Personal pronouns *I, You* and *We* as guiding strategies in Undergraduate Engineering Lectures across two Institutional Backgrounds

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ABSTRACT

A comparative analysis on linguistic features employed by native-speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) lecturers when delivering academic lectures has been scarce, perhaps due to the difficulty and complexity of collecting data for analysis. This paper attempts to fill the gap by analyzing how personal pronouns *I, you* and *we* are used in undergraduate engineering lectures in two instructions across different background to emphasize the way lecturers guide their students throughout the unfolding texts. Ten lectures (five each from a Malaysian university and a British university) covering fundamental engineering courses intended by second-year Civil Engineering students delivered by different lecturers were video-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Based on eleven discourse functions that could facilitate students' understanding of lecture contents, pronouns *I, you* and *we* that occurred in phrases and clauses that manifest the identified lecture discourse functions were analyzed and compared. Findings reveal that there are obvious similarities in the use of pronouns by NS and NNS lecturers in guiding students to follow their lectures. Among the three pronouns*, you* and *we* have been identified as the most common pronouns used by both NS and NNS lecturers. The findings reveal that factors that underline lecture as a genre override all others in the lecturer's delivery as far as pronouns are concerned. The findings are nevertheless useful for training young lecturers to improve delivery efficiency, especially for the purpose of academic mobility for both students and lecturers.

Keywords: *Pronouns, Undergraduate Engineering Lectures, Malaysian Lectures, Lecture discourse functions, English as a medium of instruction*

INTRODUCTION

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is defined as "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English" (Dearden, 2014, p.2). The rapid growth and the unprecedented spread in the use of EMI in English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) contexts have given rise to a considerable amount of research on using English to teach, to learn and to acquire new knowledge through English. EMI has even been considered as an important tool for universities to produce knowledgeable and skillful graduates (Karim et al., 2021) although debates persist on whether students can improve their language proficiency while at the same time attain academic achievement (see Lu, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 2014; Macaro et al., 2018). An area of research that has received much attention in relation to EMI in higher education is the challenges faced by participants in EMI programs in higher education (see Macaro et al., 2018). Bjorkman (2010) argues that when using EMI in a context where both lecturers and students are NNS of English and yet English is used as a vehicular language, they become novices in the situation and therefore have their own set of challenges. From the side of the lecturers, even if they are proficient in English, they may not be considered effective if they could not deliver the contents to students (Bjorkman, 2010). In other words, lecturers should become aware of their language use and make adjustments wherever possible so that complexities of students' conditions (e.g., mixed language ability, varied cognitive ability to comprehend lecture contents) could not jeopardize their comprehension. Research thus has investigated various strategies such as simplification of language (Sert, 2008), speaking rate (Hincks, 2010) as well as pragmatic strategies (Chang, 2012; Bjorkman, 2010; Morell, 2004) and rhetorical resources (Aguilar & Macia, 2002) that typify academic lectures to understand the kind of practices of lecture and classroom discourse which may lead to beneficial outcomes for both lecturers and students. The current study focuses on the use of personal pronouns in undergraduate engineering lectures at the tertiary level in two different institutional contexts to understand how NS lecturers and NNS lecturers use personal pronouns as a linguistic resource to guide students in following lectures.

PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

The use of personal pronouns in academic discourse has been investigated in written and spoken texts, but not with symmetrical attention. Written academic texts have consistently received more attention, possibly due to the convenience in collecting data, and studies have focused on both students' written work (e.g.: Tang and John, 1999; Hyland, 2002; Luzon, 2009; Candarli et al., 2015; Dechvijankit & Puangsing, 2021) as well as scholarly articles (e.g. Kuo, 1999; Harwood, 2005; Isik-Tas, 2018; Yu, 2021). Most studies on students' writing have focused on how NNS student writers used personal pronouns as a strategy to achieve various rhetorical goals such as expressing stance, or stating purpose of writing, or making the structure of their writing clearer to their readers. These studies, however, have also pointed out the inability of NNS students to amplify the use of personal pronouns in constructing authorial identity, indicating their inadequate knowledge of pronouns as a linguistic resource in writing (see for example, Friginal, Li & Weigle, 2014).

Studies investigating personal pronouns used by academic writers in scholarly articles have

focused on frequency and referent of pronouns as well as the discourse functions achieved. For example, in her investigation of scientific articles, Kuo (1999) discovered that *we* was more commonly used than other pronouns, and even writers of single-authored articles also opted for *we* rather than *I* to refer to themselves. Kuo also reported that when *we* is used, it was most frequently used to explain what the writers did in the research. Li (2021) examined the use of first-person pronouns in abstracts of linguistics journal papers and found that writers used *we* and *I* for low-stake discourse functions rather than high-stakes ones, that is, the writers portray a lesser powerful authorial presence in their writing. Li also found out that single-author papers exhibited the least function of authorial identity than papers with co-authors when using *we* and *I*.

There have also been comparative studies examining the use of pronouns between NS academic writers and their NNS counterparts. Molino (2010) compared the use of first-person subject pronouns among English and Italian authors of Linguistics research articles (RAs) and revealed that Italian Linguistics RAs contained a lesser number of personal pronouns. Yu (2021) examined the use of first person pronouns (*I/me/my/we/us/our*) in 40 English research articles of Applied Linguistics written by native speaker scholars and non-native speaker scholars to see how the writers constructed authorial identity as a means to self-promote their articles. She concluded that the use of first-person pronouns is governed by cultural context, speakers' proficiency levels and other aims, in her case, the drive to get their article published. Another study by Isik-Tas (2018), showed that both NS scholars and Turkish scholars used first person pronouns to front a powerful authorial identity when expressing an opinion.

In spoken academic discourse such as lectures, the use of pronouns is central and inevitable (Yaakob, 2013) to serve the interactional function (Hyland, 2005) as well as to form some degree of interpersonal relationship between or among the participants in the classroom (Friginal et al., 2017). In comparison to the extensive studies on pronouns in written academic discourse, similar investigations in spoken academic texts, particularly that of lectures, remain limited. Fortunately, with the availability of corpora such as MICASE and BASE, research on pronouns in lectures have been possible (e.g., Auria, 2006; Gomez, 2006, Okamura, 2009; Cheng 2012; Yang, 2014). Investigations involving smaller specialized corpora or collections of class sessions by the researchers have also been reported (e.g., Rounds, 1987; Yeo and Ting, 2014: Molino, 2018: Akoto et al., 2021). The focus of these studies has been on frequency, distribution and variations of pronouns used, referents of the pronouns as well as the discourse functions served by the pronouns. For example, Rounds (1987) used five university Mathematics class sessions conducted by teaching assistants and found that *we* has been frequently used. Yeo and Ting (2014) used data from Malaysian lecture introductions and discovered that *you* is most frequently used.

As far as the discourse functions that personal pronouns fulfill, Auria (2006), using MICASE, found that *we* could help to establish solidarity between the lecturers and the students, thus creating a feeling that learning is a joint endeavor (Flowerdew and Miller, 1997). Okamura (2009) analyzed collocations of pronouns in MICASE and concluded that *you* in lectures did not function to create a distance or negative politeness (see for e.g., Lee, 2009) between a lecturer and his or her students, but as explicit guides for students to follow the unfolding text. Fortanet (2006) who investigated the occurrences of pronouns *I* and *you* revealed that most of the pronouns *I* and *you* that occurred in MICASE strictly served the metadiscursive function, suggesting that pronouns have the facilitative effect that influence the effectiveness of lecture delivery and perhaps lecture comprehension among students. Similarly, Akoto (2020) who looked at lectures from two Ghanaian universities to identify the referents of *I, you* and *we* also concluded that lecturers used pronouns to serve the metadiscursive and non-metadiscursive roles to achieve rhetorical effects that not only create engagement with the students, but also "help to transform the abstract entities into concrete form to aid students'

understanding" (Akoto, 2020, p. 10).

While the attention given to personal pronouns thus far has illuminated their importance in pedagogical practices and/or highlighted the instructional intentions of lecturers in various institutional settings in guiding students to understand lecture contents, to the best of our knowledge, there has not been a study that look at the use of pronouns in Malaysian lectures and in other institutional contexts. In fact, exploration on NS lecturers and NNS lecturers' practices in lectures remains scarce, except for studies on speaking rates (see Hincks 2010) and rhetorical styles (Thøgersen & Airey, 2011). And, as far as studies on linguistic differences between NS and NNS lecturers are concerned, Lee (2010) analyzed the language of teacher talk in general, comparing a Korean lecturer and an American lecturer while Thijssen (2019) conducted a corpus-based study on lexical bundles employed by the same lecturer lecturing in Dutch and English. The study on the use of discourse markers between NS and NNS lecturers received the most attention (e.g., Othman, 2010; Vickov and Jakupčević, 2017; Shahbaz, Sheikh and Ali, 2013; Ding and Wang, 2015; Zorluel Özer & Okan, 2018), but personal pronouns as a linguistic repertoire that could help improve students' grasp of disciplinary knowledge has not been covered.

This paper aims to fill in these gaps: first, to capture the similarities and differences in the use of personal pronouns *I, you* and *we* during face-to-face lectures by NS and NNS lecturers when delivering lectures; and second, to contribute to the literature on the linguistic practices of NS and NNS academic lectures. In other words, we seek to understand how personal pronouns are used by NS lecturers and NNS lecturers, focusing on the discourse of academic lectures to see how the linguistic features of personal pronouns are employed to assist students in following evolving spoken texts, i.e., academic lectures.

CORPUS AND METHOD

The data analyzed in this investigation are lectures collected and compiled for a joined project funded by the British Council under the Prime Minister Initiative-II Fund. Undergraduate engineering lectures were video-recorded and transcribed in a university in Malaysia and a British university in the United Kingdom respectively, and five lectures each were analyzed for this study. All the Malaysian lecturers are non-native speakers of English while their counterparts from the British university are all native English speakers. They all have more than five years of lecturing experience. All lectures covered the fundamental topics in the Civil Engineering field focusing on the second-year subjects at the respective university. All lectures were transcribed using a transcribing software, *Transana* (developed by University of Wisconsin- Madison, see http://www.transana.org). Each transcription then went through rigorous checking by various members of the group project to ensure accuracy of the transcription. Table 1 details the corpus used for this paper.

Table 1 Corpus of the study

Lecturer ID	No of Lectures	Word count
Malaysian lectures	5	41,216
British Lectures	5	42,388
Total	10	83, 604

This study adopted a discourse analytical approach with textual analysis of the lecture transcriptions as the primary method of selecting pronouns to be analysed. The pronouns were carefully analysed based on their occurrences in the phrases and clauses that functions to metadiscursively guide students to follow the lecture. Phrases and clauses that were interpreted as metadiscursively guiding students through the evolving lectures have been identified based on several studies that focus on functions of academic lectures (e.g., Khuwaileh, 1999; Aguilar, 2008; Adel, 2006, 2010; Deroey, 2012). The discourse functions of lectures and samples of occurrences derived from the corpus are as in Table 2.

Again, as the aim of analysis is to look for personal pronouns that function to assist students to follow the evolving texts, emphasis thus is given to pronouns that occur in relevant phrases and clauses that serve the above functions. In other words, occurrences of personal pronouns as shown below are excluded as they do not serve any of the above functions.

(1) okay if **you** want the book actually, **we** got the book in STC okay **you** can buy the book over there STC steel technology center C09 okay block C09 [Mal_02]

(2) okay there's nothing there that's not already in the book **I**'m just hopefully boring half of you by repeating what **you**'ve already read just to get my own interest again [UK_01]

In [1] the lecturer was informing students where to buy the textbook for the course, while in [2], the lecturer was highlighting that the contents discussed are in the textbook. These instances of personal pronouns, though they are relevant for students to understand the message, do contribute towards understanding of the lecture *per se*, and therefore were not included in the analysis. In the study of lectures and the language use, it is important to note on the general aim of lectures, that is, its didactic value or lecture as a platform for dissemination of knowledge (*c.f.* Murray and McDonald, 1997; Sutherland and Badger, 2004; Zare and Keivanloo-Shahrestanaki, 2017). In other words, most linguistic features used by the lecturers have some elements of pedagogical practices and instructional intentions even though they do not directly contribute to facilitating students' understanding of the lecture contents. Thus, in identifying the personal pronouns that have contributions towards facilitating students' understanding of the lecture contents, it is important to follow the discourse functions identified earlier during the analysis (see Table 2).

In coming up with the frequency counts, we manually extracted and examined all pronouns

embedded within the phrases and clauses of lecture discourse functions to determine the pronouns to be included in the analysis. The first consideration given was that there should only be one pronoun selected for each phrase or clause. In other words, the pronouns were only counted once even though there are several occurrences of the same pronoun or different pronouns in the phrases and clauses identified. Illustrations are as follows:

(3) just now *I* told *you* that the aggregate itself contains a lot of pore or void inside there and also in between the aggregate [Mal_03][Reviewing and reminding previous contents]

(4) so as *you* increase the axial load the stress block increases the neutral axis depth drops to give *you* more compressive force and eventually what happens is the stress block and the neutral axis move outside of the section so the whole section is now in compression so *you* 've gone from this state which is very similar to a beam to this state where the whole section is in a state of compression [UK_04][Concluding and/or summarizing topics and sub-topics]

In (3), there are two personal pronouns, *I* and *you,* which occurred while the lecturer reminded the students of the previous content. For the frequency count analysis, only pronoun *I* was taken for analysis as *I* was more prominent in the reflection of the function of reviewing and reminding. *You* was a mere complement of *I,* essential to complete the phrase *I told*, and therefore *you* was not counted. Similarly, in (4), although there are three occurrences of pronoun *you* when the lecturer summarized the contents already presented, the pronoun *you* was only counted once for the frequency, as all the *yous* referred to the same addressee.

In brief, when counting for the frequency of personal pronouns in the already identified relevant phrase and clauses only one single count of the most appropriate pronoun that amplifies the discourse function of the phrase and clause was taken into the frequency count. This treatment offers a fairer comparison, as some phrases and clauses have at least one pronoun, while others may not have any pronoun. It is based on this parameter that the frequency of pronouns to be analyzed was derived.

Table 2 Lecture discourse functions, their definition and samples taken from the corpus

No	Lecture Discourse Functions / Meaning	Samples from the corpus
1	Introducing major topics and sub-topics - To explicitly announce to students what the lecturer is going to talk about at different junctures of the lecture	(5) okay okay today we discuss on the aggregate [Mal_02] (6) right here we go so we're doing section two point three of the notes which is on page fifty [UK_03]
2	Limiting topics and sub-topics - To explicitly highlight to students that some contents are irrelevant at the time of speaking	(7) I'm not going to go into very detail because it's quite tedious [Mal_02] (8) we're going to restrict ourselves for the time being to horizontal and vertical components [UK_01]
3	Overviewing overall contents - To make reference to the bigger picture of the discourse (Bunton, 1999), thus demonstrates overall connectedness in a text	(9) there are so many things that we need to discuss as far as aggregate is concerned uh what is aggregate what is the what is natural aggregate what is cast aggregate eh what is the effect of the shape of aggregate the texture the grade etcetera so these are the things that I would like to cover this morning [Mal_03] (10) so what I'm going to do is I'm going to look at grading first and then I'll just run through the rest of the power points and then we'll go back and do some tutorial questions grading of aggregates right [UK_03]
4	Reviewing and reminding previous contents - To facilitate access to previous contents and to highlight the saliency of previous contents in relation to the current ongoing contents (Aguilar, 2008)	(11) modulus of elasticity is something that we have discussed before in the first lecture also we discussed on the graph remember the stress straight graph [Mal_03] (12) what the codes say going back to what we said a few moments ago the code talks about a minimum crack width sorry a maximum crack width [UK_05]
5	Defining key and new terms - To explicitly show the students how to interpret the terminology or the concept (Adel, 2006)	(13) you get what's called compression failure erm and this is where the neutral axis is now is outside of the section [UK_04] (14) okay what about coarse aggregate the one that is greater than five M M you can term it as the coarse aggregate [Mal_03]
6	Providing examples and clarifications - To clarify and support meaning through illustrations and rephrasing or reformulation (Hyland, 2007)	(15) the best example of this is if you look at speed and velocity if I tell you that I'm driving my car at seventy miles an hour… [UK_01] (16) for the L value here you calculate it by using the theorem Pythagoras which is L equals to square root of L X square plus L Y square plus L Z square

		[Mal_04]
7	Showing logical order of contents - To indicate a listing of what is being stated (Hyland and Tse, 2004) and to show how specific parts are put in relation to other parts	(17) we have two category one is the surface area per meter length and the other one is per ton okay [Mal_05] (18) these are the sort of general criteria that are spelt out in the code um in terms of making sure that you've got a durable structure [UK_05]
8	Highlighting similarities and differences of contents - To emphasize the associations that different contents have, most often contents that are not clustered together	(19) okay now for joint A we use the same approach [Mal_04] (20) for beam you need to classify the beam first as restrained beam or unrestrained beam because we we got two version of design it's not the same okay [UK_04]
9	Emphasizing importance of contents - To highlight the importance and saliency of contents, thus guiding students to see the information as intended by the lecturers	(21) so this very important you must multiply or to get the moment of a force about any point you have equation is very simple force times the moment arm D [Mal_01] (22) so that's an important point on the er on the graph because that shows you where it starts to-to- to turn from tension to compression failure [UK_04]
10	Previewing future contents - To announce upcoming materials (Crismore et al., 1993) so that audience will anticipate what they will encounter a while later (Hyland, 2005)	(23) I just introduced to you the term workability so you will hear a lot of it later on [Mal_03] (24) we'll look at that in a bit more detail when we look at pin joined frames where it particularly comes into its own [UK_01]
11	Concluding and/or summarizing topics and sub-topics - To summarize and close discussion of a topic at any phase of the lecture, not necessarily at the end (Young, 1994)	(25) **so** we have seen how to apply this equations to solve the problem of the equilibrium in three dimension [Mal_01] (26) **right** you can see from all that from what I've been saying that finding aggregate is an increasing problem [UK_03]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3 shows the frequency of pronouns occurring in the phrases and clauses that functions to metadiscursively guide students to follow the lecture. The frequency count of the pronouns was obtained based on the description in the previous section.

Table 3 The frequency of personal pronouns occurring in discourse functions of lectures that guide students to follow lectures

	Malaysian		British	
Total number of lecture discourse functions identified		518		481
Total number of personal pronouns occurrences in the identified lecture discourse functions	333	64.2 %	311	64.7 %
I	85	25.45 %	63	20.38 %
you	114	34.13 %	130	40.76 %
we	134	40.12 %	118	37.58 %

From the table, it is evident that the occurrence of pronouns is quite similar for the two groups of lecturers. Generally, about 65 percent of the phrases and clauses that were identified as metadiscursively serving the lecture discourse functions contain a pronoun, indicating the intimate relationship between pronouns and phrases and clauses that function to help students follow the lecture. This appears logical as the lecturers were addressing and interacting face to face with a 'live audience', and so the frequent use of pronouns is inevitable. As highlighted by Morell (2004) and Yang (2020), the use of pronouns could result in a more engaging discourse, offering explicit and impactful guide for students to understand what is being delivered.

Table 3 also shows an interesting pattern in the frequency of use of pronouns *I, you* and *we* among the two groups of lecturers. First, the occurrence of pronoun *I* in the identified phrases and clauses is slightly more frequent in the Malaysian lectures than in the British lectures. Only about 20 percent of the phrases and clauses used by the British speakers include the pronoun *I*, while among the Malaysian speakers the percentage is about 26 percent. Next, in both contexts, *you* and *we* seem to be more frequently used in comparison to *I* in phrases and clauses that metadiscursively guide students. However, the Malaysian lecturers have about 40 percent of their

metadiscoursal phrases and clauses with the pronoun *we* and about 34 percent *you*, while the opposite could be seen in the British lecture, i.e. 40 percent *you* and 37 percent *we*.

The inconsistency in the choice of whether to use *we* or *you* in lectures is not uncommon. Rounds (1987) analyzed five lectures and found that *we* ranked first, followed by *you* and *I*. On the other hand, Fortanet (2004, 2006) and Okamura (2009) investigated the same nine lectures from MICASE and found that *you* is preferred over *I* and *we* respectively. In the Malaysian university context, Yeo and Ting (2014) analyzed 47 science and arts lecture introductions and have also found similar results as those of Fortanet's and Okamura's. Based on these earlier findings, it is obvious that either *you* or *we* seem to be the most preferred pronoun used in lectures. What is interesting about pronouns is that they reflect the speakers' focus of attention and they also form a shared reference between the speakers and listeners (Kacewics et al., 2013). Kacewics et al. further claim that since pronouns normally refer to human beings, the use of pronouns could show status in social hierarchy. And in their research, Kacewics et al. have shown that lower status individuals have the tendency to use more *I* in contrast to higher status individuals who prefer to use *we* and *you*. Given the asymmetrical relationship between lecturers and students, and the didactic nature of the lecture speech, it is therefore reasonable that the occurrences of *we* and *you* are more frequent than that of *I*. To ensure that students can acculturate themselves into the field, lecturers pay less attention to themselves but rather on their students and on their students' needs to comprehend lecture contents presented, thus the more frequent use of pronouns *we* and *you* rather than *I*.

To further investigate the similarities and/or the differences in the lecturers' use of personal pronouns in facilitating students' understanding of the unfolding lecture discourse, details of occurrences of each pronoun within the phrases and clauses that serve the relevant functions are illustrated in both Table 4, and Figure 1 for ease of reference. As can be seen in both visuals, it is obvious that personal pronouns are most frequently used when the lecturers introduce topics, followed by when lecturers offer reviews or reminders of previous contents, provide examples and clarification as well as when they show logical order of contents and when they conclude and summarize contents. Personal pronouns are, however, used the least during defining key and new terms, overviewing overall contents, and limiting topics and subtopics.

Table 4 Distribution of pronouns *I, you,* and *we* in Malaysian and British Lectures

Functions / sub-functions	Frequency (Raw counts)						TOTAL
	Pronoun *I*		Pronoun *You*		Pronoun *We*		
	MAL	UK	MAL	UK	MAL	UK	
1. Introducing major topics and sub-topics	10	9	12	10	51	25	117
2. Limiting topics and sub-topics	5	6	2	0	2	4	19
3. Overviewing overall contents	1	6	0	2	3	2	14
4. Reviewing and reminding of previous contents	35	10	15	7	16	23	106
5. Defining key and new terms	0	0	4	1	1	4	10
6. Providing examples and clarifications	7	10	17	33	11	9	87
7. Showing logical order of contents	10	2	22	19	29	7	89
8. Highlighting similarities and differences of contents	6	1	10	16	5	5	43
9. Emphasizing importance of contents	2	1	13	10	0	5	31
10. Previewing future contents	7	12	2	4	4	22	51
11. Concluding and/or summarizing topics and sub-topics	2	6	17	28	12	12	77

The similarities and/or differences between the two groups are perhaps illustrated better by Figure 1. First, it is obvious that the use of pronouns *I, you,* and *we* by Malaysian lecturers is consistently higher than that of the British lecturers in introducing topic (INTOP). Especially for the use of *we,* the frequency is almost double that of *we* used by the British lecturers. The same can also be said for the functions of showing logical order of contents (LOG). Again, the pronouns *I, you,* and *we* are consistently more frequently used by the Malaysian lecturers than their British counterparts. In the case of personal pronoun *you,* the difference in number, however, is not that big. The next discourse function in which Malaysian lecturers have shown a higher tendency to use personal pronouns is when they review and remind students of the previous contents (REV). From both Table 4 and Figure 1, the use of personal pronouns *I* and *you* is consistently more frequently among the Malaysian lecturers. However, in the case of *we*, it is the British lecturers who used it the most.
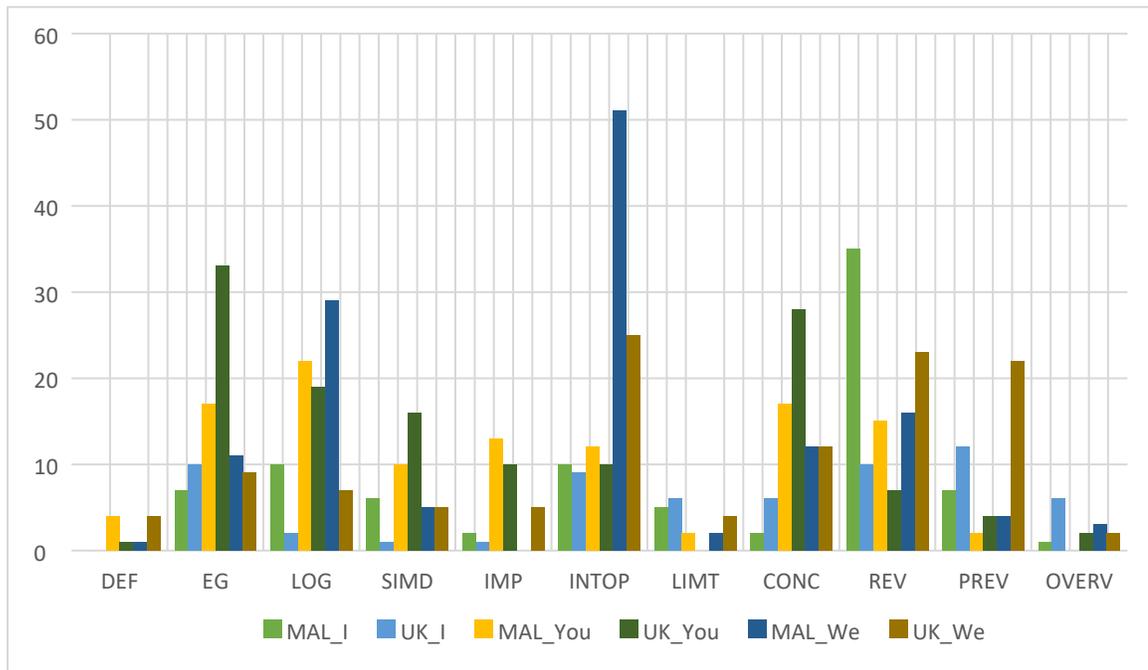
Figure 1 Distribution of pronouns *I, you,* and *we* in Malaysian and British Lectures

In the case of the British lecturers, there were also several lecture discourse functions in which the number of pronouns used was higher than that of the Malaysian lecturers. The first one is when they were previewing the contents (PREV). The use of all the three pronouns was consistently higher, with *we* being almost five times more. Next is when they provided examples and clarifications (EG). British lecturers used more *I* and especially *you*; however, when it comes to *we*, the Malaysian lecturers had slightly more. The other discourse function where the British lecturers used more pronouns than their Malaysian counterparts is when they concluded or when the summarized the contents of the lectures (CONC).

Finally, Table 4 and Figure 1 also highlight that for the other discourse functions, the number of occurrences of the pronouns are both low and that the differences can be said to be less striking. For example, for defining key and new terminologies, limiting topics, and overviewing the overall contents, the number of pronouns used was very small, perhaps due to the fact that there are not many instances of defining key and new terms, limiting topics and giving an overview in lectures. However, the prevalent use of *I* by the British lecturers, comparatively to the very low frequency use of any personal pronoun among the Malaysian

lecturers in overviewing the overall contents, is worth a mention. Overviewing overall contents seems less favorable among the Malaysian lecturers, and *we* was their choice of pronoun. The number of occurrences is too small to be conclusive about the Malaysian preferences of pronoun to manifest this discourse function. As for the concluding and summarizing topics, and highlighting similarities and differences, it is obvious that both groups of lecturers used *you* more than they used *I* and *we*.

The findings presented above have shown that generally there are obvious similarities in the employment of pronouns when lecturers from two different institutional backgrounds conduct their classes. The most prosaic explanation is perhaps due to the features of lecture as a genre which influence the practice. First, as a spoken genre which takes place in front of a live audience, the necessity of using personal pronouns is inevitable to acknowledge the presence of the audience. Even if the lectures were purely monologic, the insertion of conversational features (Othman, 2010; Flowerdew, 1994) such as personal pronouns injects elements of interactivity or dialog with the audience (Kuo, 1999). Next, as academic lectures are a platform to disseminate knowledge to emerging members of the discourse community who are yet to acquire much knowledge about the field, lecturers are both responsible to decide on the information to be delivered and most importantly how to effectively deliver it (Morrell, 2007). The strategic use of pronouns may help lecturers to convey their intentions, which can effectively engage students with the contents (Yeo and Ting, 2014), resulting in their comprehension of contents. In addition, because there is an unequal power between lecturers and students (Kacewics et al., 2013), pronouns can also help lecturers project authorial positions that could result in students trusting the contents delivered (Samson, 2006) and thus help in achieving the general didactic goals of lectures. The use of personal pronouns also helps build rapport for better lecturer-student co-operation (Crawford-Camiciottoli, 2005) and with good rapport, lecturers can maneuver the lectures in ways they perceived appropriate for their students, leading to the correct interpretation and comprehension of contents as intended. All these may accentuate the significant function of personal pronouns in spoken genre, thus the high occurrences of personal pronouns in the identified phrases and clauses that provide guides to students to follow the unfolding lecture discourse is justified.

The differences are interesting, even if they are not very significant, are nonetheless worth mentioning. The prevalent use of certain personal pronouns in certain discourse functions or the significant high frequency of certain personal pronouns among the group of lecturers could not be ignored. Miller (2014) describes idiosyncratic aspects of individual lecturers that allow us to witness some individualistic styles in using some linguistic features, including pronouns. The different preferences for using personal pronouns among the two groups of lecturers studied here may perhaps be the manifestations of what Bhatia (1997) exerts that all genres are locally realized and shaped, and academic lectures are speech events that are indeed situated in cultural institutions. Even though academic lectures, as a genre, have established and standardized discourse practices that are recognizable across institutional and linguistic boundaries, lectures are also socially constructed and situated in a particularised and institutionalized academic setting. Briefly, while the lecture genre may dictate its structure and organization, there are still rooms for experienced discourse community members who are well-versed with the enactment of the genre to inject various elements in shaping the genre to meet the local needs.

CONCLUSION

The study aims to compare the use of personal pronouns in academic lectures across two different institutions. The findings illustrate that personal pronouns are crucially employed to facilitate students' comprehension of lectures, as they are intimately linked to spoken and face- to-face interactions. Our analysis has shown that among the NS and NNS lecturers of two different institutional backgrounds, their use of personal pronouns *I, you* and *we* has obvious similarities: generally, for both groups of lecturers, *you* and *we* are the most common pronouns that were employed during lectures. The similarities that have emerged from lectures being delivered in two different institutions by two different groups of lecturers with different linguistic backgrounds underline the pervasive influence of the lecture genre on lecture delivery. Both NS and NNS lecturers understand their task to disseminate contents to students for knowledge acquisition, and so make use of similar linguistic resources in the English language. The findings also strengthen our knowledge about the influential role of lecture as a genre in knowledge disseminaton as far as certain pronouns are concerned.

This study has offered some valuable insights to the understanding on the roles in lectures particularly those in the Malaysian context since such investigation has been limited. The study also has added valuable insight into classroom practices in EMI context, particularly that of Malaysian higher learning institutions. The way the Malaysian lecturers utilize personal pronouns while addressing their students who share the same native language – especially when the result portrays a slight difference from that of the NS speakers – may be attributed to their use of the Malaysian English variety that has slight variation from the native speakers' model and yet proven relevant and functional for EMI in the Malaysian context. The findings thus are relevant and may be valuable input for institutional training of young lecturers to improve the efficacy of their content delivery, specifically in using pronouns strategically to deliver their pedagogic intentions more effectively. Finally, the cross-cultural elements highlighted in the findings may also be useful to facilitate both students and academic mobility.

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