Saeedeh Shamsaee*

Mazandaran University of Science and Technology, Iran
saeedeh.shamsaee@ustmb.ac.ir

Mohammad Ali Shams

Babol University of Medical Sciences, Iran
neoshams@gmail.com

Josep Soler

Stockholm University, Sweden
josep.soler@english.su.se

THE INJUSTICE OF ACADEMIC PUBLISHING IN ENGLISH: IRANIAN MEDICAL DOCTORS' NARRATED EXPERIENCES

Abstract

The aim of the present study is to investigate the conceptions and beliefs of Iranian medical faculty members and their experiences in academic publishing in English. There has been a recent and heated controversy over the weight or even the very reality of such biases in the literature of publication research. To contribute to the debate from an empirical perspective, we approached 40 publishing Iranian faculty members (aged from 30 to 62) and elicited their narrated experience as writers/authors dealing with the perceived inequalities in scientific publication in English. Through thematic analysis, four categories were identified as the loci of interaction between the participants' self as micro academic agents and the macro agents in the academic community: 1) plagiarism and unauthenticity; 2) editing and inferiority; 3) journals' criteria and submission; and 4) reliance on students and seniority. In addition, semantic analysis of the adjectives used in the participants' narrated experience revealed self-image profiles that show how the faculty members perceive their authorial self in connection to the perceived structural and linguistic injustice in academic publishing. The findings suggest that linguistic (discursive) and structural (non-discursive) injustices in academic publishing are closely intertwined and must be investigated as such.

Key words

linguistic injustice, structural injustice, academic publishing, English, Iran, authorial self, academic identity, thematic analysis.

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* Corresponding address: Saeedeh Shamsaee, English Dept., Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Mazandaran University of Science and Technology, Sardaran 12 Aven., Babol, Iran.

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1. INTRODUCTION

For a long time now, the "publish or perish" motto in academia has been discussed and much criticized because of the pressure it puts on researchers, with its emphasis on quantity over quality. In recent years, Iran has been one of the countries where a focus on quantity has been felt so strongly (Mirhosseini & Shafiee, 2019). In 2000, the number of indexed scientific articles produced in the country was just above 1,500 (1,567), while in 2018, that number escalated to 48,305 (The World Bank, 2022). This places Iran in the third position worldwide as the country with the highest percentage increase of scientific articles, just after Malaysia and Indonesia. In this article, we present and discuss data collected among a group of doctors at a medical university in northern Iran. A focus on Iran is granted because, until now, very few studies have looked into the topic of academic publishing in English in this context (cf., Maniati & Jalilifar, 2018; Mirhosseini & Shafiee, 2019; Nejad et al., 2020); in addition, and at a more general level, English in Iran is symbolically associated with access to higher education and a connection to the wider world (Piller, 2010). However, as much as it may be valued as a resource in academic contexts, not all forms of English carry the same weight, meaning that knowing English in itself might not be enough to grant a speaker (or writer) a purported connection to the wider world, or to academic publication outlets more specifically.

The ministry of health and medical education manages 51 medical universities in Iran, and is similar to the ministry of science, research and technology in its recent emphasis on publication in international journals. The current study was conducted through a round of face-to-face interviews with faculty members across 30 medical majors whose professional promotion is dependent on the quantity of their scientific publications specially in English journals that exert additional pressure on the authors through demands for native-like writing, revision and editing. A total of 40 participants were asked about their experiences, feelings, and reactions towards academic publishing, with a focus on writing in English for publication purposes. Results show that both non-discursive and discursive (i.e., language-related) factors are at play in shaping these scholars' experience of academic publishing (Canagarajah, 1996). These include the pressures felt by scholars derived from institutional policies (Curry & Lillis, 2013), accusations of plagiarism (Yilmaz, 2007), or the need for articles to carry a proof of copy-editing certificate for them to enjoy a smoother path towards publication. We put these results in connection to recent debates on linguistic injustice and the role of English in academic publishing. Corcoran (2016) discusses the increasing tensions about linguistic injustice in research publications from the perspective of applied linguistics. In recent years, a controversial debate has unfolded around the question of whether or not language (i.e., English) is a (main) source of injustice in academic publishing. Some have argued it is not (e.g., Hultgren, 2019; Hyland, 2016), others maintain that it is (Flowerdew, 2019; Hanauer et al., 2019). This dichotomic view of the role of language in academic publishing might be problematic because it may reduce the

complexity of the entire process of academic publishing, and it tends to portray a view of language that is disassociated from the social conditions of academic and scientific production (Soler, 2021). Noting the interwoven relationship between both linguistic and non-linguistic factors in academic publishing, we argue that a broader viewpoint is needed to further scrutinize the status quo of academic publishing today.

2. INJUSTICES IN ACADEMIC PUBLISHING IN ENGLISH: BOTH LINGUISTIC AND STRUCTURAL

For a long time, applied linguists and sociolinguists have been aware of the centrality of language in the field of academic publishing (Baldauf & Jernudd, 1983). Already in the 1980s, there was a clear sense that scholars for whom English was an additional language found themselves in an unfair position vis-à-vis L1 English-speaking researchers when trying to get their work published in English-medium academic journals (St. John, 1987; Swales, 1990). This gave much impetus to the early work investigating the role of English for research publication purposes (ERPP) (e.g., Flowerdew, 1999, 2000; Swales, 1997), which proved to be highly influential in shaping the direction of research around the disadvantages facing multilingual scholars in the years after (Cargill & Burgess, 2008; Hanauer & Englander, 2011; Hanauer et al., 2019). However, and in parallel to that initial impetus, there was also an awareness that language alone could not account for all the reasons why academic publishing was (and is) such an uneven playing field. Canagarajah (1996) termed these other factors 'non-discursive requirements', including, *inter alia*, access to the relevant (and updated) literature in the field, and the availability of basic material resources for writing. Canagarajah's research has also been influential in subsequent work in ERPP (Curry & Lillis, 2017; Habibie & Flowerdew, 2023; Lillis & Curry, 2010, 2022; Navarro et al., 2022).

　　More recently, in the context of the crisis of the 'native speaker' concept (Bonfiglio, 2010; Doerr, 2009; Houghton et al., 2018) and a realisation that widespread multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception generally as well as specifically in academia, researchers have argued for the need to look beyond the native-non-native dichotomy in ERPP (Kuteeva & Mauranen, 2014). In essence, there has been a call to look even more closely to the 'non-discursive' elements shaping access to ERPP. In some cases, the downplaying of the linguistic factors has been very explicit, arguing that L1 background is no longer a relevant concern in academic publishing in English, and that at best, it should be treated as a contextual variable, less important than, for instance, level of expertise (Hyland, 2016). This line of argument, then, suggests that the linguistic privilege of L1 English-speaking scholars does not exist anymore, and as a result, it is no longer possible to talk about linguistic injustice in the field of academic publishing. Such position has been controversial, and others have responded that language (L1 status in particular)

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should still be considered the primary source of the injustice in ERPP (e.g., Corcoran, 2019; Flowerdew, 2019; Hanauer et al., 2019; Politzer-Ahles et al., 2016).

Hyland (2016, p. 67) does acknowledge that writing for scholarly publishing is a socially anchored practice, and that the skills required for academic publishing in English need to be learned in and through practice; they are not pre-given attributes to native speakers of the language, and pre-university education often is not advanced enough to build the required writing skills either (Hyland, 2022). However, it needs to be emphasised even more that authors do not engage in writing for publication purposes in a vacuum, detached from the socio-economic and political circumstances that surround them. In that regard, an intersectionality lens that sees language as a resource that mediates and reinforces social differences and inequalities (Martín Rojo, 2021) might be a better-suited approach to understand the challenging circumstances that many authors face in their attempt at disseminating their work internationally. While we may not adopt a fully intersectional approach in the analysis of our data below, we do look at our data with this mindset. This is important because, when conceptualised this way, language can be seen as the vehicle that channels and indexes differences of race, gender, and ethnicity (Kubota, 2020), which might make an impact in authors successfully having their work published in academic journals (Lillis & Curry, 2015; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007). This is why it seems important to stress that both linguistic and structural (or discursive and non-discursive) factors are at play when determining the degree of injustice authors may face in their attempt to publish their research in English-medium, internationally indexed journals.

Seeing language as mediating social differences and inequalities is the approach that we take in the analysis below. Some previous studies, including those with a focus on Iran, have embarked on a similar exercise. Maniati and Jalilifar (2018) report on the perceptions of Iranian scholars publishing in English; they highlight, among other themes, structural and linguistic issues that may lead to increased hurdles for these authors to getting their work published in English-medium journals (e.g., being asked to have the manuscript proof-read by a "native" speaker by the journal, but then not being able to use the services in the website provided, which does not accept credit cards issued in Iran). Lack of confidence as an L2 writer, unawareness of potential problems of plagiarism, biased comments by editors and reviewers, etc., are additional themes that Maniati and Jalalifar (2018) report in their study. Nejad et al. (2020) add that Iranian PhD researchers are strongly motivated to publish in English, but they too report both discursive and non-discursive obstacles in getting their work out in English-medium journals. They mention networking and support from experienced colleagues as crucial in the success of this exercise. Finally, Mirhosseini and Shafiee (2019) raise the point that the dilemma between writing in English or in the local/national language (Farsi, in this case) goes beyond a pragmatic calculation, and is an ideologically loaded question. That is exactly the area we aimed to investigate in the current study; Iranian academics' various considerations through the process of authoring and

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publishing research articles are not adequately explored. Moreover, the issue of ideology is a relatively prominent one in Iran given the crucial role of various ideologies in the creation of the Islamic republic in general, and the development of governing policies in higher education in particular. One cannot think of the effect of internationalization efforts on the quality of English articles or the academic identity of faculty members while ignoring the relationship between Iranian higher education policies and ideology. Therefore, Iran seems a reasonable case for exploring the entanglement of academic identity, organizational ideologies and authoring quality. In sum, as we shall see below, the themes reported by previous research have strong resonances to the study we present here. Next, we move on to present our data and methodology.

3. METHODOLOGY

The current qualitative case study aimed to explore the lived experience of medical faculty members via retrospection. To this end, semi-structured interviews were used to elicit the required data from the participants. This is in line with relevant research aiming to investigate the perceptions of experiences of those involved in academic publication processes from masters (Minaz, 2022) and doctoral students (Wakerkwa et al., 2019) to faculty members (Rashid & Amin, 2022) or editors and members of editorial boards (Fazel, 2018). Our method is also consistent with the recently increased emphasis placed on autoethnographic approach in publication research (Reyes, 2023). Semi-structured interviews such as Chien's (2019) during which the participants are invited to freely discuss their own experiences can be effectively used to identify the problems facing academic authors. In our study, one of the researchers interviewed a group of medical doctors (his colleagues) at a university in northern Iran to discuss the current challenges of scientific publication in the country. The inclusion criteria, collection details, and procedure of the study are briefly explained in the following sections. The informal nature of faculty members' complaints makes them very hard to grasp when it comes to conventional research methods; this chasm must be filled with methodological creativity and flexibility. This is where "ethnographically-flavoured interviews", as Bardi (2021) puts it, can nudge the interviewees to express their perceptions and beliefs on topics which are not usually very easy to examine due to their sensitive nature.

Few Iranian academics are willing to formally and overtly voice their concerns and complaints mainly for two reasons: 1) the complaints might be interpreted as a sign of weakness; and 2) the objections might have legal bearings or be socially unpopular. It means that voicing such concerns is thought to come at a high price endangering the dissidents' dignity or even entity. Our solution was to provide the faculty members with a safety net for expressing their opinions and experiences, including fears, anxieties, or any negative feelings that count as a problem in the context of publishing in academic English. This was achievable using a three-layered

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design that protected the faculty members from possible threats and breaches of their identity. We did not record their voice to ensure full anonymity (first layer); we translated and summarized their spoken Persian remarks into written English (second layer); and we analysed only selected excerpts from their speech (third layer). Therefore, the participants could be effectively assured that they can talk as freely as they want which was of great methodological significance to us. Informed consent was obtained orally, after participants had been explained the goals and rationale of the study.

3.1. Participants

Participants of the study were 40 (25 male and 15 female) faculty members aged between 30 and 62 chosen from several departments of a single medical university in northern Iran. The demographic and academic specifications of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Code	Field	Degree	Position	Gender	Publications
3	Nutrition	PhD	Professor	Male	85
11	Virology	PhD	Assistant P.	Male	62
2	Neurology	MD	Professor	Male	42
34	Traditional Persian Medicine	PhD	Assistant P.	Female	41
21	Histology	PhD	Assistant P.	Female	38
29	Pathology	PhD	Assistant P.	Male	37
31	Traditional Persian Medicine	PhD	Assistant P.	Female	37
40	Anesthesiology	PhD	Associate P.	Female	34
7	Traditional Persian medicine	PhD	Assistant P.	Female	31
25	Parasitology	PhD	Associate P.	Male	30
13	Cardiology	PhD	Assistant P.	Female	28
10	Biochemistry	MSc	Lecturer	Male	25
37	Anatomy	PhD	Professor	Male	24
24	Psychiatry	PhD	Assistant P.	Female	24
39	Nephrology	MD	Associate P.	Male	23
8	Internal Medicine	MD	Professor	Male	21
20	General surgery	MD	Assistant P.	Male	20
28	Physiology	PhD	Assistant P.	Male	19
35	Dental radiology	MD	Associate P.	Female	18
9	Gynecology	MD	Assistant P.	Female	18
23	Orthodontics	MD	Assistant P.	Male	18
1	Traditional Persian medicine	PhD	Assistant P.	Female	17
36	Pediatrics	MD	Associate P.	Male	15
27	Physiotherapy	PhD	Associate P.	Male	15

15	Social Medicine	PhD	Assistant P.	Male	13
5	Pharmacology	PhD	Assistant P.	Male	12
17	Rheumatology	MD	Associate P.	Female	12
4	General Dentistry	MD	Assistant P.	Male	10
18	Histology	PhD	Assistant P.	Male	9
33	Speech and language therapy	PhD	Lecturer	Male	9
38	Nutrition	PhD	Assistant P.	Female	8
19	Pathology	PhD	Assistant P.	Female	7
16	Anatomy	PhD	Assistant P.	Female	6
26	Dermatology	PhD	Assistant P.	Female	6
6	Anesthesiology	MSc	Lecturer	Male	5
22	Genetic engineering	PhD	Assistant P.	Male	5
12	Medical Education	MSc	Lecturer	Male	5
32	Nursing	PhD	Lecturer	Male	3
14	Orthopedics	MD	Assistant P.	Male	2
30	Parasitology	PhD	Assistant P.	Male	2

Table 1. The demographic and academic specifications of the participants

They were first approached by the interviewer (the second author of the current paper) to be informed about the purpose and procedure of the study, and more importantly to be assured about the confidentiality of the collected data. Due to the sensitive nature of the issue at hand and the direct reference that had to be made to official policies or personal experience, the assurance was of utmost significance and bore even greater weight compared to the usual routine regarded in most interview studies. It is worth mentioning that a number of other colleagues did hesitate and finally were discouraged by their own concerns to participate in the study and let their voice be heard. The high level of sensitivity also affected the instrumentation of the study, which is elaborated below.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Unlike the expected routine of interview studies that use the most advanced digital recording devices, we had to resort to the interviewer's mental notes which were immediately transliterated and reconstructed after the end of each interview. Voice recording was out of question since almost no faculty member in Iran can accommodate the idea of their recognizable voice being recorded while they are complaining about the policies or criticizing the status quo in the country's academic milieu. Although some participants had no problem with the interviewer's taking notes during the session, some others saw that as another solid evidence of their sensitive comments and asked for a completely informal talk with no trace of their names or demographic information. Therefore, for the sake of homogeneity all

Persian narrative accounts were only heard by the interviewer to be reconstructed in English in the manner explained above. The semi-structured interviews began with the following opening questions:

1) What are the main problems you have experienced in authoring, submitting, editing and publishing English articles?

2) How are the current publication policies or procedures affecting the quality of your work?
3) What changes are required to be made to improve the current situation?

It is worth noting that the participants were permitted to go beyond the above questions, and discuss any other aspect of publication processes that they felt was relevant, yet not directly mentioned by the interviewer.

The process of the study commenced with sample selection. Based on the information available to the interviewer with regard to the mindset of his colleagues at Babol University of Medical Sciences and of course their availability, a total number of 67 faculty members were approached and informed about the purpose and setting of the interview. Twenty-three cases refused to engage, and 4 participants failed to provide any representable data in spite of their previous promise for an open expression of opinions. However, 40 participants did manage to have an effective and fruitful presence in the session, and their recounts were organized into separate excerpts numbered from 1 to 40 and prepared for theme analysis and content analysis. The duration of the interview sessions ranged from 12 to 23 minutes. The analysis had two main phases: a) identifying the main themes emerging from the 40 interview transcripts; and b) a semantic analysis of 16 excerpts. The whole procedure of the study is shown in the following flowchart.
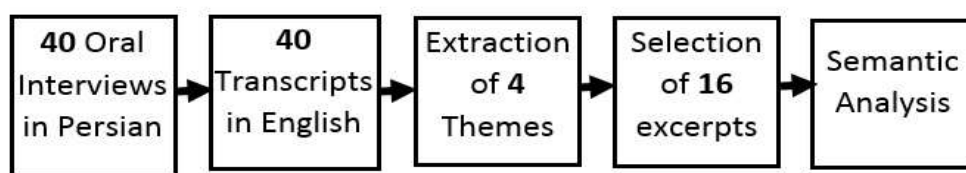
The first phase of analysis was set to find the recurrent themes emerging during the interviews and written down in the 40 transcripts as pieces of a single puzzle and components of the same corpus. Four themes were recognized, namely 1) Plagiarism, 2) Editing, 3) Journal's criteria, and 4) Reliance on students. Ivanic (1998) distinguishes author from writer. While authorship is rather concerned with the faculty members' accountability for the content of the writings in the context of their various interactions with other members of the academic community for the purpose of publishing, writership is more focused on the internal mechanics of writing. We used the author/writer dichotomy and labelled the faculty members'

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role in relation to each of the above themes respectively as follows: 1) Unauthentic writer; 2) Inferior writer; 3) Submitting author; and 4) Senior author. The last phase of analysis has a semantic nature in the sense that those adjectives or phrases representing an aspect of academic self-image (identity) on the part of faculty members are put together to come up with a general profile for the authors categorized under any of the four analytical themes. It should be mentioned that the semantic analysis was conducted only on the 16 excerpts extracted from the transcribed corpus. Details of the four lines of analysis built around the above themes are presented in the following section.

4. FINDINGS

The qualitative results of the study are divided into four subsections in accordance with the four main themes that came up in excerpt analysis. Figure 1 provides a visual introduction to the mentioned categories and their relationships.

Figure 1. Construction of academic identity through research publication

As the diagram in Figure 1 suggests, research publication is the locus of interaction between the authors' self (as micro agents) and the academic community (including macro agents). Writing is concerned with linguistic text while authorship goes beyond that and into the social context. Faculty members' academic identity takes form while interacting with editorial boards, editors, journals' criteria and their own co-authors (mainly students). In each division, four representative excerpts (altogether 16 excerpts out of the 40 transcripts) are discussed in terms of the self-other relationships that appear in the faculty members' sentences. Some words or phrases are marked (bold) to show the center of discussions. While the individual

analyses in this section are focused on the nuances and details of each excerpt, the discussion section includes collective summaries that wrap up each of the four subsections in semantic frames. The numbers associated with the excerpts refer to their place in Table 1. The double quotation marks indicate that these are excerpts from the interviewer's English account of the Persian interviews.

4.1. Plagiarism and unauthenticity

It is usually assumed that non-English researchers are more likely to commit plagiarism. Their non-native English writing becomes a locus rather prone to unconscious acts of plagiarism which is readily transcended as an unauthentic research performance. Four participants in the present study did voice relevant concerns in the interview and they are discussed below. The first one focuses on the slight difference between "copy and edit" and "copy and paste".

> **Excerpt 1:** I first **copy** the piece from a reference, and then try to **change** it so that I would not be **accused of plagiarism**. But it is not that easy. There are **limited** ways to change a sentence, and one would run out of alternatives very soon.

Excerpt 1 reveals how the struggle for paraphrasing heightens a sense of guilt combined with a mental atmosphere of confinement and limitation. The issue of plagiarism for a non-native speaker of English with little experience in writing is mostly oriented towards the linguistic surface of the text. They are always concerned with the high possibility of being labelled as a plagiarist, and their limited writing skills only worsen the situation. Therefore, it can be seen how the academic identity of a non-native researcher is constructed and distorted under the influence of a certain type of "learning anxiety" which is mainly induced from a legal position. The "accused" feels the extra burden of L2 writing, which can easily lead to unpleasant academic repercussions if the quantitative standards of plagiarism checker software are not met. The threat sometimes appears to be so serious that it could lead to deep negative feelings, as the next participant has explained.

> **Excerpt 9:** I am always **afraid** of writing something that is too similar to a part of a reference: I did not have this **phobia** before. When I see the numerous cases **flagged as plagiaristic** by journals in my field … well I become **doubtful about everything** I write.

Excerpt 9 reveals the depth of the fear associated with plagiarism and the harsh impact it can have on the feelings, identity and self-image of a given faculty member. The word "phobia" shows how stressed a scientific author can be when writing their sentences. They have become increasingly doubtful about the authenticity of their writings; in other words, their confidence in the originality and acceptability of their scientific production has diminished as a result of the negative

and discouraging feedback received from the journals. Here one can obviously see the direct impact of the gatekeeping publishers on the academic identity of a faculty member. The radius of this impact can be much greater than the rejection of a single paper. Any damage to the self-confidence of a scientific author can seriously compromise their academic identity as well. However, depending on the personality of the individual, instead of losing self-confidence, one might be driven into a rather aggressive stance projecting the problem on "the others" not self. Nevertheless, this is again an identity forming conception as Excerpt 10 shows.

> **Excerpt 10:** The problem comes from the **people who set the software limits** or thresholds for plagiarism. They should make the setting **more tolerant** so that a **reasonable amount of similarity** would be allowed.

This faculty member has taken a rather critical stance towards the journals' rules with regard to plagiarism by asking for a change in those rules instead of playing by the rules and tolerating the imminent threat of rejection. The participant talks about a group of people who seem to have an unquestioned power or privilege to determine the fate of others. This individual solely sees the problem in the system and tries to exonerate themself from any possible faults associated with plagiarism. In fact, they believe that if there is any unauthenticity it is on "them" not "me". The aggressive stance can become even sharper as a call for action rather than a mere verbal complaint. In Excerpt 12, a participant is using words like "need" and "have to" to show the urgency of the situation and the significance of building the momentum for change.

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> **Excerpt 12:** … we need **a movement to stop this**. The journals have to stop this **insane process** and put more effort into their reviewing system to make it **smarter** and **more logical** …

The idea of a "movement" against the "insane" editing demands made by journal is an interesting one particularly because it is concerned with a group identity and turns the separate individual identities of complaining faculty members to a collective sense of the oppressed self. This is also significant because of its active mood, which is totally different from the usual passive complaints without actual affect. Here not only is academic identity formation confined by publication processes, but also the binding element that constitutes the group identity of the dissident authors is a sense of resistance and confrontation with the established institutions and their rules.

4.2. Editing and inferiority

Article writers are inferior to journal reviewers. The sense of inferiority is significantly deepened when the writer is not a native user of English. Quite

expectedly this situation will take a great toll on the academic identity of the non-English researchers. In this subsection, four different reactions from four participants who were concerned with the issue of editing and inferiority it induces are discussed. The first participant reports a type of confusion that is very widespread among Iranian faculty members who receive vague and general comments from their reviewers.

> **Excerpt 3:** I have **revised** my article **several times**; but I still receive comments from reviewers saying that "**the language is too simple**" or "**it needs serious modifications**". I **don't know what** they are referring to.

The frustration imposed on the "editing writer" is clearly reflected in that "I don't know" at the end of this excerpt. They are lost in communication and cannot follow the journal's vague instructions. The sense of inferiority is induced in two ways here: 1) a lack of writing proficiency when composing the article, and 2) a failure in comprehending the written correspondence with the journal. Both cause the faculty members to seriously doubt their language proficiency in terms of skills and components. The repercussions of such a sense of inferiority can go well beyond the scope of the article at hand and harm the faculty member's academic self-confidence and independence in a much broader area. It would be also useful to explore the thoughts of a reviewer here. In the next excerpt, we saw the rare occasion of a faculty member who sees English as a barrier to scientific communication with their Iranian colleagues.

> **Excerpt 4 (A reviewer's point of view):** I often have **problem with expressing** myself in English. This is weird. **I am Iranian**, the author is Iranian too. **But the medium** for making and receiving comments **is English**. Does this really make us more **international?**

The question raised by this faculty member is worth contemplating upon. The process of internationalization of higher education is expected to promote the place of the academic institutions and contribute to the formation of firm and stable academic identities. Here the reviewing agent is questioning the process because the product does not seem reasonable. The use of English as lingua franca between two non-native speakers with the same mother tongue is seen as an excessive and meaningless act of over-internationalization. In the face of journal's constraining criteria for reviewers, the academic self is struggling to preserve their right to use L1 when the use of L2 is not necessary. This is a dispute provoked around the issue of inferiority. Sending English comments to a fellow Farsi speaker, the faculty member is wondering "Who am I?" which is the central question when it comes to identity. As paradoxical as it may sound, one can argue that here the academic identity of the faculty member is being established by defying the internationalization standards rather than conforming to them. Another form of

critical confrontation with the standards and routines can be observed in the form of a metalinguistic awareness that is evident in the next excerpt.

> **Excerpt 5:** … most of my **Farsi articles** include **pieces of translation** from English references. And to produce English articles, I have to **first write in Farsi**, and then **translate** it to English; and it is **a scientific Farsi that is rooted in bad translations** from English to begin with!

Here the issue of inferiority is addressed from a translation point of view. In Translation studies, the translated text is mostly considered inferior to the original one since it can never convey exactly the same content. Now in academic writing and publication, any act of translation can easily jeopardize the authenticity of the authorship and represent the writer as a second-hand translator who only makes English patchworks out of inauthentic materials previously and poorly translated from English. There is a deep chasm between authorship as an initiative enterprise and translation as a considerably less creative process. When the writing process is reduced to translation from and to English, the authorial self of the faculty member can be dramatically overshadowed and dominated. However, it is imperative to keep in mind that not everybody sees editing as an inferiority-inducing process. The next excerpt represents the minority of Iranian faculty members who are satisfied with the status quo.

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> **Excerpt 37:** My English is **not very good**; but that can be **easily managed** with the help of translators and editors. I really **do not get any of the complaints** made by many of my colleagues in regard with the dominance of English or a sort of **inequality or bias** against us.

This interviewee is one of the rare cases that has no worries with regard to the dominance of English or any linguistic injustice associated with it. Although this attitude is not representative of the general mental atmosphere of our subject, it should not be overlooked or ignored for the sake of majority. As a matter of fact, not everyone is complaining and faculty members like this one do exist and do play a role in constituting the Iranian academia's reaction to the publication procedures. This excerpt was intentionally included in our analysis not to miss the voice of the minority.

4.3. Journals' criteria and submission

Scientific journals are the immediate environment for submitting authors. It is through the journals' actions, rules and reaction that faculty members can gradually build an understanding of their relevant academic community. Therefore, the issues raised by the four participants selected for this category are closely related to the construction or deformation of academic identity. The first participant is criticizing

the functionality and rationality of the use of English specially in majors that are independent from the English literature.

> **Excerpt 7:** Many concepts and **nuances in our Arabic references** [for traditional Persian Medicine] **cannot be articulated in English** even by a native speaker. It is in this situation that our "English" is being assessed by some native speakers of English. It is **not fair at all**.

Although the issue raised by this faculty member in a traditional Persian medicine department at first seems only relevant in case of this particular field of study because of its reliance on the Arabic language, it can be extended to other majors as well. The underlying assumption that "English is not enough for us" does appear frequently elsewhere. The assumed linguistic discrimination mentioned in this excerpt can severely affect one's attitude towards self and others, hence forming a certain dimension of academic identity that is mainly concerned with unjust criteria that need to be adjusted. When the medium of internationalization, English, is framed as the very means of discrimination and oppression against non-native speakers of English, the author constantly sees the journals' regulatory criteria as power structures that hinder rather than foster the authors' individual, institutional and national interests. The next participant criticizes another aspect of journals' criteria and questions the reliability and validity of their plagiarism-checking software.

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> **Excerpt 8:** We see **preposterous requests** for modification; I mean the sentence is totally written by me without any copying from other sources; but still I am **asked to paraphrase** it. Well, to be honest, I think there is **something seriously wrong** with that software.

This faculty member has confidence in themself but is considerably dubious about the legitimacy of the requests made by the journals and of course the mechanisms that produce those requests. Here we see that the authorial identity is formed out of a conflict with the gatekeepers of the academic community. Therefore, if any academic identity is being constructed, it is one of despair and animosity rather than motivation and convergence. One would wonder about the extent of occupational satisfaction that such an identity would bring. Feelings of burnout and dissatisfaction can increase to a level that makes the researchers to even question the sincerity of journals.

> **Excerpt 13:** There are **much deeper stuff going on** under the surface of our publication systems, and their reviewing process. I think their **motives** are basically and mainly **financial**. Journals **pretend to be strict** so that they can find **pretexts** to refer us to editing agencies. I am sure **that there is a relationship** between them.

This faculty member suspects the sincerity of the journals and editing agencies on the grounds that the apparently strict measures applied by the journals cannot have an academic purpose since they do not provide the researchers with any meaningful comments and rather use ambiguous general comments that require the authors to involve editing agencies in the process and pay significant amounts of money to them. Of course, we cannot confirm the claim in the absence of convincing evidence. However, the recognition and attending to such suspicious attitude on the part of the faculty members should not be overlooked. Even if the claimed unhealthy relationship between the publication organizations is a myth, the factors contributing to the sceptical atmosphere have to be identified and dealt with in an effective manner. The next participant provides a critical and quite sceptical evaluation of the current direction of international scientific publication in general.

> **Excerpt 20:** I believe that the whole **reviewing** business has **gone astray**. Journals have **lost sight of the original goals** of anti-plagiarism and have become involved in an artificial and **superficial** process of **stigmatization**.

The interesting point in this final excerpt is that it goes beyond personal interests and voices a deeper concern about the whole enterprise of publishing and specially reviewing. The divergence of current practice from the ideal goals has made this faculty member question the very philosophy of such actions. Here not only is the academic identity of the faculty member deformed by the organizational pressures, but it is also formed in the process of evaluation and confrontation. To be able to evaluate the current practice, an individual's identity needs a basis that precedes and stands independent of that practice. This particular individual is adhering to the theoretical standards; the use of the term "astray" can only have meaning when the "way" is clearly defined.

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4.4. Reliance on students and seniority

Article writing is only one of the duties of faculty members. First and foremost, they are teachers or theses supervisors in charge of a number of students. This subsection is allocated to those excerpts that focus on the interaction of article writing as the main research activity of faculty members and supervising as their most important teaching job description. The first participant explains how reliance on a student in article writing can bring a painful sense of regret that is detrimental to academic identity.

> **Excerpt 2:** One of my articles was **rejected** because of **plagiarism**; I could not believe it at first. … But when I examined it more closely, I realized that they were right. The fact is that the article was **mostly written by my student**, and I only had a cursory look at it, and I deeply regret it now.

Here the author's reliance on their student has led to a disaster. Not only was the seniority of the author as a guiding supervisor not realized, but also his academic prestige was badly diminished down into a black list made to mark and punish plagiarist authors by depriving them of any chance of acceptance at least in the near future. In such cases the author is either totally aware of the wrongdoing or partially blind to it; the guilt associated with the latter is slightly less embarrassing but still serious enough to damage the academic identity of the so-called senior author. One might wonder why such situations occur to begin with. In other words, what mentality can lead to such careless practice on the part of a faculty member? The answer can partially be found in the next excerpt.

> **Excerpt 26:** My **students write** the article. Then I take a **cursory look** and submit it as the corresponding author, and wait for reviewers' comments. Well, since I was **not involved** in its formation from the beginning, I prefer to **stay aside** and transfer everything to them. I am more of **a project manager** rather than an author.

The description provided by this faculty member bears indifference towards the deformation and subversion of natural (ethical) professor-student relationship. The fact that the professor is using the students to do the work is expressed with such neutral tone that makes one wonder if the professor even recognizes the immorality involved here. The "staying aside" mentioned by the professor here is not limited only to one paper; this seems like a dangerous withdrawal from the natural elements of authorship which is central to academic identity. The interviewee's euphemistic use of the term "project manager" can be considered an attempt to cover the identity problem mentioned above. In addition to euphemism, other techniques are also used to sugar-coat the unethical practice of excessive reliance on students. That is why the next participant is proposing a smart version of "the end justify the means" argument.

> **Excerpt 29:** In the current **competitive environment**, when I see my colleagues producing articles … I emphasize … **not writing, only producing** articles through a chaotic and hasty procedure of reliance on outsiders … well I **feel obliged** to do the same **not to lag behind** and lose any scores. It **feels bad**, but seems inevitable.

The faculty member is concerned with the preference of quantity over quality. The emphasis put on the act of "production" rather than "writing" shows how the nature of this central academic activity is perceived to have dramatically changed under the "publish or perish" pressure. The quality of writing as a creative process is compromised in order to meet the quantitative requirements of the academic organizations. The faculty member "feels bad" on the one hand, but is not willing to move away from the herd because their very academic existence seems to depend on staying with the crowd and following the rules that have no respect for quality. Fortunately, some faculty members do learn a lesson from previous mistakes and try to correct their behaviour. This can be considered a positive and constructive

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effect on the academic actions that build the identity of any individual. The next participant is such a case, albeit rare.

> **Excerpt 33:** I **assigned a student to translate** a Farsi article of mine to English. Then **without reading** the English version, I submitted it to an international journal which labelled the language 'ambiguous'... many parts were very **hard to grasp** ... I **regret** it now; but sadly, that pattern is **still the common practice** of many of my colleagues.

In this case the authorial identity of the faculty member is deformed when it comes to English translation of the original paper. The transfer of the translation task to the student is inevitably working towards the subversion of the original academic identity of the professor. Here reliance on the student is aggravating the situation specially when the professor fails to even adequately revise the English version. Medical and technical academicians in Iran usually do not attach much significance to the language of their works thus consider the translation from Farsi to English a superficial and routine task that does not require their direct presence or even supervision. This attitude is rooted in a superficial understanding of academic English and its complexities including citation practice.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The detailed analyses of the sample excerpts provided in the previous section need to be discussed within a single collective framework. This is presented in Table 2 that summarizes the results of the semantic analysis focusing on the identity related adjectives used by the participants. In other words, each section of the table presents a semantic summary for one of the four most salient issues mentioned in the results section above. The academic identity of the authors is crystalized in their wordings while discussing different aspects of the relationship between their "self" and "others" during the process of research publication. While the results section was focused on the role of "others", here we discuss the effect of "others" on the "academic self" of the faculty members. This is important because it is closely tied to academic identity construction as one of the central concepts in the present study.

Each of the 16 chosen excerpts has received a general label that captures the gist of the remarks made by that specific interviewee. In addition, three main adjectives drawn from the excerpt under analysis are presented as an identity-related semantic profile. Therefore, the four labels and 12 adjectives that are found in each section of Table 2 show a range of reactions all of which being focused on the topic of that section e.g., "unauthentic writer" as one of the four emerging themes that appeared when analysing the whole corpus including all the 40 transcripts.

Unauthentic Writer (4 excerpts)			
Guilt	*Fear*	*Reform*	*Resistance*
Unauthentic / Captive / Threatened	Degraded / Monitored / Shaky	Reformist / Looking Up / Exonerated	Confronting / Demanding / Proposing
Inferior Writer (4 excerpts)			
Confusion	*Miscommunication*	*L1*	*Conformism*
Less than others / Unsuccessful / Unwitting	Blamed by self / Nationally bound / Voiceless	Debased / Unoriginal / Aggravating	Admitting / Dependent / Conformist
Senior Author (4 excerpts)			
Disengagement	*Hate*	*Regret*	*Justice*
Alienated / Indifferent / Evasive	Lagger / Resentful / Entangled	Refused / Remorseful / Clueless	Employer / Careless / Apologetic
Submitting Author (4 excerpts)			
Injustice	*Irrationality*	*Insincerity*	*Irrelevance*
Proud / Hegemonized / Misconceived	Independent / Criticizing / Hurt	Suspicious / Confident / Aware	Original / Vigilant / Deep

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Table 2. Identity related adjectives in the faculty members' accounts of research publication

The summary of semantic analysis conducted on the selected excerpts that are categorized under the theme "*plagiarism*" is presented in section 1 of Table 2. The academic identity of a non-English researcher writing in English might be inclined to a passive or active stance when it comes to the issue of plagiarism. The most passive state is guilt, where the faculty member is totally devastated by the external pressures. Fear is slightly less passive since it is associated with a possible threat in future rather than with an established accusation in the past. Those who can

overcome these two passive feelings, can move towards more active stances including reform and resistance. While a reformist faculty member merely hopes for change, an activist one calls for a collective momentum for action that could lead to real and rather sudden change in the state of affairs.

The summary of semantic analysis conducted on the selected excerpts that are categorized under the theme "*editing*" is presented in section 2 of Table 2. Confusion of non-English writers when facing the reviewers' vague comments can become too problematic and lead to miscommunication specially when both parties are non-native users of English. This annoying and unnatural situation makes some faculty members to question the rationality of the current regulations; however, some other members of the academic community not only accept the status quo, but also defend it as natural and correct. Therefore, the issue of editing can engage the academic identity of faculty members across a wide range of conceptions from feeling voiceless to total satisfaction and conformism. Although the latter is not as frequent or salient as the former, both exist and had to be accounted for in the present study.

The summary of semantic analysis conducted on the selected excerpts that are categorized under the theme "*reliance on students*" is presented in section 3 of Table 2. As it was discussed above, faculty members can have various reactions to negative results of reliance on their students in article writing, translation, editing and submission. Faculty members are the middle ring in the hierarchy of power starting from journals and ending with their students. It seems that some faculty members avoid facing the inferiority induced by journals in the process of submission and editing. This is mainly done by misusing the superior position of a supervisor and involving the students in article writing in ways that are not very ethical. In other words, these faculty members cover up the failures of their own academic identity by imposing their own duties on students who stand below them in the structure of power. Here the faculty members are both victims and factors of structural problems in research publication. The next section attends to the role of journals who stand above the authors and form the main side in the triangle of supervisor, student and journal.

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The summary of semantic analysis conducted on the selected excerpts that are categorized under the theme "*Journals' criteria*" is presented in section 4 of Table 2. Most of our participants took a very critical stance towards the journals and their criteria. Regardless of the factuality of these claims, one should be concerned with their mental effect on the academic identity of the sceptic faculty members. The main labels given to the remarks of the four selected participants in this section and the adjectives extracted from their excerpts show that when it comes to the action of "others" as opposed to "self", our participants have behaved rather homogeneously. While in other sections, opposing views could sometimes be observed across the excerpts as diverse as justice and injustice, here all participants are unanimously critical of journals' criteria and each approaches the issue from a certain point. According to these evaluations, journals' criteria are neither adequately ethical nor sustainably reliable. It is significant to note that taking such

a critical stance has created a range of positive aspects for the academic identity of the faculty members from independence and confidence to vigilance and originality. Nevertheless, those negative feelings that resemble some of the similar conceptions in the previous three sections should not be overlooked as either.

To conclude, the group of doctors interviewed for the present study are acutely aware of how much institutional policies push them to publish at all costs (Curry & Lillis, 2013). In addition to that, journal editors place subtle but consequential demands on submitting authors: they frequently recommend that articles carry a certificate to demonstrate that the texts have been edited and proofread by a language professional. Often, journals can suggest specific language editing companies that can issue such certificates (naturally, for a fee). Articles carrying these proof of review documents have higher chances of enjoying a smoother route towards publication, a tip of the iceberg indication of the high level of corruption in academic publishing in the country (Sadeh et al., 2019). Finally, authors feel constrained by the need to write and publish in English. They frequently face accusations of plagiarism and feel highly insecure as contributors to science given their self-perceived low proficiency in academic English. This is particularly true for doctors working in areas in which they can place higher claims of disciplinary knowledge such as Traditional Persian medicine.

The data presented and discussed in this article suggest that even though it may be possible to bend the rules of what seems to be established and conceived as "standard" academic written English, and that some agentive power on the part of authors might sometimes be possible (Canagarajah, 2022), it is also chiefly important to put emphasis on the unequal structural position from which authors in different positions in the academic field enter the very field. For some, therefore, English will very frequently tend to be more of a fence than a bridge, in Kuteeva's (2023) recent terminology, which might be especially damaging for both knowledge flows and legitimation of voices, even in areas where authors from geopolitical peripheries might be able to claim more authority. The long-lasting assumptions made about English as the indisputable lingua franca in research publication are recently challenged arguing that it does not necessarily promote inclusion, and even might contribute to unequal distribution of knowledge production and uptake (Navarro et al., 2022).

In summary, linguistic injustice in academic publishing seems to be closely intertwined with structural inequities. This is not to disregard the important role of discursive factors (e.g., Flowerdew, 2019) as well as other matters, including degree of experience and seniority in the field (e.g., Hyland, 2016), but presented in binary terms might not be the most effective in grappling with the complexity of the matter at hand (Soler, 2021). Instead, a third perspective grounded in empirical work and appreciating the entanglement of multiple factors might be more useful. The academic identity of authors in peripheral positions trying to publish in English is partially but indispensably constructed through their writing experiences. Therefore, any sense of inferiority, insecurity or injustice rooted in their written

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linguistic endeavours, as we have shown here, is concurrently linked to the existing structural biases in academic publishing and has to be investigated accordingly. Further research can look into various dimensions of the experiences of plurilingual EAL (English as an additional language) scholars who can provide insight into the discursive factors in research publication.

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SAEEDEH SHAMSAEE is Assistant Professor in TEFL at the Department of English, Mazandaran University of Science and Technology. Her research interests include foreign language policy, educational identity and academicians' perceptions of research. Her papers are available in journals such as *Journal of Technology and Education* and *National Studies Journal*.

MOHAMMAD ALI SHAMS is Assistant Professor in TEFL at the Department of English, Babol University of Medical Sciences. He is interested in narrative approach to applied linguistics research and retrospective protocol analysis of non-native speakers' narrated linguistic experiences. He has recently published research in *Interdisciplinary Studies in English Language Teaching*.

JOSEP SOLER is Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics at the Department of English, Stockholm University. He specializes in the study of language ideologies and on the macro-micro dynamics of language policy configuration in different settings, with a focus on internationalizing higher education systems. Josep's research has appeared in journals such as *Language in Society*, *Journal of Sociolinguistics* and *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*. He is the author of *Language policy and the internationalisation of universities* (Mouton de Gruyter) and "Linguistic injustice in academic publishing in English: Limitations and ways forward in the debate" (*Journal of English for Research Publication Purposes*).

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