on all the text files in the corpus using AntConc (Anthony, 2015). The resulting KWIC lines were transferred into separate spreadsheets for
manual coding based on the type of identity represented through self-mentions. The findings/discussion section includes detailed explanation of the criteria used for coding different first-person pronouns and determiners as representing different identity types. Here, I present examples of pronouns and determiners excluded from the data during the coding process, as they did not meet the criteria for representing identity. Example 1 shows an instance where the pronoun I was used as part of a quote and therefore did not indicate the speaker’s identity.

(1) Ok. Pat told Mr. Steve “I’m done.”

In example 2, the determiner my is used as part of an introduction at the beginning of a mini-lecture. Such instances were excluded because the test-takers were asked to assume that the lesson was happening somewhere in the middle of the semester and therefore to not introduce themselves. Regardless, some ITAs introduced themselves; but for the sake of consistency, I excluded such self-mentions from the data.

(2) And this is my first name and this is the last name and this is not a middle name that we normally can think.

Example 3 shows an instance when the speaker repeated part of the sentence. In such cases, I coded the pronoun or determiner only once.

(3) Um I’m I’m sure you are going to like this.

In some other cases, the speaker left their sentence incomplete and therefore it could not be determined what identity type was meant to be conveyed through the pronoun or determiner. Example 4 illustrates such an instance.

(4) I just, no. First I will be starting with Kristoff’s current law.

Finally, I excluded instances of I used not as a personal pronoun but as part of an abbreviation, algebraic or physics notation, or grammar practice (examples 5a-5c).

(5a) The VTH is obstructed by the ISC.

(5b) F is constant function on an interval I if FA is equal to FB.

(5c) Right, subject-verb agreement, so I, they, you, first person, second person, and the plural, they go with the root form: I go to ISU.

In the next stage, the remaining instances of first-person singular pronouns and determiners (N=739) were contextually examined and coded for the identity type they were perceived to denote based on the three frameworks previously developed by Tang and John (1999) for the academic genre identities, Farrell (2011) for professional identities, and Zareva (2013) for institutional identities and speech event roles (Appendix A). Each instance of self-mention was coded for only one of the identity types across these three frameworks. In cases where there was more than one first-person singular pronoun or determiner within a sentence boundary, each instance was coded separately.

3. Findings/Discussion

Analyzing ITAs’ teaching demonstrations showed that they expressed a variety of identity types through their use of first-person singular pronouns I, me, mine, and the my determiner. Not only were most academic identity types projected in ITAs’ teaching demonstrations, but also professional and institutional identities were represented. Table 1 summarizes all identity types along with the frequencies of the pronouns and determiners that denoted each identity type. Figure 1 illustrates this distribution in a simpler way combining all the pronouns and determiners for each identity type.
Table 1

*ITA Teaching Demonstration Identities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Roles</th>
<th>Raw Frequencies: First-Person Singular Pronoun/Determiner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Genre Identities (52.9%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as the representative</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as the guide</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as the architect</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as the opinion holder</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Identities (26.8%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as the knowledge provider</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as the authority</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as the interaction initiator</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Identities (4.6%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as an individual</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as a community of practice member</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speech Event Roles (15.7%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as the speech event manager</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>629</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The percentages after the title of each identity category and in the last column are based on all instances of self-mention that were included in the data. For example, 10.7% of all first-person pronouns and determiners that denoted an identity type indicated the *I as the representative* identity.

Figure 1. Distribution of identity types across the 4 categories of identities

A preliminary look at the main categories of identity types clearly demonstrates that the academic genre identities comprise the largest proportion (52.9%) of identity types projected in the data, indicating that the ITA teaching demonstration register closely follows the academic genre in this regard. Following the academic genre identities, the professional identity types comprised 26.8% of all
identity types, indicating that ITAs—although probably still novices in the academic teaching community—have taken on some professional role identities and view themselves as professional instructors in the higher education community. Following professional identities, a considerable proportion of the first-person pronouns and determiners (15.7%) were used to manage the teaching demonstration speech event, rather than to represent any particular identity. Exclusive to the spoken register, these uses of the first person pronouns and determiner do not necessarily relate to the content of teaching demonstrations, but rather involve apologizing, discourse marking, etc. Finally, the least prevalent identity types presented in the data were the institutional identity types with only 4.6%. This low proportion might possibly be due to the fact that ITAs have not yet developed identities that are associated with membership in the academic community of their college/university. Additionally, it is noteworthy that more than 85% of all the self-mentions have been through the use of the first-person singular pronoun *I*. In the following sections, I discuss each identity category with examples of each identity type.

### 3.1. Academic genre identities

The first research question was concerned with the academic genre identity types projected through ITAs’ self-mentions. In order to address this question, I used the framework developed by Tang and John (1999) for academic writing identity. Using this framework was deemed appropriate after a preliminary examination of the data which revealed that a large proportion of all identity types projected through first-person pronouns were similar to those represented in this framework. Tang and John (1999) ordered the identity types in the written academic register along a continuum in terms of authorial power (Figure 2). In their definition, authorial power involves having command and control over others and showing knowledge and authorship in a specific field. Through the use of first-person pronouns, writers can show their degree of authorial stance from when the pronoun denotes their identity as originator of an idea (*I* as originator: high authorial stance) to when it indicates their identity as only a member representing the community (*I* as representative: low authorial stance).

![Figure 2. Academic writing identities on the continuum of authorial power (Tang & John, 1999)](image)

In the ITA corpus, more than half of all the identity types were associated with the academic writing register. However, only four of the six academic register identity types identified by Tang and John (1999) were present: *representative, guide, architect, and opinion holder*. Below, I provide detailed descriptions of each identity type along with examples in hopes of explaining the reason for such a distribution. Raw frequencies of each identity type within the category of academic genre identities can be seen in Figure 3.
3.1.1. I as the representative

This identity type was presented when the speaker’s use of first-person pronoun or determiner did not denote their individual selves, but rather people in general. Tang and John (1999) believe that this use of first-person pronoun “effectively reduces the writer to non-entity” and is therefore the least powerful in terms of the authority it exhibits (p. S27). While this identity type has been shown through first-person plural pronouns in the academic writing register, the ITAs’ teaching demonstrations included a considerable number of singular pronouns to represent this identity type (example 6).

(6) But can we generalize this and say all negative affixes carry a negative pejorative attitude? Can I say that?

In this example, although the ITA uses the plural pronoun we at the beginning, the singular pronoun I is used in the second question for the same function. Although the reason behind the switch from a plural to a singular pronoun cannot be determined, it seems that the ITA is using I to refer to him/herself as a member of the whole community, hence representing low authorial power.

3.1.2. I as the guide

This identity type is projected when the speaker guides the audience through the lecture. In academic writing, similar to the representative identity, this identity is shown through the use of inclusive plural pronouns. However, the ITAs were found to use singular pronouns to guide the listeners to something they have previously said, done, shown, etc. (example 7).

(7) One is adult hemoglobin which is what I have drawn here.

The ITA in 7 is referring to a drawing which provides a visualization for hemoglobin and can help the audience better understand the topic. The more common use of singular first-person pronouns in teaching demonstrations compared to their plural form in academic writing might be due to the fact that in a face-to-face situation, the ITAs feel the need to take more responsibility for what they say than academic writers would. This can also be explained in the context of example 7 where the ITA is referring to something s(he) has just done. Such immediate references do not seem to occur a lot in the written register as the text is produced through multiple stages of planning and revising rather than on the spot.
3.1.3. I as the architect

This role is taken when the speaker introduces, outlines, or organizes the topic to be discussed. In the ITA corpus, most of the pronouns used to project this identity type were followed by a modal verb like will, would like to, be going to, or the mental verb want (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999). The ITAs seem to have used this function mostly at the beginning of their teaching demonstrations to introduce the topic of the day, but also in some instances later in the demonstrations to give examples to better explain the topic. Examples 8a and 8b illustrate these two functions.

(8a) Hi class, I’m going to give a topic on resistors and series in parallel today.

(8b) This example is a little bit difficult. So I’m going to do a very simple example.

This identity type has the highest frequency of first-person pronouns in this category, most likely because ITAs, being aware of the evaluative context of teaching demonstrations, try their best to organize the topic by explicitly pointing to what will be done next.

3.1.4. I as the opinion holder

On Tang and John’s (1999) continuum of authorial power, this type of identity is placed high because the writer uses self-mentions to express their opinion about a topic. In the ITA corpus, almost 80% of the self-mentions that represent this identity are used with the mental verb think. While in many cases, the ITAs refer to themselves to express opinions on a topic (example 9), a closer look at the examples reveals that many of them involve hedging expressed through I think as an epistemic adverbial of doubt (Biber, et al., 1999, p. 383) (example 10).

(9) Uh, then I think it’s very useful to um, use uh, correlation to find out what variables are highly correlated with the s- the amount of saved money.

(10) For example if oil price is going up one dollar per gallon, many people drive less. It’s about, I think it’s about the elasticity of demand.

In example 9, the ITA believes (and is expressing the belief) that using correlation would help find out the relationship between the variables in question. In contrast, in example 10, the ITA seems to be unsure that the elasticity of demand would be related to the example they just gave about the change in oil price.

Overall, the ITAs did not seem to have shown high authorial presence within the academic genre identities. Looking back at Tang and John’s (1999) continuum of authorial power, the most powerful identity, I as the originator, has not been expressed at all. Additionally, since most cases of the first-person pronoun I with the mental verb think have been to express hedging rather than the speaker’s opinion, Tang and John’s second most powerful identity, I as the opinion holder, has also not been expressed to a considerable extent in the ITA corpus. This can be explained in the context of the differences between the nature of the academic writing and that of teaching demonstrations. While in the academic essays examined by Tang and John (1999), the undergraduate writers might have expressed more certainty and argued for certain propositions, in the teaching demonstrations, the graduate ITAs have been in a testing situation and were probably more aware of the importance of keeping their authorial presence at a lower level so as to be evaluated as an efficient communicator of knowledge.

3.2. Professional identities

In response to the second research question that was concerned with professional identity roles represented in ITAs’ teaching demonstrations, I based my analysis on Farrell’s (2011) framework which clusters teacher identities in three main categories: teacher as manager, teacher as acculturator, and teacher as professional (Appendix B). Several of these professional identities were not attested in
the uses of personal pronouns in ITA teaching demonstrations. For instance, the *acculturator* identity—someone who socializes with and provides care for students—was non-existent in the data. Obviously, the nature of teaching demonstrations did not allow for representing socialization or caretaking. In a real teaching situation, when ITAs develop rapport with their students and become more attached to their role as teachers, they might socialize with their students and provide them with necessary care.

Nevertheless, there were several identity types represented in the ITA data that could fit Farrell’s definitions of *teacher as manager* and *teacher as professional*. Since I did not find the ITAs’ professional identities as exactly matching the sub-identities within Farrell’s *manager* and *professional* categories, I organized them under three different titles, namely *knowledge provider* (Zareva, 2013), *authority*, and *interaction initiator*. The distribution of these professional identities across the data can be seen in Figure 4. Obviously, the self-mentions that represented the knowledge provider identity have a higher frequency than the other two professional identities. I will expand on the possible reasons below.

![Figure 4. Professional identity types in ITA teaching demonstrations](image)

### 3.2.1. I as the knowledge provider

This identity type is projected when the ITAs use first-person pronouns or determiner to convey new information to students. Example 11 illustrates this point.

(11) *That is, I want to say the melting point of fatty acids rise as the carbon chain gets longer.*

In this example, the increase in the melting point of fatty acids is new information in the lecture that the ITA is trying to explain. The majority of the self-mention instances that projected this identity type included the ITA’s reference to him/herself as an example to explain the topic (example 12).

(12) *So uh suppose if I say that I have an income of hundred dollars and my brother has income of fifty dollars. I can say that these are guideline measures and my income is twice that of my brother.*

In example 12, the ITA has used the first-person pronoun *I* and the determiner *my* to provide an example that could help explain the topic of the lecture, consumer behavior.
3.2.2. I as the authority

This professional identity type includes the use of self-mentions to express some level of authority over the class. Several of the examples involve the ITA prompting the audience to answer a question (example 13).

(13) Now I want from one of you to tell me what does this writer write here? What does this writer do right here?

In other cases, it seems that some ownership of the session is claimed through the use of first-person possessive pronoun my (example 14).

(14) Welcome to my class. First of all, I invite all of you to see these two pictures.

In example 13, the ITA seems to be making an attempt to control what happens in class and in example 14, they seem to be implying—consciously or unconsciously—that they have the authority in the class. This identity type was not found in Farrell’s (2011) study of experienced teachers’ identity. The reason might be that the ESL teachers in Farrell’s study were both experienced teachers and native speakers of English teaching non-native speaking students. Due to this power structure, those teachers might not have felt the need to express authority over their class or might have simply learned to avoid doing so. However, the power relationship is different for ITAs in college classrooms. They are non-native speakers of the language of the community, but have to teach a large number of students who are in some cases mostly native speakers of English. Most of the ITAs are also inexperienced in teaching in American classrooms; but, aware of the hierarchical structure of the educational system, they might have been feeling the need to develop some sort of authority in order to construct their identities as teachers (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

3.2.3. I as the interaction initiator

This professional identity deals with the ITAs’ attempt to engage the participants in the topic by asking a warm-up question (example 15) or empathizing with them about the difficulty of the subject matter (example 16).

(15) First of all, I want to ask you, ask you guys a question. Why people gain weight? I think everyone can answer this question. Over-eating, less physical activity, unhealthy, unhealthy lifestyle.

(16) Many people hate the mathematics, but uh, of course I also hate the mathematics, but in economics, economics ...

In example 15, the ITA attempts at asking a warm-up question to get the audience thinking about the topic, weight management. While in a real classroom situation, the ITA would probably give students some time to answer this question, the evaluative nature of the teaching demonstrations along with the time constraints made the ITA to answer their own question immediately and move on with the topic.

In example 16, the ITA uses self-mention to express their attitude toward mathematics so that students become motivated to work on it despite the difficulties. Both of these professional identities aim at creating a connection between the ITA as the conveyor of information and students as the receivers.

3.3. Institutional Identities

In response to the third research question that was concerned with institutional identity roles represented in ITAs’ teaching demonstrations, I followed Zareva’s (2013) framework for identity types represented through self-mentions in TESOL graduate student presentations and examined the data for instances of institutional identities in the two categories of I as an individual and I as a community of
practice member. ITAs’ representations of these two types of institutional identities were very similar in terms of frequency (Figure 5).

![Figure 5. Institutional identity types in ITA teaching demonstrations](image)

3.3.1. I as an individual

This institutional identity is represented when the ITA refers to a personal experience of theirs and relates it to the topic of the lecture to help the audience understand the information better. Example 17 presents an instance of this identity denoted through the first-person pronoun I.

(17) You see one deer, *D E E R*, but you can’t say two deers, right? *I corrected my son yesterday, so I remember this.*

The ITA in example 17 chooses to give the students a glimpse into his/her personal life in a way that is related to the topic at hand, the plural form of the word *deer*.

3.3.2. I as a community of practice member

This institutional identity is projected when the ITA referred to some knowledge shared by the members of the community of practice. In an actual classroom, the community of practice members would include the students and the ITA. Therefore, in the teaching demonstrations, ITAs assumed a position that referenced a shared past knowledge. Most of such instances included self-mentions that referred to topics covered in the previous classes (example 18).

(18) So we started with that last time. *I gave you basic introduction. So today I be going into more details.*

With the self-mentions that projected these two institutional identity types, the ITAs showed their connection to the community of practice and tried to even further connect their personal experiences to their professional and institutional identities.

3.4. Speech event roles

This identity type was mainly related to the spontaneous nature of the spoken register. The ITAs used first-person pronouns in apologies when they had said something wrong (example 19) or in discourse markers such as *I mean* (example 20).
(19) That’s why it’s called nested loop. Now we’ll write. Oh, ok, ah ok, it’s not a loop actually. I’m sorry, you can write it as a, ah, nested if, I’m really sorry. A nested if.

(20) “Were” is for other type of people. I mean, other type of subjects, sorry.

Some other instances of self-mentions involved things that happened at the time of the teaching demonstrations (example 21).

(21) Uh. Let me erase this first.

All these self-mentions were linked to the spoken mode of discourse in teaching demonstrations rather than the topic being taught. Obviously, the academic writing register cannot include any such instances of first-person pronoun use. But, the similar register of student presentations studied in Zareva (2013) included the same types of speech event roles projected through self-mentions.

4. Conclusion

ITAs represented in this study used self-mentions in their teaching demonstrations to indicate academic genre identities, professional identities, and institutional identities. Among all identity types in these categories, I as the architect and I as knowledge provider were projected with far greater frequencies. ITAs’ projection of the I as the architect identity role can be indicative of their awareness about the importance of using organizational phrases in their instructional speech to help their audience understand the content better. However, caution must be exercised in generalizing this finding to actual teaching situations in which ITA performance is not affected by the presence of raters. Given the high-stakes nature of the assessment situation in which the ITAs in this study had performed, their use of phrases such as I am going to to outline the structure of their talk might have been the result of their attempts to perform at their best in organizing and structuring their teaching demonstration and does not necessarily mean that they would do the same in their classroom teaching. Moreover, ITAs’ projection of the I as knowledge provider identity—as the second most frequently conveyed identity type—conforms to the context of instructional speech where the instructor is the main provider of knowledge. It can be argued that through self-mentions, the ITAs have attempted to present themselves as knowledgeable professionals in their fields.

Several identity types were projected in the data with frequencies below 4% of all identities represented through self-mentions. These low occurrences can mostly be explained in light of the nature of teaching demonstrations. For example, because the ITAs were required to teach a fixed topic in a certain amount of time, they might have rightly avoided expressing their personal opinions to instead focus on explaining the topic, hence the low frequency of the academic genre identity I as the opinion holder. From the category of professional identities, the I as the authority and I as the interaction initiator identities also had low frequencies. While the ITAs attempted at playing the role of an authority (an instructor in the classroom), the actual authority belonged to the raters who were evaluating the ITAs’ performance. As a result, ITAs’ attempts to demonstrate their authority might have been restricted to occasional self-mentions to express some ownership over the hypothetical teaching situation. Moreover, the ITAs did not have the chance or time to develop rapport with their audience and initiate interactions with them, resulting in the low frequency of the I as interaction initiator identity type. Finally, both institutional identity types, I as an individual and I as a community of practice member, had frequencies below 2% of all identity types. These low frequencies can be explained in terms of the restrictions of teaching demonstration as an assessment situation, but another reason for the less frequent expression of institutional identities might be that the ITAs were novices in their institutional roles and still in early stages of constructing, reconstructing, and negotiating their identities as teachers in the US higher education. As Miller (2003) said, “linguistic and social cultural learnings occur in tandem, and are mutually facilitating, as meanings and understandings are learned and shared, and identities are represented and negotiated. The process involves the ability to represent one’s identity in the language, to be heard, understood and legitimated as a speaker and a social number” (p. 5). ITAs’ academic, professional, and institutional identities are even more complicated because they are both students and teachers in their schools.
The main limitation of this study relates to the context in which the ITA speech had been produced. Produced in an assessment context, the language of teaching demonstrations might not be representative of ITAs’ actual classroom language. Therefore, generalizing the findings to actual teaching situations must be done with caution. Future research can examine ITAs’ use of first-person pronouns for self-representation in real teaching situations. Data on identity projection in ITAs’ classroom speech can be triangulated with interviews to more deeply examine ITAs’ self-perceived identities and how that affects their performance in general, and their use of first-person pronouns in particular. Longitudinal studies would provide valuable insight into how ITAs’ perceptions of identity and their projection of these identities through self-mentions change over time. Other limitations of this study include lack of a second rater and reliability measures. The coding scheme can be improved if more theories of identity are taken into consideration to inform the analysis. Nevertheless, the findings of this study provide insights into how ITAs’ multiple identities are realized from an external perspective. Such an understanding could help inform programs that aim at training ITAs to perform well in the context of US higher education.
Appendix A

Identity Frameworks Used to Guide this Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Roles</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I as the representative</td>
<td>At least for French, we know that it solely belongs to the Romance languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as the guide</td>
<td>Moreover, from example 1, we observed that there is an absence of the determiner article, ‘the’ and pronoun, ‘that’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as the architect</td>
<td>In this essay, I will discuss the bastard status of English from the pre-English period (-AD 450) to Middle English (c. 1100—1450)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as the recounter of the research process</td>
<td>The data I collected included written texts, transcripts of discussions and notes made as a result of observation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as the opinion holder</td>
<td>I think Kushwant Singh has managed to succinctly convey the essence of the English Language with his phrase ‘bastard language.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as the originator</td>
<td>To me the phrase embodies the whole evolution process of the language to its present day status.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Professional Identities in Experienced ESL Teachers (Farrell, 2011)**

- Teacher as Manager (Vendor, Entertainer, Communication controller, Multi-tasker, Motivator, Presenter, Arbitrator)
- Teacher as ‘Acculturator’ (socializer, social worker, care provider)
- Teacher as professional (collaborator, learner, knowledgeable)

Additional Identities Found in TESOL Graduate Student Presentations (Zareva, 2013)***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional identity roles</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I as an individual</td>
<td>Alright, so, the major misconception with study abroad is that it’s the key to fluency. And I personally went on two study abroad trips and, particularly with my trip to Spain, I expected to come back with near native-like abilities, but it didn’t quite work out that way. Now I know why.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as a community of practice member</td>
<td>So, before I get started here, does anybody have an idea of what language this might be or what these words might mean? I know we have lots of languages spoken in this room so, I was curious.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Speech event roles

I as a speech event manager

Does everybody have a handout? I think there’re some extras over there.

Note. As not all identity types were found in this study’s data, examples in this table are all adopted from the original studies.

* Tang & John’s (1999) study examined both singular and plural form of first-person pronouns and determiner.
** Examples for this category are not presented because Farrell (2011) did not actually examined self-mentions to identify identity roles.
*** Zareva (2013) used the first two frameworks and found identity roles in both categories. In order to avoid repetition, this table represents only the new identity roles she found.
Appendix B (Farrell, 2011)

Taxonomy of Experienced ESL Teacher Role Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as Manager</td>
<td>Attempt to control everything that happens in classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Vendor</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- A seller of ‘learning’ of English: ‘selling’ a particular teaching method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Entertainer</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Tells jokes &amp; stories to class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Communication Controller</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Attempts to control classroom communication and classroom interaction dynamics (turn taking, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Juggler</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Multi-tasker in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Motivator</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Motivates students to learn; keeps students on task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Presenter</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Delivers information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Arbitrator</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Offers feedback (positive &amp; negative) in classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher As ‘Acculturator’</td>
<td>Helps students get accustomed to life outside class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Socializer</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “Socializes” with students; attend functions outside class with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Social Worker</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Offers advice and support to students on matters related to living in another country/culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Careprovider</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Plays care provider role for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher As Professional</td>
<td>Teachers dedicated to their work; take it seriously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Collaborator</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Works &amp; shares with other teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Learner</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Continuously seeks knowledge about teaching &amp; self as teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Knowledgeable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Knowledgeable about teaching and subject matter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


