

## Individualities in the Referents of *I, we, and you* in Academic Lectures across Disciplines

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### Abstract

Studies on the referents of *I, we, and you* (the tri-PP) in academic lectures across disciplinary supercommunities: Humanities (HS), Social Sciences (SS), and Natural Sciences (NS) are relatively not many. The few ones done limit themselves to commonalities in the referents across DSs. This paper thus appears the first of its kind to investigate individualities in the referents of the tri-PP in university lectures across the three disciplinary supercommunities. A 116, 000 corpus of undergraduate academic lectures audio-recorded from disciplines in the HS, SS, and NS in universities in Ghana was built for the study. The concordance tool in *AntConc* was used to search for the tri-PP and their variants in the corpus. The referents were identified based on contextual, co-textual and pragmatic indicators. The study revealed that there are referents of *I, we, and you* peculiar to individual Humanities, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences. The referents for the tri-PP across the DSs were either metadiscursive or non-metadiscursive alluding respectively to participants in the discourse internal and external worlds. The findings deepen our understanding on the metadiscursive and non-metadiscursive roles in academic lectures, and the “degree of mono-disciplinary homogeneity” (Hyland, 2000, p.10) with respect to the pragmatics of personal pronouns in academic lectures.

**Keywords:** Academic Lectures, Corpus Linguistics, Disciplinarity, Personal Pronouns, Referents

### 1. Introduction

There are dipartite, tripartite, and quadripartite approaches to classifying academic disciplines (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Hyland, 2009; MacDonald, 1994; Gholipour & Saeedi, 2019). Hyland (2009) adopts the tripartite approach and classifies disciplines into three disciplinary supercommunities (DSs): Humanities (HS), Social Sciences (SS) and Natural Sciences (NS). Generally, studies in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) that adopt the tripartite approach seek to discover rhetorical and discursive choices informed by shared norms and conventions across the DSs. Over the years, scholars have investigated the referents of *I, we and you* in academic lectures by adopting either the dipartite approach (Yeo & Ting, 2014), tripartite (Plaza & Alvarez, 2013) or quadripartite (Yaakob, 2013) approaches. The focuses of the studies that adopt the tripartite approach like Plaza & Alvarez (2013) can be represented in Figure 1 below.

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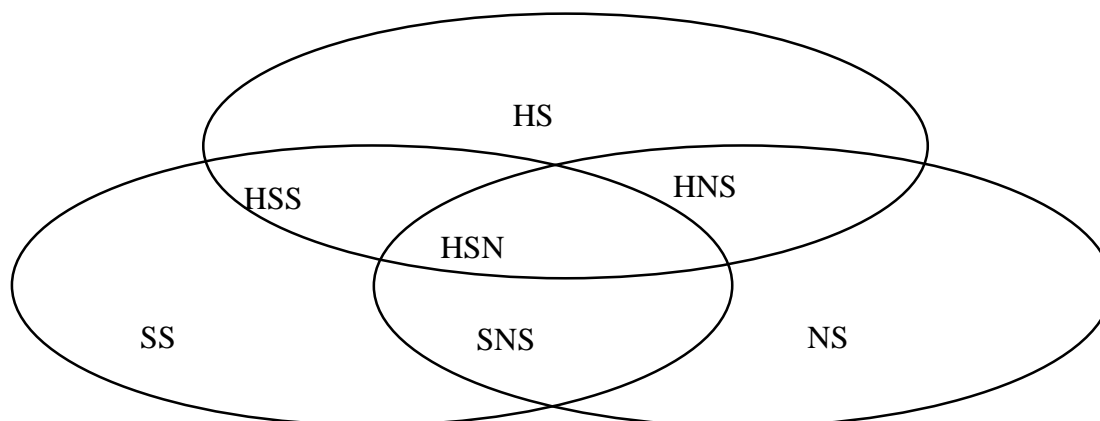


Figure 1: DS Interrelationships

HSN represents the intersection of all the three broad knowledge domains. Studies in this section are interested in the referents of *I*, *we* and *you* (the tri-PP), which transcend disciplinary boundaries (Plaza & Alvarez, 2013; Yaakob, 2013; Yeo & Ting, 2014). The domains represented by HSS, HNS, SNS focus on referents shared by two DSs only. The last ones HS, SS and NS focus on tri-PP referents specific to individual knowledge domains. The first two are informed by shared conventions, norms and practices but the last is influenced by disciplinary specificities and uniqueness in norms, conventions, practices, and philosophies.

To date, studies on the tri-PP in academic lectures have sought to explore the referents of the tri-PP common to all the DSs with corpora from L1 contexts (Yaakob, 2013; Yeo & Ting, 2014). Although interested in disciplinary variation, these studies limited themselves to the commonalities of the referents of the tri-PP across disciplines. Yaakob (2013) used a corpus of lecture-introduction from MICASE and examined the referents of tri-PP across Arts/Humanities, Social, Life and Physical Sciences, and found that *I* designated lecturer, student and lecturer + student across the four broad knowledge domains. Similarly, *we* also referred to lecturer, students, lecturer + students, people in general, and people in the field. Furthermore, *you* was used to allude to students, anyone, and anyone in the field. On the other hand, Yeo and Ting (2014) used a 37 373 lecture-introduction corpus to investigate the referents of the tri-PP across Arts and Science. In relation to *I*, *we* and *you*, they found *I* for *I*, and what they term *I...to...you*; *we* for *you* + *I*, *we* for *I*, *we* for *you*, and *we* for *I* and *they*; and *you*-audience, and *you*-generalised respectively. Both Yaakob (2013) and Yeo and Ting (2014) used lecture-part corpora although they differed in their approaches to disciplinary classification. The present study is, therefore, the first attempt to examine individualities in the referents of *I*, *we* and *you* in academic lectures across disciplines, using full-lecture corpus from L2 context. The previous studies interested in commonalities in tri-PP referents across disciplines help us to appreciate the common core view on disciplinary variation that argues that the DSs are characterized by some *pronominal referent universals* (Yaakob, 2013; Yeo & Ting, 2014; Rounds, 1987a & b). While this view has significant implications for teachers, students, EAP practitioners and curriculum developers, it does not present the full realities of disciplinary variation as they overlook *pronominal referent particulars*, which the present study examines. Thus, the present study would help stakeholders in EAP to appreciate how individual DS's distinctiveness influences the referents of the tri-PP in academic lectures. In the subsequent sections, corpus and methods, results and discussions, and conclusions are presented.

## 2. Methodology

2.1. Corpus Source and Size

The laborious, time consuming, and expensive nature of developing a spoken corpus (Fox, 1992; Meyer, 2002; Nelson, 1996; Yaakob, 2013) has caused many researchers to utilize already existing, and readily available corpora. Some researchers resort to existing corpora since they may be some readily available ones that can answer their research questions (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). With the present study aiming to explore the discourse referents of *I, we and you* in Ghanaian university classroom lectures, there was the need to create a corpus that is absolutely Ghanaian.

Consequently, undergraduate academic lecturers from two universities in Ghana (i.e. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, and University of Cape Coast) were audio-recorded for the study. These universities were selected because of my affiliation as a member of staff, and student respectively. My affiliation thus facilitated access to the lecturers, who for the sake of collegiality, allowed me to record their lectures to be included in the corpus for this research. All the lectures included in the corpus were English-medium, spontaneous (not scripted), given by Ghanaian Senior Faculties; from large classes comprising regular undergraduate students, and from first semester introductory courses. The lectures were manually transcribed (guided by transcription conventions for adapted from Jefferson 2004; Simpson, Briggs, Ovens & Swales (2002), and processed into computer readable form. Academic lectures involve interaction between lecturers and students where both participants talk (Ädel, 2010; Rounds, 1987a & b). However, given that the focus of the paper is on the tri-PP used by lecturers, only the lecturer-talks were included in the corpus.

Table 1: Disciplinary Supercommunities and Subcorpora Word Counts

Disciplinary Supercommunities	Word Counts
Humanities	36 586
English Language	
Philosophy	
Religious Studies	
Social Sciences	43 916
Law	
Communication Studies	
Political Science	
Educational Foundations	
Natural Sciences	34 622
Electrical Engineering	
Mathematics	
Biology	
Total	115, 124

Table 1 shows the DSs and the individual disciplines, the sizes of the subcorpora and the overall total. Admittedly, the size of the corpus is relatively small. Lee (2009) has opined that the size of a corpus *matters* in research. This, has engendered debate among corpus linguists. Some scholars (e.g. Fox, 1992; O’Keeffe, McCarthy & Carter, 2007; Sinclair, 2004) advocate a large corpus study, arguing that this provides a realistic representation of the occurrence of the use of a particular linguistic variable, and that small corpora “impose certain limitations on the generalizability of the findings” (Blackwell, 2010, p. 6). Fox (1992, p. 53), therefore, asserts that “...the bigger the corpus, the more chance there is of finding examples which are both natural and meaningful...” Fox’s (1992) position re-echoes the maxims “small is not beautiful; it is simply a limitation” (Sinclair, 2004, p. 189) and “the lengthier the corpus, the better” (Meyer, 2002, p. 33). While this is true to some extent, Koester (2010) asserts that mega-corpus usually suffers from superficial analysis.

In spite of the immense contribution of large corpora mainly concerning the fuzzy and the debated term *representativeness*, smaller specialized corpora have been found to be useful in language studies, to

reflect the pattern of some linguistic variables, especially functional words. The variables under investigation (*I*, *we* and *you*) justify the size of the corpus since it is more useful to use a small corpus in exploring a functional item than a lexical or content one (Koester, 2010). Thus, in exploring *I*, *we* and *you* in this study, one does not require a relatively large corpus to obtain occurrences that are “representative of typical use” (Fox, 1992, p. 47) since pronouns occur frequently in spoken academic genres (Koester, 2010; Yaakob, 2013; Zhihua, 2011). Surely, on functional items in corpus-based studies, contrary to Sinclair’s (2004) contention, small becomes beautiful, and simply not a limitation.

With large corpus, the compilers are usually not the analysts, so they (analysts) appear to be unfamiliar with some useful contextual clues to the corpus. However, Koester (2010, p. 28) rightly contends that “with small corpus, the corpus compiler is often also the analyst, and therefore usually has a high degree of familiarity with the context”. This is true with the current study, as I adopted an ethnographic approach in collecting the data. Consequently, I personally observed contextual information on the number of teachers (as some lecturers went with their Teaching Assistants), lecturing style, and class size which cannot be inferred from the corpus.

## 2.2. Data Analysis (Corpus Analysis)

I used the concordance tool in *AntConc* (v. 3.5.0) Anthony, 2015) to search for the tri-PP in the corpus. Baker et al. (2008) observe that “concordance analysis affords the examination of language features in co-text, while taking into account the context that the analyst is aware of and can infer from the co-text” (p. 279). We then manually examined each ‘occurrence’ to determine: one, its *pronounness* as in ‘I’ in the name ‘I K Abban’ from the SS subcorpus, and two, referents. All cases of *I*, *you* and *we*, and their corresponding variants were searched and examined to ascertain their referents. The discourse referents were mainly determined based on the contextual and co-textual information surrounding the tri-PP. I closely examined the concordance lines of each of the tri-PP, guided by “the collocating verbs associated with the pronouns ... to obtain contextual and linguistic cues” (Yeo & Ting, 2014, p. 29). Ädel (2010, p. 79) observes: “there are oftentimes contextual clues present in the data which reveal something about the scope of a pronoun”.

Having determined the referents, I counted the occurrences of the referents of the tri-PP, and these were normalized to occurrences per 1, 000 words (ptw), given that the subcorpora, as shown in Table 1, had unequal sizes. Finally, I conducted a log-likelihood analysis using Rayson’s (n.d.) Log-likelihood Calculator to determine whether the observed differences were statistically significant. I used 95<sup>th</sup> percentile; 5%;  $p < 0.05$ , with log-likelihood value =3.84 as the “cut-off point of statistical significance” (Baker et al., 2008, p. 277), implying that any value equal or above 3.84 was deemed statistically significant.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. I-referents at Intra-disciplinary Supercommunity Level

#### 3.1.1. I-referents Peculiar to Humanities (HS)

Table 2 presents the HS-specific referents of *I*. A number of them designated the lecturer as a person in the discourse external world (Ädel, 2006, 2010), suggesting a complicated nature of politics of representation (Wetherell, 2001) or the “various treatments of self-representation” (Cherry, 1988, p. 251) in classroom lectures.

Table 2: I-referents Peculiar to HS

S/N	Referents	Raw Freq.	Normed Freq.
1.	Lecturer as passenger	1	0.27
2.	Lecturer as a person (human being)	7	1.91
3.	Lecturer as a TV watcher	1	0.27
4.	Lecturer as member of staff	2	0.55
5.	Lecturer as SHS student	2	5.74
6.	Lecturer + scholars + general students in the field	1	0.27
7.	Pre-modern Africans	9	2.46
8.	Attendant on a plane	3	0.82
9.	Africans	6	1.64
10.	Women in society	2	0.55
11.	Men in society	1	0.27

The referents 1-6, which are lecturer-related show how HS lecturers integrate their “physical selves” (Friesen, 2011) or “selfhood in the sociocultural and institutional context” (Ivanic, 1998) or societal self (Chery, 1988) in lectures. It is akin to what Goffman (1981) terms “code-switching like behaviour” (p. 127) that lecturers exhibit in their engagement with students in the classroom. It further gives credence to Cherry’s (1988) assertion that “self-representation ...is a complex multidimensional phenomenon that skilled writers [speakers] control and manipulate to their rhetorical advantage” (p. 385). The varied HS-specific *I*-referents indicate a rhetorical strategy to merge the three selves (societal, genre, and discursal) in this key instructional genre. All these help the lecturers to explain disciplinary concepts to facilitate students’ understanding. The web of discourse external and internal selves arguably illustrates the complementary relation between real world experiences and scholarly ones.

Besides the speaker-oriented discourse external identities, HS lecturers have *I* varieties “referring to members of a category defined in context” (Ädel, 2006, p. 35) such as women in society, men in society, and attendants on a plane. All these constitute the rhetorical strategy to create a miniature world in the classroom to bring reality close to the students. It is noted that some of these occurrences, which appear in real and hypothetical worlds (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2007), are “for the benefits of the students so they can put themselves in the hypothetical situation” (Yaakob, 2013, p. 220) to enhance their understanding of the theoretical and conceptual disciplinary knowledge (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2007). Interestingly, the numerous HS-specific *I*-referents are in line with the fact that Hyland (2009) describes HS as explicitly interpretive, with dispersed knowledge. Thus, HS lecturers create varied references in order to *assemble* the dispersed knowledge for students’ understanding.

### 3.1.2. I-referents Peculiar to Social Sciences (SS)

Tang and John (1999, p. 23) argue that “the first-person pronoun in academic writing is not a homogeneous entity” in that it can conjure multiple referents, both human, and non-human. As shown in Table 3, SS lecturers used *I* to designate non-human referents comprising toponyms: western countries, and any country; institutions: political parties; and “members in a category defined in context” (Ädel, 2006) such as Ghanaians and scholars. The use of *I* to designate non-human referents corroborates Kitagawa and Lehrer’s (1990) claim that the impersonal use of *I* is common in English. It further supports Zhihua’s (2011) observation that *I* was used to refer to “personified objects”. However, while Zhihua’s impersonal *I*-referent is non-human-related, those in the present ones are human-related.

Table 3: I-referents Peculiar to SS

Referents	Raw frequencies	Normed frequencies
Western countries (e.g. US)	8	1.82
Any country	3	0.68
Political party	2	0.46
Ghanaians	1	0.23
Scholars in NS	1	0.23

The first three referents, as can be seen in Table 3, exemplify impersonal use of personal pronouns (See Kitagawa & Lehrer–1990 for details on this phenomenon). Zobel (2014) describes such pronouns as “impersonally interpreted personal pronouns”. This practice contrasts with “impersonalization” or “impersonality”, which refers to “the absence of agentivity as well as non-specified person (Skorupal & Dubovičienė, 2016, p. 82). Appropriately, the phenomenon is depersonalization of PPs, which construes the use of a PP for non-human referents such as countries and political parties. Pragmatically, the *I*-forms in extract SSC 0008 refer to developed or western countries whom the lecturer claims may benefit from climate change.

SSL: So, if it is based on institutional dynamics, it's based on not the person choosing to agree but if **I** think **I** am benefiting from the impact of climate change there is the likelihood that **I** may deny that you are vulnerable from the things of climate change because of **my** action. [SSC 0008]

The lecturer (as illustrated in SSC 0008) depersonalizes himself/herself and speaks as a *country*, thereby casting a non-human identity of themselves. Clearly, this demonstrates a change in footing, or positioning (Goffman, 1981). Further, the toponymic references offer the lecturers the opportunity to take the minds of the students outside the classroom for a *rhetorical tour*, consistent with the role of the lecturer as a guide (Tang & John, 1999). The result of this rhetorical act is that it brings those non-human institutions into the immediate rhetorical environment of the students. It also helps the students to grasp the shared knowledge as they observe the ‘speaking personalized countries’ in the classroom. Essentially, therefore, these referents perform ideational functions rather than interpersonal ones.

### 3.1.3. I-referents Peculiar to Natural Sciences (NS)

As presented in Table 4, there are five NS-specific *I*-referents. Interestingly, four of them are speaker-oriented while one is student-oriented, albeit they are identities outside the discourse (Alajaji, 2015). The two categories of *I*-referents in NS refer to both the speaker and the audience as experiencers in the discourse external world, the “real world” (Ädel, 2006, p. 35). These referents illustrate NS lecturers’ move to draw on their own (lecturers and students) *non-academic* experiences to explain complex scientific phenomena to enhance shared understandings (Hyland, 2005).

Table 4: I-referents Peculiar to NS

Referents	Raw frequencies	Normed frequencies
Lecturer as driver	24	6.93
Lecturer as patient	1	0.29
Lecturer as father	1	0.29
Lecturer as bank client	7	2.02
Students as applicants	2	0.58

They further reveal how NS lecturers depend on personal narratives or anecdotes which “concentrate attention and produce involvement...used to achieve specific content-oriented and interactional goals” (Strodt-Lopez, 1987, p. 194 cited in Querol Julian, 2011, p. 132). Further, they show that NS lecturers manifest their discourse-external selves (permeated through *I*), unlike their HS and SS counterparts who either ‘unsell’ or ‘undersell’ their real-world selves in their lectures, which are also legitimate and valid

sources of ideas/knowledge (Hyland, 2002). It also shows how speaker-centeredly *dialogical* (in Bakhtinian sense) (Wetherell, 2001; Bakhtin, 1981) NS lectures are as they allude to other rhetorical ‘sources’ of their *other selves* in the classroom. The finding partly confirms Querol Julian’s (2011) study on personal narratives in academic lectures where he found NS (represented by Biology) to comparatively outnumber both HS and SS in terms of the frequency of narratives and personal anecdotes.

Aside from the portrayal of the discursal external self of lecturers, NS lecturers projected a non-metadiscursive identity of the audience as *applicants*. This audience representation draws the students back to their pre-university life, a strategy to raise “rhetorical consciousness” (Hyland, 2002, p. 5) in the students. The students’ current state as members of the discourse community (Afful, 2010) compared to their historical selves stimulates their “curiosity and encourage them to actively and independently engage...” (Hyland, 2002, p. 8) with such literacy practices of note taking/making, and questioning.

Generally, Tables 2, 3, and 4 have revealed DS-specific *I*-referents. The DS-specific polyreferential systems of *I* indicate how lecturers adjust or change their footing, or positioning while lecturing. Thus, they talk “as either the **author** of what they say, as the **principal** (the one the words are about) or as the **animator** of someone else’s words” [bolded in original] (Wetherell, 2001, p. 19). The change in footing (Goffman, 1981) arguably has “interactional significance” (Goffman, 1981, p. 163). Goffman, therefore, argues: “A change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance” (p. 128).

3.2. *We-referents at Intra-disciplinary Supercommunity Level*

3.2.1. We-referents Peculiar to HS

It can be observed from Table 5 that there are 16 *we*-referents peculiar to HS. HS seems to draw greatly on real world or discourse external experiences, events and realities in their lectures (Ädel, 2006). The *we*-references identified here are evident of the complexities of footing shifts (Metzger, 1999) in classroom lectures in HS. In Hyland’s (2009) model, HS is considered more interpretive, followed by SS and then NS. It is unsurprising, therefore, to find HS manifesting varied identities through *we*-referents.

Table 5: We-referents Peculiar to HS

Referents	Raw frequencies	Normed frequencies
1. Lecturer + teaching assistant	1	0.27
2. Lecturer + current students –one student	2	0.52
3. All lecturers + all university students	5	1.37
4. African scholars + lecturer	23	6.29
5. One student + other students	1	0.27
6. Lecturer (a pupil) + students(when pupils)	1	0.27
7. Lecturer then a child + other children	1	0.27
8. Lecturer then a child + siblings	2	0.52
9. English Speakers	5	1.37
10. Passengers on a plane	10	2.73
11. Ideological anthroponyms (evolutionists)	2	0.52
12. Another lecturer	2	0.52
13. Other lecturers	2	0.52
14. Ethnic group (e.g. Yurobas)	4	1.04
15. Community members	4	1.04
16. Religious people (e.g. ATR believers)	12	3.11

Table 5 shows that there are four major classifications of the HS-specific *we*-referents: audience-oriented metadiscursive *we* (No. 5), inclusive metadiscursive *we* (Nos. 1-4), inclusive non-metadiscursive *we* (6-8), and clusive non-metadiscursive *we* (Nos. 9-16). Audience-oriented metadiscursive *we* alludes to the current audience of the evolving discourse while the inclusive metadiscursive *we* involves the current speaker (lecturers) and at least a participant of the ongoing discourse. On the other hand, there are two categories of non-metadiscursive *we*. The inclusive non-metadiscursive *we* which encompasses the lecturer who enacts an identity of himself in the real world; and the clusive non-metadiscourse also alludes to the discourse external world but this concerns other referents without the discourse-external self of the lecturer.

Ädel’s (2006) asserts in her concept of participation that HS lecturers enact varied discourse identities in their lectures. This can be attributed to the epistemology, philosophies and norms of this broad area of knowledge (Kagan, 2009). For instance, in terms of epistemology, it is said to have dispersed knowledge (Hyland, 2009) which allows the lecturer to change footing to be able to construct diverse identities. This is supported by the fact that it has a more varied audience, and more fluid discourses (Hyland, 2009).

### 3.2.2. We-referents Peculiar to SS

Similar to HS, SS also manifests its distinctiveness with respect to *we*-referents, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: We-referents Peculiar to SS

Referents	Raw frequencies	Normed frequencies
1. Colonized countries	7	1.59
2. Institutions (department, university)	1	0.23
3. Other nations	1	0.23
4. Political parties (e.g. UGCC)	2	0.46
5. Some Ghanaians (excluding lecturer)	1	0.23
6. Political leaders in Ghana	10	2.28
7. Teaching Assistants	1	0.23
8. Current lecturer (then a child + parents)	3	0.68
9. Elderly people (old generations)	6	1.37
10. Colonizers	2	0.46
11. Students in general	4	0.91
12. President of Ghana	1	0.23
13. One student	3	0.68
14. Rural people	4	0.91

The referents discourse-external identities revolving around non-human entities such as political parties, colonized countries, and universities/departments. The *we*-type here is referred to as *rhetorical we*, which is used in collective sense (Ädel, 2006) to address human institutions such as political parties. The SS lecturers, therefore, used *we* to designate non-persons, a practice Whitman (1999) describes as personalization. We can observe from Table 6 that *impersonal we* has 4 non-human referents (Nos. 1-4): institutions (department, university), nations, colonized countries, and political parties. The strategic positioning of SS on the disciplinary continuum, allows it to draw on both positivist and constructivist practices. Thus, SS seems to have a wide spectrum of *we* referents that help it consolidate its status at HS-NS interface (Hyland, 2009). It is, however, important to note that these referents “reflect an informational rather than interpersonal purpose” (Biber, 1995, p. 173).

The finding corroborates Zhihua (2011) who found that *we* was used to designate personified objects. Again, it affirms Biber, Conrad, Daly and Packer’s (2009) assertion that a referent can be anything directly or indirectly related to humans. Considered as society-oriented field of study, SS alludes to elderly people in society, and President of Ghana. These varied referents for *we* in SS are



relatively consistent with SS's reflective and interpretive nature (Hyland, 2009). Given that the SS hugely overlaps with Humanities (Hyland, 2009), the findings here are not surprising, as they demonstrate that in terms of fluidity of discourse, and epistemology (unlike methodology) SS is closer to Humanities than NS.

### 3.2.3. We-referents Peculiar to NS

NS lecturers also enacted unique referents through *we*. However, unlike HS and SS, NS has just two peculiar *we*-referents. The few NS-specific *we* referents can be attributed to its norms and orientations. It believes in realism and positivism and thus "takes the positivist line that there is a world to be investigated which exists independent of human belief, perception, culture and language: reality and truth are, therefore, to be uncovered or discovered" (Hart, 1998, p. 85).

Table 7: We-referents Peculiar to NS

Referents	Raw frequency	Normed frequency
Customers/clients	2	0.46
Other students (aside from the current ones)	1	0.23

Consequently, NS lecturers limited themselves to the defined members in the academic discourse community, ranging from undergraduates to expert. As shown in Table 7, the two NS-specific *we*-referents are related to defined academic discourse community members. Interestingly, the two NS-specific referents are humans, and they are both non-metadiscursive.

## 3.3. You-referents at Intra-disciplinary Supercommunity Level

### 3.3.1. You-referents Peculiar to HS

HS-specific *you*-referents numbered 18 (as shown in Table 8), out of which only one (i.e. *male student*) is metadiscursive; the others are captured in Ädel's (2006) concept of participation.

Table 8: You-referents Peculiar to HS

	Referents	Raw freq.	Normed freq.
1.	Lecturer + Students when children	4	1.06
2.	Modern Africa(ns)	2	6.01
3.	Male students	3	0.82
4.	Pre-modern Africans	64	17.49
5.	Polygamous African societies	9	2.46
6.	Children in pre-modern African societies	8	2.19
7.	Pre-modern African farmers	4	1.09
8.	Lecturer then SHS student	1	0.27
9.	Some scholars in the field	1	0.27
10.	Teaching Assistant + students	9	2.46
11.	People in society	1	0.27
12.	Passengers on a plane	2	0.55
13.	Scholars in the field (minus lecturer)	1	0.27
14.	Teaching Assistant	1	0.27
15.	Traditional leaders/chief	2	0.55
16.	Kingmakers	1	0.27
17.	Opposition to Nkrumah	1	0.27
18.	General students across the globe	2	0.55

Table 8 reveals the polyreferential *you*-referent system in HS classroom lectures. HS lecturers have varied referents for *you*, and this supports Fairclough's (1989) claim that *you* could designate unlimited referents. This could be due to the nature of the subject matter, the epistemology, norms and conventions of HS (Hyland, 2009). Hyland (2009) notes that HS has dispersed knowledge which

correlates with its varied audiences. It is noted that there are *you* varieties that refer to the general students across the globe, kingmakers, and the likes who are part of the discourse external world audience.

It is important to note that the varied human referents of *you* can have positive and negative impact on teaching and learning. Positively, it affords the lecturer the opportunity to provide a *mini-drama* where he/she alone performs multiple functions. The complex footing, rhetorically, enables the HS lecturer to *assemble* the disciplinary “dispersed knowledge” (Hyland, 2009, p. 63) for students’ grasp. On the other hand, it can be a “source of pragmatic failure” (Hyland, 1994, p. 239) which will affect students’ understanding. Students will have an onerous task of interpreting or “deconstructing” all *you* referents in lectures. Given L2 students’ relatively limited pronominal competence, they may assign wrong referents to a pronoun in discourse and this can have a dire implication for the meaning of propositions pronominal competence (Ricard, Girouard, & Decarie, 1999).

### 3.3.2. You-referents Peculiar to SS

SS, as shown in Table 8, recorded 19 *you*-referents peculiar to it. Except *two students*, which is metadiscursive, all the others are non-metadiscursive. These referents correspond to Ädel’s (2006, p. 42) notion of participation, which refers to “writers when they appear in the text to talk about personal experiences that have been accumulated outside the world of discourse”. Ädel maintains that participation includes “occurrences of pronouns with reference to the writer and/or reader ... and often including other referents”. The undefined *other referents* are those that in this context designate both persons and non-persons.

Table 9: You-referents Peculiar to SS

Referents	Raw frequencies	Normed frequencies
2 <sup>nd</sup> year students	1	0.23
Two students	2	0.46
Political leaders	1	0.23
General students in the field	15	3.42
People in western countries	2	0.46
Lecturer + scholars as researchers in the field	7	1.59
Past students of current lecturer	2	0.46
Africans of colonized countries	24	5.47
Ghanaians	16	3.64
African countries	9	2.05
University authorities	3	0.68
Citizens of UK	2	0.46
Prominent people in society	2	0.46
Political party (e.g. NPP)	2	0.46
Parliament	2	0.46
Opponents of colonial rule	1	0.23

SS is said to be an anthropocentric knowledge domain (Afful, 2010), hence, several anthroponyms in their lectures. Further, Hyland (2009) asserts that SS aligns itself more with constructivist or interpretivist ideology. This allows it to draw on several realities in its interaction in the classroom to provide a more rhetorically effective and persuasive lectures to students.

The *impersonal you* in the SS subcorpus is, however, not new. Zhihua (2011) found that *you* was used to refer to personified objects, although in this study all the *personified objects* are largely human-related (e.g. African countries, political parties, and parliament). This finding supports Kitigawa and Lehrer’s (1990) position that “the personal pronouns *you*, *we*, and *I* in English can be used as

impersonal pronouns in discourse situations”. The impersonal use of *you* has two key rhetorical implications. It personalizes the human institutions (Whitman, 199) to transform the abstract entities into concrete form to aid students’ understanding. Again, it corresponds with Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of ventriloquation, which invariably self-positions the lecturers. This practice is dramatic as lecturers project themselves as speaking ‘human institutions’, which naturally have no voices.

### 3.3.3. You-referents Peculiar to NS

While HS and SS recorded 18 and 19 distinct *you*-referents, NS recorded only four. NS has the lowest *you*-referent density, suggesting that a greater portion of *you* designates are shared (either with one of the other two DS, or both). From Table 10 indicates that two of the NS-specific *you* referents are characters in a story, affirming Querol Julian’s (2011) finding that NS lecturers employ more anecdotes than their HS and SS counterparts. The frequent use of anecdotes in NS lectures therefore call for discourse-external world ‘selves’ of the lecturers.

Table 10: You-referents Peculiar to NS

Referents	Raw frequency	Normed frequency
Christians	2	0.58
Lecturer as a driver	2	0.58
Father in a story	1	0.29
Son in a story	3	0.87

Again, the last two referents also cast the lecturer as a driver, which is a real-world identity that communicates the experiences of the lecturers. This corresponds with Brooke’s (1987) assertion that speakers sometimes enact new roles that are not known to members in their discourse communities. This suggests that identities in lectures are not monolithic.

## 4. Conclusions and Implications

The paper explored *minority referents* of *I*, *we* and *you* (tri-PP) that are distinct to individual disciplinary supercommunities: Humanities (HS), Social Sciences and Natural Sciences (NS). In fact, as far as I know this is the first study that adopts the tripartite view of disciplinary classification and focuses on DS-specific referents of *I*, *we* and *you* in academic lectures. The paper found that there are referents of *I*, *we*, and *you* that are peculiar to HS, SS and NS. It is noteworthy that all the DS-specific referents of the tri-PP are peculiar to the present study. This can be attributed to an array of factors such as the nature of the present corpora, geopolitics, and the concordance analysis undertaken. The issue on geopolitics is considered crucial, given that the register (classroom) of the present study bears the same situational characteristics (Refer to Biber & Conrad, 2009) with the previous ones. Biber and Conrad (2009) argue that cultural context results in variation in register features and markers. The present corpus is Ghanaian and thus the effect of the Ghana-oriented geopolitical conventions, cultures, norms and ‘rhetoric’ on university classroom lectures cannot be overemphasized. The polyreferential system of the tri-PP across the three DSs and the peculiarities are possibly evident of Ghanaian lecturers’ reliance on discourse external world experiences to impart knowledge to the students since classroom lecture as a “situational variety is maximally oriented towards giving new information...” (Owusu-Ansah, 1992, p. 85).

A crucial implication of the study is that teachers of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) should not only focus on the *majority* cross-DS referents of *I*, *we* and *you* but should rather focus on the individualities as well. This will further draw students’ attention to how the distinct norms and conventions of the DSs influence the referents of the tri-PP. EAP practitioners and curriculum developers are also encouraged to emphasize the *microscopic* view to teaching and researching the referents of *I*, *we* and *you* (Vosoughi, Ghajar & Navarchi, 2019), as against the *macroscopic* one that focuses on only those with high frequencies.

The study used a relatively small corpus size of academic lectures from Ghana. Future research could use a larger corpus running into millions to further investigate the *minority referents* of the tri-PP to ascertain their pervasiveness or otherwise. Such studies could also adopt an ethnographically-oriented approach and interview lecturers and students about the use and rhetorical effects of these DS-specific tri-PP referents.

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