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A Corpus-Assisted Investigation on the Quality-Dependent Differences in Writer Visibility in L2 Writing

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Writer visibility denotes the degree of a writer's presence in a text. A number of studies have reported that high writer visibility is one of the most noticeable features in L2 writing. Based on the findings of prior studies, this study aimed to test the relation between the degree of writer visibility and L2 writing quality through a close examination on writer visibility in different levels of L2 English writing. For a corpus-based investigation on the linguistic features of writer visibility, this study constructed three corpora of different levels of L2 writing and examined the significant differences in writer visibility across the three corpora. The results showed that basic level writers tend to use writer visibility features more frequently than advanced writers. In particular, the use of evaluative modifiers and first person (both singular and plural) pronouns showed significant differences among the three corpora, indicating a meaningful relation between the use of writer visibility features and the writing quality. Despite some limitations, this study contributes to deepen our understanding on writer visibility, serving as a foundation for future research to explore various features and dimensions of writer visibility and to provide pedagogical implications in L2 writing instruction.

**[writer visibility/evaluative modifiers/first person pronouns/L2 writing/
작가의 가시성/평가적 수식어/1인칭 대명사/제2언어 작문]**

I. INTRODUCTION

A number of studies have noted that the writer's strong presence or high writer visibility is often considered as undesirable in formal English writing because the close distance between the writer and the text may hamper a sense of objectivity in the writing (e.g.,

Lachowicz, 1981; McCrostie, 2008; Paquot, Hasselgård & Ebeling, 2013; Petch-Tyson, 1998; Recski, 2004). Writer visibility is usually marked by the use of a set of features "to express personal feelings and attitudes and to interact with readers" (Petch-Tyson, 1998, p. 108). The features include various linguistic items such as first and second person reference, emphatic particles, evaluative modifiers, imperatives, and questions. In fact, the features of writer visibility have a lot in common with another actively explored field of research, the interactional metadiscourse. Hyland (2005) explained that the resources of interpersonal metadiscourse "are not only the means by which writers express their views, but are also how they engage with the socially determined position of others" (p. 52). The features of interaction metadiscourse include hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, and self-mentions. In English writing, appropriate use of interpersonal metadiscourse is crucial to maintain strategic connections between the writer and the readers (Hyland, 2005, 2006). On the contrary, writer visibility seems to be more strongly related with the presence of the writer in the text to express his or her subjective stance, which was often considered as an undesirable feature in L2 writing (e.g., Ädel, 2008; Breeze, 2007; McCrostie, 2008; Petch-Tyson, 1998).

In examination of the writer visibility in writing by L2 English learners of different language backgrounds, Petch-Tyson (1998) identified features of writer/reader visibility: first person reference, second person reference, speaker's mental processes, monitoring of information flow, emphatic particles (*just*, *really*), fuzziness of words (*kind/sort of, and so on, etc*), references to the situation of reading/writing (*here, now, this essay*), evaluative modifiers, imperatives, questions, quotation marks, and italics. In the study, he noted that L2 English learners showed higher degree of writer visibility than native speakers. For example, L2 writers used the first person pronouns to express opinions directly or to talk about themselves within the text while native English writers used the pronouns mainly to recall personal experiences as a strategy to develop one's argument. In addition, emphasizers such as *deeply, thoroughly, quite,* and *definitely* were used in L2 writing, which made the manifest presence of the writers.

Along the similar line, McCrostie (2008) attempted to examine different use of writer visibility features among different degrees of L2 writing. In the study, the author identified the writer visibility features such as the first person pronouns, second person pronouns, fuzzy words, emphatic particles, reference to the situation of reading/writing. The study found that Japanese students' L2 English writing contained more writer visibility features than native English speaker writing. The first year college students (presumably intermediate level learners) used the same writer visibility features as the second year students (presumably more advanced learners), but used them more frequently than the second year students.

Based on the findings of the various features of writer visibility, it seems to be necessary

to put more focused attention on the quality-dependent differences in writer visibility in L2 English writing. In particular, it is questionable whether the writers' college grade corresponded with their level of writing proficiency as McCrostie (2008) assumed. In addition, both Petch-Tyson (1998) and McCrostie (2008) focused on the use of personal pronouns (especially *I*) while the other writer visibility features such as evaluative modifiers and reference to situation of writing were left underexplored. Taking a step further from the prior studies, a comprehensive research is required to statistically and textually examine the use of various writer visibility features in different grades of L2 writing. Findings of the investigation would provide us with deeper understanding on the writer visibility and bring practical implications in L2 writing pedagogy.

II. PROMINENT FEATURES OF WRITER VISIBILITY IN L2 WRITING

A number of empirical studies examined the individual features of writer visibility in L2 writing. A recent study by Jiang (2015) compared the nominal stance construction in L1 and L2 students' writing and found that L2 writers used evaluative adjectives and self-mention significantly more than L1 writers do, indicating strong presence of the writer in L2 writing. In particular, evaluative modifiers such as *wonderful, unfair, strong*, and *our own* were found in L2 writing to express the writers' strong subjective stances on a given topic. In addition, the use of evaluative adjectives reinforced the writer's attitudinal feeling throughout the texts (e.g., Hunston & Thompson, 2000).

Also, reference to the situation of the writing indicated the strong presence of the L2 writer. Ädel (2001) noted that the expressions indicating the writer's extreme situation awareness such as *this essay will show* and *in this essay* were frequently used in students' writing, which suggested high degree of the writer's reflexivity. Modal verbs are also considered as writer visibility features in L2 writing as Aijmer (2002) noted that learners have a tendency to overuse modal verbs, resulting in a strong degree of writer visibility. Similarly, Hyland and Milton (1997) found that Chinese L2 writers overused a limited range of modal verbs, offering strong commitments and exhibiting problems in conveying a precise degree of certainty.

Some lexical features, which are more often used in speech than in writing, may indicate the strong degree of writer visibility (e.g., Gilquin & Paquot, 2008). Although questions and imperatives are more frequently used in speech than in writing (Hidalgo Downing, 2003), Kenkel and Yates (2009) found that L2 writers tend to use questions and imperatives more than L1 writers do, highlighting the writer's voice in a written text. Similarly, emphatic particles are more often used in speech than in writing (Mithun, 1985), but Farr and Janda (1985) found frequent use of the emphatic particles such as *just, very,*

and *really* in the basic level writing, reinforcing the writers' subjective stance.

In addition, studies found that excessive use of self-reference pronouns indicated a strong degree of high writer visibility (e.g., Biber, 1988; Breeze, 2007; Ringbom, 1998). Ringbom (1998) found that L2 writing showed high writer visibility due to the overuse of first and second person pronouns. Also, Breeze (2007) reported that L2 writers tend to overuse *I* and *you* in their writing, suggesting high writer visibility and low genre awareness of the writers. In addition, in the examination of thematic choice of stance in L2 English writing, Hasselgård (2009) noted that first person pronouns are overused as subjective stance markers in L2 writing.

In particular, some studies have identified different functions of first person pronouns, displaying different degrees of writer visibility (e.g., Harwood, 2005; Hyland, 1999; Tang & John, 1999). In particular, Tang and John (1999) detailed writer identity on a continuum of six different writer entities. *I* as representative is the least powerful role of the first person pronoun, denoting the writer as part of a larger community including the reader. At the other end of the typology is the *I* as the originator, which is the most powerful role of the writer as an origin or source of the argument.

Including the first person pronoun *I*, there are subjective stance markers delivering four major semantics (Hasselgård, 2009): belief/assumption (*I believe, I think, I don't think, I guess, I suppose*), prefacing own opinion (*I would say, I would like to say, I'm sorry to say, I would argue, I must emphasize*), truth/fact (*I know, I remember*), and external source (*I'm not saying*). The subjective stance markers are frequently found in L2 writing, showing the clear presence of the writer in the writing (e.g., Aronsson, 2005; Hasselgård, 2009). In particular, L2 writers' frequent use of *I think* to express their personal opinion has been investigated by a number of empirical studies (e.g., Aijmer, 2001; Granger, 1998; Hasselgård, 2009; Neff, et al., 2006). In particular, Herriman and Aronsson (2009) noted that L2 writers used the interpersonal metaphor *I think* as a useful formula to start an utterance.

At this point, it seems to be obvious that the individual features of writer visibility are actively explored in L2 writing studies, but it is noteworthy that only a few studies examined them comprehensively. In addition, it is necessary to examine the potential relation between the use of writer visibility features and overall writing quality. Given the stronger degree of writer visibility in L2 writing than in L1 writing (e.g., Ädel, 2008; Breeze, 2007; McCrostie, 2008; Petch-Tyson, 1998), it seems to be fair to expect that basic level L2 writing would show stronger degree of writer visibility than advanced one. Findings from the investigation on the quality-dependent difference of writer visibility would provide substantial implications in L2 writing pedagogy. In response to the academic needs, this study presents an investigation on the difference in frequency and usage of the writer visibility features among different levels of L2 writing through

examination on three corpora of different qualities of L2 English essays. The investigation of this study would be the process to seek the answers to the following research questions:

1) Do the writer visibility features show a statistically significant difference in frequency across different levels of L2 writing?
2) Do the writer visibility features show a significant difference in usage across different levels of L2 writing?

III. METHOD

1. The Corpora

In order to examine the writer visibility in L2 writing, this study used two corpora: Yonsei English Learner Corpus (YELC, 2011) (S. C. Rhee & C. K. Jung, 2012) and LOCNESS (Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays) (Granger, Sanders & Connor, 2007). YELC is a collection of placement writing test written by freshmen of a Korean University. This study used the data of the year 2011, which consisted of argumentative (300 words or more) and descriptive essays (100 words) written by 3,286 students. Each participant wrote an argumentative and a descriptive essay, making up a total number of 6,572 essays (1,085,879 words) in YELC (2011). Construction of the corpus was led by researchers at Yonsei English Corpus Laboratory and the researchers collected the writing data and trained 20 native English speakers to grade the writings in a two-week workshop. Through this workshop, the raters familiarized themselves with scoring guidelines and calibrated their evaluation with the guidelines. The raters were asked to grade the essays holistically on a continuum of twelve levels from the poorest (A1) to the best (C2+).

Using YELC, this study constructed three learner corpora of different writing quality. To this end, YELC was divided into three parts, basic (A1, A1+, A2, A2+), intermediate (B1, B1+, B2, B2+), and advanced writing (C1, C1+, C2, C2+) to create pools of writing at significantly different levels. Since only 78 essays were scored as advanced writing, this study chose 78 essays from the pools of basic and intermediate writing categories respectively through random sampling to create YELC Basic and Intermediate. Consequently, each corpus included 39 argumentative and 39 descriptive essays in the similar grades. The descriptions of the three corpora and LOCNESS are provided in Table 1. YELC Advanced essays showed better performance than YELC Basic in terms of the number of tokens, mean sentence length, and words used from the Academic Words List (AWL).

In addition, this study used LOCNESS as a reference to compare the use of writer visibility features with the sub-corpora of YELC. LOCNESS is a collection of essays

written by native English speakers (Granger, Sanders & Connor, 2007). Since the data were collected from college students' writing, there was some academic writing citing scholarly references. In order to make a reliable comparison with YELC, this study excluded the academic writing from the data of LOCNESS. In the qualitative examination, the use of writer visibility features in the writings from LOCNESS were closely reviewed and compared with that of the three sub-corpora of YELC.

TABLE 1

Description of YELC Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced

	YELC Basic	YELC Intermediate	YELC Advanced	LOCNESS
Number of essay	78	78	78	313
Number of tokens	8,033	14,596	16,263	217,090
Mean sentence length (in words)	13.79	14.29	16.82	19.62
Type-token ratio (standardized)	18.41	14.49	15.90	5.91
Academic Words List (AWL) words (%)	2.86	4.02	4.52	
Lex density (content words/total)	0.52	0.52	0.52	

2. Data Analysis

This study examined features of writer visibility used in the studies by Petch-Tyson (1998) and McCrostie (2008) including evaluative modifiers, first person pronouns, second person pronouns, emphatic particles (*just, really)*, fuzzy words (*kind/sort of/ and so on, etc.*), reference to the situation of reading/writing (*here, now, this essay*), imperatives, and questions. Examination of writer visibility words started with creating wordlists of the three corpora of YELC aided by the function of WordSmith 5.0. Each wordlist was a list of words in the order of frequency in a corpus. The wordlists were lemmatized by loading e-lemma made by Someya (1999), a collection of lemmatized forms of words, to extract and examine base forms of the words. Then, the researcher found writer visibility features and their raw frequency in the lemmatized wordlists. In order for reliable comparison among the three corpora, this study used normalized frequency (per ten thousand words, pttw) of writer visibility features in YELC Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced (e.g., Hunston, 2007; Millan, 2008). The normalized frequencies were used to test the statistical significance of the difference across the three corpora by Pearson chi-square test (non parametric). The features showing significant difference among the three corpora ($p < .05$) were selected for detailed qualitative analysis.

In the qualitative examination, the selected features were closely analyzed, assisted by the function of *Concord* in WordSmith5.0. To be specific, each writer visibility feature was

used as a search term for creating a list of concordances, which were meticulously examined to reveal a distinctive pattern concerning the writer visibility. In order to make comparison with the use of features by L1 English writers, essays from LOCNESS were qualitatively examined, too. This process allowed for investigation of distinctive linguistic patterns of writer visibility in L2 writing and identification of different degrees of writer visibility among different levels of L2 writing.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of normalized frequency (per ten thousand words) and Pearson chi-square tests of writer visibility features are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Normalized Frequency Per Ten Thousand Words (pttw) and Results of Chi-Square Tests on Writer Visibility Features

Category	Examples	YELC Basic	YELC Intermediate	YELC Advanced	χ^2 *p* value
Evaluative modifiers	*good, bad, delicious*	817	717	726	8.125 .017*
First person singular pronouns	*I, me, my, mine*	551	356	297	88.058 .000*
First person plural pronouns	*we, us, our, ours*	149	163	92	21.005 .000*
Second person pronouns	*you, your, yours*	20	13	12	2.533 .282
Emphatic particles	*just*	11	14	22	4.128 .127
	really	11	9	5	2.240 .326
Fuzzy words	*kind/sort of*	2	5	4	1.273 .529
	and so on etc	6	3	2	2.364 .307
Reference to situation of reading/writing	*here*	5	1	1	4.571 .102
	now	15	10	6	3.935 .140
	this essay	0	0	0	-
Imperatives		7	1	2	6.2 .045*
Questions		5	3	6	1.00 .607
Total		1599	1295	1175	70.433 .000*

Note. An asterisk indicates that the chi square value was statistically significant.

Most notably, the total frequency of writer visibility features declined from 1,599 in YELC Basic to 1,295 in YELC Intermediate and 1,175 in YELC Advanced, and the difference was statistically significant ($\chi^2(2) = 70.433$, $p < .001$). This suggests that YELC Advanced included writer visibility features significantly less than YELC Basic. This seems to give a positive answer to the first research question concerning the relation between the frequency of writer visibility features and the overall writing quality. In particular, the use of evaluative modifiers ($\chi^2(2) = 8.125$, $p = .017$), first person pronouns singular ($\chi^2(2) = 88.058$, $p < .001$) and plural ($\chi^2(2) = 21.005$, $p < .001$) showed a statistically significant value, indicating a meaningful relation between the three features and overall quality of writing. The imperatives, which also showed significant results of chi-square test ($\chi^2(2) = 6.2$, $p = .045$), were not included for qualitative analysis because the frequencies in YELC Intermediate and Advanced were minimal (i.e., less than five). In order to take a closer look at the differing degree of writer visibility in different levels of L2 writing, this study examined the use of evaluative modifiers and first person pronouns (singular and plural) in detail.

1. The Use of Evaluative Modifiers

Evaluative modifiers indicate the writer's judgment on a certain subject. Petch-Tyson (1998) noted that the frequent use of evaluative modifiers is a clear indication of writer visibility as they reveal writers' personal judgment on a subject. Evaluative modifiers include adjectives such as *good, bad, useful,* and *delicious*. The normalized frequency (per ten thousand words, pttw) of evaluative modifiers suggested that the advanced writers used evaluative modifiers less frequently (726 times) than the basic level writers (817 times), and the significant gap between the three corpora ($\chi^2(2) = 8.125$, $p = .017$) suggests that the frequency of evaluative modifiers is closely related with L2 writing quality. In other words, basic level writers tend to use evaluative modifiers more excessively, making their presence clearer in the writing, than advanced writers. The frequent use of evaluative modifiers in basic level writing is illustrated in Figure 1, where the writer showed a strong subjective stance by using evaluative adjectives such as *unadequte* (*inadequate*), *bad, good, famous, careless, many*, and *profound.*

> they are just children, so **unadequte** physical punishment can produce **bad** things. one of the france philosophier russau once said that physcial pushiment wasn't **good** at nurturing child in his **famous** book - emile. maybe due to his **careless** book, **many** people who dont't have **profound** knowing about teaching think it's really true. (YELC Basic)

FIGURE 1 The Use of Evaluative Modifiers in YELC Basic

In addition to the frequent use of evaluative modifiers in YELC Basic, qualitative examination on the three corpora suggested that the adjectives *good* and *bad* were the most commonly used evaluative modifiers. Table 3 shows the normalized frequency (pttw) of adjectives *good* and *bad* in the three corpora, and the results reveal that YELC Basic used the two evaluative modifiers most frequently (35 and 36 for *good* and *bad* respectively), followed by YELC Intermediate (16 for *good* and *bad* respectively) and YELC Advanced (9 and 14 for *good* and *bad* respectively).

TABLE 3

Normalized Frequency (pttw) of Evaluative Modifiers *Good* and *Bad*

Item	YELC Basic	YELC Intermediate	YELC Advanced
good	35	16	9
bad	36	16	14
total	71	32	23

The high frequency of *good* and *bad* in YELC Basic in comparison to YELC Advanced may suggest a hypothesis that basic level writers overuse generic evaluative modifiers while advanced writers choose alternatives to deliver more subtle and accurate semantics. This is demonstrated in examples from YELC Basic and Advanced in Figure 2.

> Teachers can make other punishment like making the **bad** guys not come school for a while or so. In this way, we could catch both golas : getting rid of phyical punishment, and making **bad** guys be good. But there could be an *absolutely* **bad** guy who dosen't care of not going to school. (YELC Basic)
>
> According to many recent studies, the percentage of students showing better grades and behaviors after series of physical punishment is small. This punishments could even make students *worse* - those students who became '*worse*' after punishments showed *terrible* scores, and **bad** behaviors, proving that physical punishment is *inappropriate* for teaching. (YELC Advanced)

FIGURE 2 The Use of Generic Evaluative Modifier *Bad* in YELC Basic and Advanced

In the example, a basic level writer used *bad* three times as marked in boldface without using any alternative, which is reminiscent of findings by Granger (1998) about L2 writers' overuse of familiar expressions. In contrast, the advanced level writer used several alternatives to *bad* such as *worse, terrible,* and *inappropriate* (as marked in italics), which seems to be an attempt to avoid repetitive use of *bad* in his writing.

In order to verify the hypothesis that the advanced writers use more alternatives of generic evaluative modifiers than their basic level counterparts, this study examined the frequency of synonyms of *good* and *bad* in the three corpora. As Oxford online dictionary defines it, a synonym is "a word or phrase that means exactly or nearly the same as another word or phrase in the same language" (synonym, 2015, para. 1). In other words, many

synonyms have similar meanings but with subtle semantic differences. Given that, the use of various synonyms of *good* and *bad* would suggest a writer's high awareness of subtle semantic differences of evaluative modifiers. The synonyms in this study were found in an online thesaurus dictionary, www.thesaurus.com, which provided 52 synonyms of *good* and 49 for *bad* respectively. In the three corpora of this study, 9 and 3 of them were used respectively, and their normalized frequencies are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4

Normalized Frequency (pttw) of Synonyms of *Good* and *Bad*

Item	Synonyms	YELC Basic	YELC Intermediate	YELC Advanced
good	*excellent*	0	0	1
	great	9	3	7
	nice	4	0	1
	positive	1	1	1
	precious	0	1	1
	valuable	0	0	1
	wonderful	1	1	0
	pleasing	0	0	1
	worthy	0	0	1
sub total		15	5	14
bad	*awful*	0	1	0
	incorrect	1	0	1
	unacceptable	0	0	1
sub total		1	1	2
total		16	6	16

The total frequency showed the same results in YELC Basic and Advanced (16 occurrences), but there seems to a different pattern in usage. In particular, the results of the synonyms of *good* showed that advanced writers used a wide range of adjectives such as *excellent, valuable, pleasing,* and *worthy*, which were not used by basic or intermediate level writers. Additionally, the basic level writers used a limited selection of synonyms with a strong preference for *great*. In terms of synonyms of *bad*, YELC Advanced showed higher frequency, but the difference between the corpora was minimal (2 vs. 1).

The investigation on evaluative modifiers showed two major findings in writer visibility: significantly frequent use of evaluative modifiers and repetitive use of a limited range of generic modifiers in basic writing. Compared to advanced level writers, basic level writers expressed their personal attitude and judgment on a given issue by frequent use of evaluative modifiers. Also, the different usage of writer visibility features across the three corpora was found as the basic level writers tended to overuse a limited range of generic evaluative modifiers such as *good, great* and *bad*, which may suggest limited lexical knowledge on L2 and low awareness on writer visibility. The qualitative results seem to suggest that basic level L2 writing showed a stronger presence with a more monotonous

and repetitive voice of the writer than advanced level writing.

2. The Use of First Person Singular Pronouns (*I, my, me, mine, I think*)

As a number of studies previously noted, the first person pronouns are one of the most significant indicators of the writer visibility (e.g., Biber, 1988; Breeze, 2007; Ringbom, 1998). In particular, the high frequency of the first person singular pronouns such as *I* and *my* in writing indicates that writers keep referring to self in the advancement of the argument. In this study, the frequency of first person singular pronouns showed a distinctive pattern in which the better the writing, the less frequently the first person pronouns were used. In YELC Basic, the frequency of first person singular pronouns was 551, which was reduced to 356 in YELC Intermediate and to 297 in YELC Advanced (Table 2). More importantly, the difference across the three corpora is statistically significant ($\chi^2(2) = 88.058$, $p < .001$), suggesting that writing of different levels showed significantly different frequency of first person singular pronouns.

The frequent use of first person singular pronouns in YELC Basic was exemplified in Figure 3. In the first writing, the use of first person pronouns indicated powerful authorial presence as opinion-holders and originators (Tang & John, 1999) such as *I claim* and *I now proclaim*. The second writing showed an example of the use of first person pronouns when the writer referred to a personal anecdote to argue against animal experiments. In this way, the writer used first person pronouns frequently, revealing one's presence explicit throughout the writing.

> **I**'m not being agree with the oppinion that proclaims women also should join the army. **My** oppinion is that the policy that makes thier people join the army involutarilly is wrong. Although there is a danger of war, Korea still has enough arms to handle with, **I** think. So **I** claim that the change of the impulsory policy is now needed in Korea. Another policy that make people volutarily join the army would make sense. So, **I** now proclaim that .... (YELC Basic)
>
> **I** think this is very difficult problem. **l** love animal. **I** had a cute brown rabbit, two puppys. They are very cute and **i** loved them. So when **my** pets died, **i** am very sad. (YELC Basic)

FIGURE 3 The Use of First Person Singular Pronouns in YELC Basic

In addition to the significant difference in the frequency across the three corpora, this study examined the use of writers' subjective stance markers, which revealed the clear presence of the writer through the use of first person pronoun *I*. Hasselgård (2009) identified several subjective stances and stance markers including first person pronoun *I* in L2 writing: *I believe, I think, I don't think, I guess, I suppose, I would say, I would like to say, I'm sorry to say, I would argue, I must emphasize, I know, I remember,* and *I'm not saying.* This study identified the normalized frequency of the stance markers in the three

corpora, and the results are reported in Table 5.

TABLE 5
Normalized Frequency (pttw) of Subjective Stance Markers

Subjective stance	Stance markers	YELC Basic	YELC Intermediate	YELC Advanced
belief/assumption (probability)	*I think*	62	25	15
	I don't think	2	2	1
	I believe	0	1	4
prefacing opinion (evaluation)	*I would say*	0	0	1
truth/fact	*I know*	0	1	0
total		64	29	21

The results showed that five stance markers were used in the corpora (*I believe, I think, I don't think, I would say,* and *I know*), and the total frequency of subjective stance markers showed a noticeable gap between the three corpora. The total frequency was 64 in YELC Basic, which was reduced to 29 in YELC Intermediate and 21 in YELC Advanced. This seems to indicate that the frequent use of subjective stance markers is substantially related with a low quality of writing. In particular, the most frequently used marker was *I think* in the three corpora, whose frequency was reduced from 62 in YELC Basic to 25 and 21 in YELC Intermediate and Advanced respectively. At this point, it should be noted that the use of *I think* not only suggested the writer's subjective stance or attitude (e.g., Hyland, 2005, 2006). However, studies found that *I think* is often excessively and ineffectively used in L2 writing, indicating strong degree of writer visibility in the text (e.g., Aijmer, 2001; Granger, 1998; Hasselgård, 2009).

In addition, the use of *I think* in L2 writing seems prevalent as an interpersonal metaphor for starting an utterance (Herriman & Aronsson, 2009). This is well demonstrated in Figure 4, as the writer used *I think* as a frequent but meaningless sentence starter, which may consequently interfere with the meaning of the writing (as marked in boldface).

> If Korea millitary really need that amount Korean guys, **I think** we have to do military service but if military don't need that amount, **I think** military should diminish number of military guys. because today, they get 80000 won for a month and **I think** this is too cheep .... and many highschool boys I knew want be a US Army , Navy , Airforce. **I think** this difference is difference of perception, and **I think** If they want upgrade military men's life quallity and perception of Korean people, Korea military sould diminish number of men and do something to upgrade life (YELC Basic)
>
> Rail travel has seen decreased popularity in recent years, due to the immense popularity of the car now. Some people may not use trains due to their seemingly unreliable services. Trains also fail to offer the freedom of choice available with cars, as the passengers are tyed to the timetables and locations of railway stations. **I think** that the government should help Britains transport by aiming to decrease the amount of car useage and increase the usage of buses, trains and other forms of public transport. (LOCNESS)

FIGURE 4 The Use of *I think* in YELC Basic and LOCNESS

In contrast, in the writings of native speakers in LOCNESS, *I think* seemed to be used as a booster to make an assertion (Brown, 1980), which is a strategic move to advance one's argument in the writing.

The examination on the use of first person singular pronouns in the three corpora showed significantly frequent use of the pronouns by basic level writers, displaying a strong presence throughout the text. The qualitative investigation on the use of subjective stance markers showed that basic level writers tend to use them more extensively than advanced writers. In addition, basic level writers tend to overuse *I think* as a dispensable sentence starter, instead of as a strategic booster of an argument. The results of the investigation on the use of first person singular pronouns and subjective stance markers suggested that basic level writers used the pronouns frequently, making their presence and subjective stance too apparent and dominant throughout their writing.

3. The Use of First Person Plural Pronouns (*we, our(s), us*)

The last feature of writer visibility examined in this study is the use of the first person plural pronouns *we, our(s),* and *us.* The normalized frequency of first person plural pronouns were reduced from YELC Basic (149) to YELC Advanced (92), and the difference across the three corpora was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 21.005$, $p < .001$). Despite a slight increase of frequency in YELC Intermediate (163), the results suggested that the use of first person plural pronouns showed a clear difference in the three corpora, hinting at different degrees of writer visibility.

Through qualitative analysis on the different use of first person plural pronouns across the three corpora, this study found a distinctive pattern of *we* frequently being accompanied by modal verbs of obligatory semantics such as *should, must* and *have to*, whereas native speakers' writing usually employs rhetorical strategies to advance obligatory stances as shown in Figure 5. This is in line with findings from previous studies (e.g., Aijmer, 2002; Hyland & Milton, 1997), which reported excessive use of obligatory modal verbs in L2 writing.

In Figure 5, every sentence of the writing includes obligatory modal verbs such as *must* and *should* with first person pronoun *we* (as marked in boldface). The L2 writer's high dependency on the linguistic devices to advance an argument is in stark contrast with a native speaker's writing sample, which shows logical development of an argument from simple facts to the writer's position (as underlined) without using obligatory modal verbs or first person pronouns. It seems that for native speaking writers, rhetorical strategies for logical development of an idea work as a tool to deliver a strong degree of obligation, the function of which was served by frequent use of a simple linguistic device (i.e., modal verbs) in the Korean student's writing.

To prevent this, **We must** reinforce the life-ethics educations saying to children that **we must** thank animals. And **we have to** make the concensus that **we must** thank about animal sacrification. In short, i think **we must** use the animals in experiments to develop the technology but also **we should** thank and think about animal's sacrification to prevent any side effects of the using animal in experiences. (YELC Intermediate)

Nuclear power is becoming increasingly prevalent in today' world, and just like all other forms of energy, it definitely does have its drawbacks. It has the capabilities of being unsafe and expensive in the beginning, but once it is used, nuclear power is much better for the environment, for people's lives, and better for the economic gain of the United States. It is with innovations like this that we move ahead in the world of energy. Nuclear power will truly be an asset to our revolutionary country of life, liberty, property, and the pursuit for a safer form of energy. (LOCNECSS)

FIGURE 5 Difference in Development of Arguments between Two Corpora

In order to closely examine differences in use of *we + modal verbs of obligatory semantics* across the three corpora, this study identified their normalized frequency as shown in Table 6. The modal verbs expressing obligation and necessity to examine in this study are *must, have to, should, ought to,* and *need to* (e.g., Coates, 1983; Hinkel, 1995; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1985). The total frequency of *we + modal verbs of obligatory semantics* is the highest in YELC Intermediate (22), followed by YELC Basic (20) and Advanced (9). With a significant decrease of frequency in YELC Advanced compared to YELC Basic and Intermediate, it seems fair to assume that the *we + modal verbs of obligatory semantics* showed meaningful differences depending on the overall writing quality.

TABLE 6

Normalized Frequency (pttw) of *we + modal verbs of obligatory semantics*

	YELC Basic	YELC Intermediate	YELC Advanced
we have/had/has to	10	5	0
we should	7	8	8
we need to	2	1	0
we must	1	8	1
total	20	22	9

Note. Normalized frequency of *we ought to* is none in all corpora examined.

In particular, it seems noteworthy that the pattern of *we should* showed only minimal differences across the three corpora, which calls for further investigation on the use of *should* with focus on various types of subjects and verb forms. In fact, frequent use of the *we + should* phrase in L2 writing has been reported by previous studies (e.g., Hyland & Milton, 1997; Li & Wharton, 2012). In particular, Li and Wharton (2012) noted that L1 English writers commonly employ non-animated and abstract nouns as subjects, while L2 writers often combine the use of the pronoun *we* and modal verbs *should* to highlight the

interaction with the readers. In this sense, an investigation on the use of *should* with different types of head nouns and verb forms would show a clearer picture on the difference across the three corpora.

As shown in Table 7, the two frequently used phrases are *animate head noun + should (not) active voice* and *non-animate head noun + should (not) passive voice* in the three corpora, but there seems to be a noticeable difference among the three corpora. That is, advanced level writers preferred a *non-animate head noun + should (not) passive voice* phrase (45%) more than their counterparts did (39% and 35% of basic and intermediate level writers respectively). In addition, basic level writers used *animate head noun + should (not) + active voice* phrase (47%) more frequently than other types of phrases. This seems to suggest that basic level writers prefer *animated head noun + should (not) + active voice* to make their presence clear in the writing, while advanced level students attempt to make their stance less visible and more objective by employment of non-animated head nouns in using modal verb *should*. The finding of this study was supported by some prior research, reporting that frequent usage of passive voice is a structural device to maintain objectivity in good writing (e.g., Hyland & Milton, 1997; Lachowicz, 1981; Smith, 1986).

TABLE 7

Normalized Frequency (pttw) of *Head Noun + Should + Verb* Patterns

Types		Examples	YELC Basic	YELC Intermediate	YELC Advanced
Animate head noun	*Should (not) + active voice*	*we should do*	21 (47%)	19 (33%)	21 (30%)
	should (not) + passive voice	*animals should not be used*	-	12 (20%)	9 (12%)
Non-animated head noun	*Should (not) + active voice*	*military should abolish*	4 (8%)	6 (10%)	7 (10%)
	should (not) + passive voice	*physical punishment should be banned*	17 (39%)	20 (35%)	32 (45%)
others	ungrammatical	*should smoking* internet should use**	3 (6%)	1 (2%)	2 (3%)
total			45 (100%)	58 (100%)	71 (100%)

The findings on the use of first person plural pronouns suggested that *we* is often used with modal verbs of obligatory semantics such as *must, should*, and *have to*, which is a common phenomenon in L2 writing to deliver the writer's personal argument (e.g., Aijmer, 2002; Hyland & Milton, 1997; Li & Wharton, 2012). Further, this study found that basic level writers used the *we + modal verb of obligatory semantics* phrases more frequently, making the presence of the writer more explicit in the text. In addition, the investigation on the use of *head noun + should (not) + verb* phrases suggested meaningful differences

across the three corpora, as *animated head noun + should + active voice* phrase was the most preferred phrase by basic level writers while *non-animated head noun + should + passive voice* was the most frequently used pattern in advanced writing.

In particular, it is noticeable that the basic level writers' preference of the *we + modal verb of obligatory semantics* phrase could be explained by the strong influence of L1 to basic level students. In Korean, the sentence structure 우리는 + (목적어) + 해야 한다 (*we + modal verb of obligatory semantics + object*) is a conventional pattern in argumentative writing. Given that, it seems that the basic level students, who were more vulnerable to the influence of L1 (e.g., Y. Kim & H. Yoon, 2014; Woodall, 2002), adopted the sentence structure of Korean and translated it into English in their writing.

4. The Use of Other Features (second person pronouns, emphatic particles, fuzzy words, reference to situation of reading/writing, imperatives, and questions)

Along the three writer visibility features showing statistically significant difference across the three corpora, there are six features, which did not show significant results in chi-square tests. Despite their statistical non-significance, it seems that there is a marginally visible pattern similar with the three above-mentioned features, i.e., the declining frequency of the writer visibility features from YELC Basic to YELC Advanced.

For instance, the use of second person pronouns showed reduced frequency from YELC Basic to YELC Advanced (from 20 to 12). In addition, reference to situation of reading/writing (*here* and *now*) and imperatives seemed to show a declining frequency from YELC Basic to YELC Advanced, hinting at a considerable difference in the frequency of writer visibility features across the three corpora. Although the results of emphatic particles (*just* and *really),* fuzzy words *(kind/sort of* and *and so on etc)* and questions showed no clear pattern in their frequency, the findings on the other features were meaningful to support the findings on the different degrees of writer visibility in different grades of L2 writing.

V. CONCLUSION

A number of studies have found high writer visibility in L2 writing (e.g., McCrostie, 2008; Paquot, Hasselgård & Ebeling, 2013; Petch-Tyson, 1998; Recski, 2004), but there have been limited studies exploring the relation between the degree of writer visibility and overall quality of L2 writing. Thus, this study explored the potential of quality-dependent difference in writer visibility in L2 writing. Of course, it should be noted that "personal

references and subjective attitudes are certainly hard to avoid especially in argumentative writing" (Recski, 2004, p. 3) because authors often intend to project their personal voice and attitude into the text. However, the value of this study lies in that it focused on the different degrees of writer visibility across different levels of L2 writing.

The results of this study revealed that basic level writing showed higher frequency of writer visibility features than advanced writing, indicating a meaningful relation between writer visibility and overall writing quality. In particular, the use of evaluative modifiers and first person pronouns showed statistically significant differences across different levels of L2 writing. Qualitative investigation on the evaluative modifiers and first person pronouns supported the finding that the frequent use of the writer visibility features made the presence of the writer explicit, which may indicate the writer's relatively low writing proficiency.

The findings of this study suggested a significant implication in L2 writing instruction which calls for more focused attention on the students' awareness of writer visibility. In L2 writing classroom, the appropriate degree of writer visibility can be taught through the instruction on the objective (third person) perspective, which would improve students' awareness on the writer visibility. In fact, the objectivity in English writing needs to be a crucial part of L2 writing instruction because of the highly subjective stance typically taken by L2 writers (e.g., Aronsson, 2003; Liu & Braine, 2005). In particular for Korean students, who displayed strong writer visibility in argumentative writing by citing personal experiences to support one's argument (C. Jung & H. Choe, 2014), it is important to teach them how to maintain an appropriate level of writer visibility while taking an objective perspective in L2 English writing.

In addition, for the reference of future research, it is meaningful that this study suggested three primary factors which seemed to exert a strong influence on the findings of the relation between the degree of writer visibility and writing quality. One of the most prominent factors would be the students' different awareness on writer visibility depending on their L2 writing proficiency. As they learned the conventions and rules of L2 English writing, advanced writers would be able to improve the awareness on appropriate level of writer visibility and learn various strategies to maintain the appropriate distance between the writer and the reader. On the other hand, basic level writers would not be able to have enough opportunities to improve the awareness on writer visibility, resulting in too dominant presence of the writer in the text.

Another important factor to consider is the influence of L1. Compared to the advanced writers, basic level writers are more vulnerable to the L1 influence as they rely on L1 knowledge to compensate the lack of L2 proficiency (e.g., Y. Kim & H. Yoon, 2014; Woodall, 2002). In this process, basic level writers are likely to adopt the L1 rules and knowledge and translate them into L2, making one's presence explicit inadvertently. In fact,

the qualitative examination of this study on the first person plural pronouns seemed to indicate the strong influence of L1 on the use of sentence structures in basic level students' writing.

Also, it should be noted that this study focused on the analysis of argumentative essays, in which the strong degree of writer visibility was considered undesirable. Given that, the results of this study can be explained as advanced writers showed less degree of writer visibility because they knew the conventions of English argumentative writing better than basic level writers did. Despite the inclusion of descriptive essays in the examined corpora, findings of this study were mainly about argumentative writing. It was because of the high proportion of argumentative essays (27,771 words) compared to descriptive essays (11,121 words) due to the different writing guidelines on the size of the essays (300 words vs. 100 words). In this sense, when future studies examine different genres of writing in various disciplines, we may expect rather different results from this study on the relations between writer visibility and overall writing quality (e.g., Gosden, 1993; Luzón, 2009).

Despite the meaningful findings, this study has several limitations, which would invite future studies to advance the investigation on the writer visibility. Due to the corpus-based framework of this study, it did not examine the voices of the writers through interview or questionnaire. Therefore, future studies could complement the findings of this study by taking a qualitative approach to examine the L2 writers' voices in relation to the use of features of writer visibility. In addition, this study only examined a small portion of a large corpus due to the limited numbers of essays in advanced grades. It is hoped that future studies will examine a larger volume of data to provide robust evidence related to the findings of this study. In addition, it is desirable that future studies investigate various ways to enhance students' awareness of writer visibility through instruction to improve writing proficiency effectively. Based on the findings of this study, it is strongly hoped that our understanding on the features of writer visibility will be further advanced to bear fruitful results in the development of L2 writing instruction.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Secondary/Tertiary

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