Impact of Academic Self-Concept on Syntactic Complexity of Speaking Skill among Iranian EFL Learners

Atefeh Nikoobin[*]

English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Najafabad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Najafabad, Iran

Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to assess the effect of academic self–concept on the syntactic complexity of speaking skill among Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners. The sample consisted of 45 male and female students of the upper-intermediate level who were learning the English language in a private institute in Isfahan. To collect information about students' academic self-concept, Liu and Wang's (2005) academic self-concept scale was used. It consists of 20 items and responses are made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. For speaking data collection, participants were asked to sit for a speaking test (narrative story) and their speaking performances were recorded by a digital voice recorder for later transcription and analysis. Independent samples *t*-test was conducted to find out if there were statistically significant differences between the high self-concept group and low self-concept group's syntactic complexity in speaking. Results indicated that the former group significantly outperformed the latter on three measures of syntactic complexity including length of production units, measures of subordination, and degree of phrasal sophistication. On the measures of coordination, however, the results indicated that there were no significant differences between learners with high academic self-concept and learners with low academic self-concept.

Keywords: Academic self-concept; Syntactic Complexity; Speaking, EFL learners

1. Background

Since the 1950s, the self-concept construct has been considered important in education because of its apparent link with students'

---

[*] Corresponding Author's E-mail address: atefehnikoobin@yahoo.com

achievement, motivation, and engagement with learning (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Burns, 1982; Guay, Ratelle, Roy & Litalien, 2010; Leary & Tangney, 2003a; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). A person's self-concept consists of the beliefs one has about oneself, one's self-perception, or, as Hamlyn (1983: 241) expresses it, "the picture of oneself". It is not the "facts" about oneself but rather what one believes to be true about oneself.

Different terms such as self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy are often used "interchangeably and inconsistently" in the literature because they may refer to different ideas about how people think about themselves (Strein, 1995). Although self-concept is one of the most popular ideas in psychological research, there is no universally accepted definition of this term (De Fraine, Van Damme, & Onghena, 2007). Some researchers view self-concept and self-efficacy as the same construct, but others view them as two different constructs (Bong & Clark, 1999; Choi, 2005). Bong and Clark (1999) stated that self-concept has two facets: cognitive and affective.

In contrast, self-efficacy is one-dimensional and has only a cognitive component. Huitt (2004) distinguished the two terms self–concept and self–esteem by stating that self-concept is the cognitive aspect of self, and self-esteem is the affective aspect of self, which refers to one's feelings of self-worth.

De Fraine et al. (2007) compared three constructs, namely self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, and suggested that they vary in their specificity level. Self-esteem represents a person's general perceptions of his or her self-worth. Self-concept is domain-specific, whereas self-efficacy is regarded as a person's expectations of his or her competence in a given task. Self-concept is composed of the academic, social, emotional, and physical dimensions (Lewis & Knight, 2000; Mui, Yung, Low, & Jin, 2000). The domain-specific perceptions of self-concept (academic, physical, emotional, and social) are organized in a hierarchical structure with the general self-concept at the top of the hierarchy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2002; Shavelson et al., 1976).

In educational psychology, academic self-concept is an important construct that has stimulated widespread research. A positive academic self-concept is beneficial, especially for motivating learners to improve their academic performance (Marsh, 2007). Academic self-concept is referred to as a person's self-evaluation regarding specific academic domains or abilities (Trautwein, Ludtke, Koller, & Baumert, 2006) In

other words, academic self-concept is how students do schoolwork or feel about themselves as learners (Guay, 2003; Harter, 1998).

To become a well-rounded communicator, one needs to be proficient in each of the four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and speaking, but the ability to speak skillfully provides the speaker with several distinct advantages. According to Gower et al. (1995), speaking as a productive skill has many different aspects including two major categories –accuracy, involving the correct use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation practiced through controlled and guided activities and, fluency, considered to be the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously.

Syntactic complexity means the range and degree of sophistication of syntactic structures that surface in language production; it has been recognized as a very important construct in second language speaking teaching and research (e.g., Ortega 2003). Syntactic complexity is manifested in second language speaking accuracy in terms of how varied and sophisticated the production units or grammatical structures are (Foster & Skehan 1996, Ortega 2003, Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki & Kim, 1998). It has been considered a significant construct, as development in syntactic complexity is an integral part of a second language learner's overall development in the target language. A large number of different measures have been proposed for characterizing syntactic complexity in a second language. Most of these seek to quantify one of the following in one way or another: length of production units (i.e., clauses, sentences, and T-units), amount of embedding or subordination, amount of coordination, range of surface syntactic structures, and degree of sophistication of particular syntactic structures (Ortega, 2003).

Syntactic complexity has been long observed by many linguists and language teachers, who have paid special attention to the contribution of those more complex sentence patterns in expressing complex ideas and improving speaking quality. It is acknowledged that "certain syntactic structures, such as subordinate clauses, relative clauses, and complex noun phrases allow writers to express more complex ideas" (Beers & Nagy, 2011, p. 184). In this respect, using complex sentence patterns is necessary for stating one's ideas effectively. In addition, the use of complex grammatical structures signals effective speaking (de Haan & van Esch, 2006; Reilly, Zamora, & McGivern, 2005; Rimmer, 2008; Schleppegrell, 2004). On the contrary, simple sentences are often regarded to show the weakness of learners. Many linguists and educators regard them as an important disadvantage in speaking and argue that they

may result in the deduction of speaking scores (e.g. Davidson, 1991; Hamp-Lyons, 1991; Reid, 1993; Vaughan, 1991).

Among many others, Hinkel (2003) conducted research on speaking by over 1000 learners and native speakers, noticing that learners employed mostly simple syntactic constructions. Such a heavy reliance on simple sentence patterns and difficulty of using more complex sentence patterns may be due to psychological traits such as self-confidence, self-efficacy, and academic self-concept which is the focus of this study.

Variation of different sentence patterns, especially the employment of more complex sentence patterns, is critical for good speaking when it comes to English learners, who may have difficulty in using various English sentence patterns at ease. Apart from the instruction methods of teaching language, which have been investigated by many researchers, based on the available literature, these difficulties might be attributable to one of the important self-related constructs, namely, academic self-concept.

Norris and Ortega (2009) argue that at least three grammatical complexity measures (global complexity, phrasal complexity, and complexity by subordination) must be measured since language can be elaborated at three different syntactic levels. Global complexity, measured by the length of sentence unit (such as words per AS unit), captures complexity in a general sense, in that any additional words, phrases, or clauses will increase this measurement. It seems logical that longer sentences are generally more complex than shorter sentences. The average length is considered to be the best measure of SLA speaking (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991).

A common way for students to make longer sentences is to add a dependent clause. As such, most researchers use a complexity by subordination measure. This type of complexity is most frequently calculated as the mean number of clauses per sentence-length unit (such as AS unit) or the mean number of dependent clauses per total clauses. For instance, syntactic complexity has been operationalized as the ratio of clauses to AS unit in studies (e.g., Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Michel, Kuiken, & Vedder, 2007) and as the ratio of clauses to t-unit in others (e.g., Yuan & Ellis, 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 2006). However, complexity by subordination is only valid if the learners have acquired subordination constructions (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, p. 155).

Sentences can also become more complex through modification or nominalization, which can be measured by clause length, or phrasal complexity. Advanced learners are expected to rely less on subordination

for increased complexity as they increase phrasal complexity (Norris & Ortega, 2009). Speaking research has also found that clause length is a useful measurement in addition to global complexity (Mills, 1990).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Of the four language skills, speaking has always been the main concern of EFL practitioners and researchers (Jun, 2008). Most of the EFL students face serious problems in speaking fluently and accurately because of the speaking activities demanding nature. "Speaking is a complex mental process combining various cognitive skills, virtually simultaneously, and drawing on working memory of words and concepts, while self-monitoring" (Burns & Hill, 2013, cited in Mishan & Timmis, 2015, p. 122).

Levelt (1989) identifies four separate sub-processes in the speaking skill: conceptualization, formulation, articulation, and self-monitoring. As Mishan and Timmis (2015) state: conceptualization involves generating the content the speaker wishes to express; formulation entails selecting the language to express the content generated and organizing it according to the norms of a particular genre; and articulation is the physical production of the sounds required to encode the message (p. 122).

These processes are self-monitored so that the speaker can ensure that all is going to plan, a process which will include attention to affective factors such as the relationship with the interlocutors. Managing these processes presents a formidable challenge, particularly since, as Bygate (2001, p. 16) notes: "All this happens very fast and, to be successful, depends on automation: to some degree in conceptualization, to a considerable extent in the formulation and almost entirely in articulation." For the learner operating in a second language, of course, automation in formulation and articulation present particular challenges. It is not surprising, then, given the circumstances of production that spoken language tends to differ.

Many practitioners intuitively recognize that how a learner approaches or engages with learning activities depends to a large extent on what the individual thinks and feels about both themselves and the learning activity or subject per se (Mercer, 2011). Teachers often experience first-hand how learner behaviors and attitudes are driven by their sense of self and how this can vary across individuals in ways that are complex and often difficult to predict. Each learner holds their unique complex set of self-beliefs, which influence not only the way learners choose to act and the kinds of decisions they make within the present setting but also how they

interpret their past experiences and what kinds of goals and challenges they set themselves for the future (Mercer, 2011). When a learner enters into any language learning or use experience, be that in a classroom or contexts beyond, they do not come to the encounter as a psychologically blank sheet of paper but they bring with them their beliefs about themselves and their attitudes towards the foreign language, and these both impact on and in turn are influenced by the experience.

In recent years, the importance of affective factors like anxiety, inhibition, motivation, and self-concept has been of interest in the field of language learning because of their high effects on learning a foreign or a second language (Andres, 2002). The factors such as motivation, attitudes, anxiety, or self-concept can be positive or negative (Branden, 1994; Apter, 1998; Brown, 2000).

An important question in language teaching research is whether psychological traits such as academic self-concept have effects on learners' speaking performance. The present study aims to cast further light on speaking syntactic complexity. The intention here is to examine how EFL learners' academic self-concept level influences the degree to which their speaking performance is syntactically complex.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The overall aim of the study is to collect valid and reliable information related to the effect of academic self-concept on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' syntactic complexity of their speaking skills. Within this theme, the research has several specific objectives:

To find the effect of academic self-concept on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' length of production units in their speaking performance.

To examine the effect of academic self-concept on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' amounts of coordination in their speaking performance.

To assess the effect of academic self-concept on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' amounts of subordinations in their speaking performance.

To find the effect of academic self-concept on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' phrasal sophistication in their speaking performance.

1.3. Research Questions

The Following research questions addressed the purpose of the study:

RQ1: Does academic self-concept significantly affect Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' length of production units in their speaking performance?

RQ2: Does academic self-concept significantly affect Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' amounts of coordination in their speaking performance?

RQ3: Does academic self-concept significantly affect Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' amounts of subordinations in their speaking performance?

RQ4: Does academic self-concept significantly affect Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' phrasal sophistication in their speaking performance?

1.4. Significance of the Study

Most Iranian EFL students have been found to have inadequate competence in L2 speaking (Jafari & Ansari, 2012; Dastjerdi & Samian, 2011; Zaree & Farvardin, 2009). Most of the students have a negative attitude towards speaking. Not only ordinary students but also proficient students and those who are talented in other language skills have problems in speaking fluently.

The failure of Iranian EFL students in L2 speaking as effectively as they should perhaps be attributed to a variety of factors including L2 speaking instruction, lack of motivation, L2 speaking feedback, lack of target language proficiency and vocabulary, the interference of L1 into L2 and psychological variables such as self-concept which is the focus of this study. Accordingly, conducting studies on the relationship of these variables may provide promising feedback for EFL teaching and learning. In case academic self-concept has a significant effect on speaking performance, as it is the major objective of the current study, this conclusion can be prompted that by promoting this psychological trait, the speaking ability and other productive skills can be enhanced.

2. Methodology
2.1. Research design

A research design is "the overall plan for obtaining answers to the questions being studied and for handling some of the difficulties encountered during the research process" (Polit & Beck, 2004, p. 49). According to De Vos (1998, p. 123) a research design is a "blueprint or a detailed plan for how a research study is conducted". The present study

used a quantitative design to examine the effects of academic self-concept on different syntactic attributes of the L2 learners' speaking skills.

2.2. Participants

The present study was conducted among 45 male and female upper-intermediate EFL students at a private language school in Isfahan. The selected participants were chosen from a population of at least 70 Iranian EFL learners. The age of the participants ranged from 22 to 30 years. Their homogeneity in terms of their general language proficiency was established using an Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT).

2.3. Instrumentation

To collect the required data for answering the research questions, the following instruments were employed:

2.3.1. Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT)

The participants' proficiency levels were assessed using the Oxford Quick Placement Test. The OQPT contains 60 standardized multiple-choice items, in a cloze test format and includes grammar and vocabulary sections. The Oxford Quick Placement Test has been used as a reliable standard test in many studies for determining the proficiency level of learners.

2.3.2. Academic Self-Concept (ASC) Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from Liu and Wang's (2005) academic self–concept (ASC) scale. It comprises two subscales, the academic confidence subscale (10 items, odd numbers) and the academic effort subscale (10 items, even numbers).

According to Liu and Wang (2005), students' academic confidence (AC) and academic effort (AE) are two first-order factors of the ASC scale. The AC subscale is used to measure "students' feelings and perceptions about their academic competence", and the AE subscale is used to assess "students' commitment to, and involvement and interest in schoolwork" (Liu and Wang, 2005, p. 85). The items of the scale are graded on a five-point Likert-type scale that includes choices ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (see Appendix A).

2.3.3. Speaking Task

To meet the objectives of the study, participants were presented with a nine-frame picture story, Dr. Krif, and they were asked to describe a

narrative account (at least 25 sentences) for the cartoon picture orally after planning their oral presentations.

2.3.4. L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyzer

The L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyzer available at https://aihaiyang.com/software/l2sca/ was used to analyze the syntactic complexity of participants speaking. The software takes up to 2 samples of English text and generates both numeric and graphical results of any or all fourteen indices covering (see Table 1).

Table 1. *syntactic complexity measures, codes, definition*

Measure	Code	Definition
Length of production unit		
Mean length of clause	MLC	# of words / # of clauses
Mean length of sentence	MLS	# of words / # of sentences
Mean length of T-unit	MLT	# of words / # of T-units
Sentence complexity		
Sentence complexity ratio	C/S	# of clauses / # of sentences
Subordination		
T-unit complexity ratio	C/T	# of clauses / # of T-units
Complex T-unit ratio	CT/T	# of complex T-units / # of T-units
Dependent clause ratio	DC/C	# of dependent clauses / # of clauses
Dependent clauses per T-unit	DC/T	# of dependent clauses / # of T-units
Coordination		
Coordinate phrases per clause	CP/C	# of coordinate phrases / # of clauses
Coordinate phrases per T-unit	CP/T	# of coordinate phrases / # of T-units
Sentence coordination ratio	T/S	# of T-units / # of sentences
phrasal sophistication		
Complex nominals per clause	CN/C	# of complex nominals / # of clauses
Complex nominals per T-unit	CN/T	# of complex nominals / # of T-units
Verb phrases per T-unit	VP/T	# of verb phrases / # of T-units

2.4. Data Collection Procedure

The first task for the participants to complete was the Oxford Quick Placement Test (QOPT). All 70 participants completed the test in the 30 minutes allotted. The results were used to identify the proficiency level of each learner. About 45 participants scored between 40-47 on it, and they were selected as the main participants of the present study.

A week later, at the beginning of the session, a 10-minute mini-lesson was provided. It consisted of an explanation on how to use picture stories for the oral presentation of narratives. They were encouraged to pay

attention to their verb tense use to keep the story's unity, as well as grammatical accuracy. Then, participants were asked to speak with the aid of a picture story. They were asked to complete their speaking task in 5 to 10 minutes. While they were presenting their oral narratives, they were recorded by a digital voice recorder. At the end of the allotted time, once all the students had finished their speaking tasks, they were asked to complete Academic Self-Concept Questionnaire (ASCQ) in 10 minutes. Based on their scores on ASCQ, participants were divided into two groups, learners with High Academic self-concept (HASC), and learners with low academic self-concept (LASC).

Finally, their speaking tasks were transcribed by the researcher and were analyzed using the L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyzer to determine the level of syntactic complexity in their speakings.

2.5. Data Analysis

According to their responses to the Academic Self-Concept (ASC) Questionnaire, participants were divided into two groups, high academic self-concept (HASC) and low academic self-concept (LASC). The scores derived from the questionnaire made the comparison of the HASC and LASC learners possible. Independent-Samples t-test in SPSS (version 21) was employed to help answer the research questions of the present study.

3. Results for the Placement Test

The learners who took the placement test were studying at the upper-intermediate level in the institute where they were learning English. However, to ensure their homogeneity and to double-check their being at the upper-intermediate level of proficiency, measures were taken to calculate the descriptive statistics of their placement test scores, identify the mean score, and include in the sample those whose scores ranged between one standard deviation above and below the mean. Since a single group of EFL learners was recruited as the participants of the study, no inferential statistics would apply here, and the results of the descriptive statics are in view in Table 2:

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics Results of the Placement Test*

Placement Test	*N*	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
	45	40.00	47.00	43.55	3.68	-.001	-1.29

The number of participants ($N = 45$), the mean score ($M = 43.55$), standard deviation ($SD = 3.68$), and other descriptive statistics of the

placement test are shown in Table 4.1. As it could be seen, those learners with a score between 40.00 and 47.00 were selected as upper-intermediate to take part in the current investigation. Also, the skewness value (which indicates the symmetry of the distribution) and the kurtosis value (which provides information about the peakedness of the distribution) are presented in Table 4.1. If the distribution is perfectly normal, a skewness and kurtosis value of 0 would be obtained. Here the skewness value was a very small negative one (-.001), which indicates a slight clustering of scores at the high right-hand end of the distribution (negatively skewed), and the kurtosis value (-1.29) indicates that the distribution was not peaked, but rather slightly flat.

3.1. Results for the First Research Question

As it was mentioned above, the first research question of the study was: Does academic self-concept significantly affect Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' length of production units in their speaking skills? Length of production was operationalized in the present study through the three measures of mean length of clause (MLC), mean length of sentence (MLS), and mean length of T-unit (MLT). Independent-Samples *t*-test was run three times between HASC and LASC groups to compare each of these three measures. The results are in view in Table 3.

Table 3. *Results of Independent-Samples t-Test Comparing HASC and LASC Learners' Length of Production*

		N	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*t*	*df*	*Sig.* (2-tailed)
MLC	HASC	24	9.35	2.88	-.61	43	.04
	LASC	21	7.90	1.87			
MLS	HASC	24	15.84	9.41	-1.26	43	.02
	LASC	21	13.03	4.07			
MLT	HASC	24	13.10	5.68	-.65	43	.04
	LASC	21	11.20	3.50			

As it can be seen in Table 3, in terms of MLC, the HSAC learners (M = 9.35) and their LASC counterparts (M = 7.90) were found to be significantly different since the *p*-value under the *Sig.* (2-tailed) the column corresponding to this comparison was lower than the significance level (.04 < .05).

The same result was obtained for MLS (M_{HSC} = 15.84, M_{LSC} = 13.03, p = .02), and MLT (M_{HSC} = 13.10, M_{CG} = 11.20, p = .04). The conclusion to

be drawn from these analyses would be that the HASC and LASC learners were significantly different in terms of their overall length of production units in speaking (which comprised MLC, MLS, and MLT). This discrepancy between the two groups in terms of the three above-mentioned measures of length of production is illustrated in Figure 1.
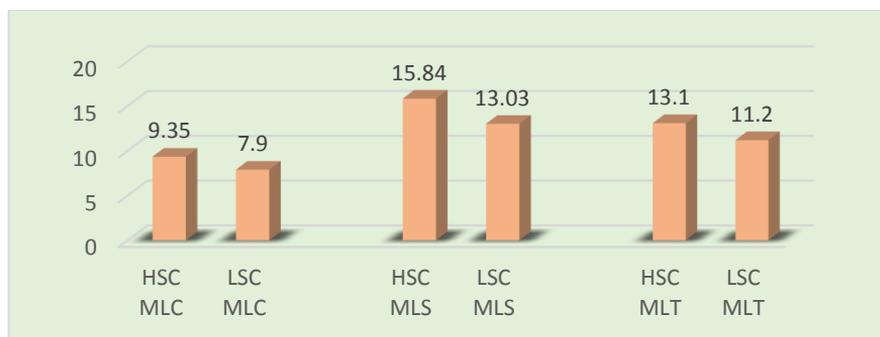

Figure 1. HASC and LASC Learners' Mean Scores for Different Components of Length of Production (MLC, MLS, and MLT)

It could be easily seen in Figure 4.1 that concerning the three measures of length of production, the HASC learners significantly outperformed the LASC learners, giving rise to the rejection of the first null hypothesis of the study, and to the conclusion that academic self-concept significantly affects Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' length of production in their speaking skill.

3.2. Results for the Second Research Question

As stated at the outset of this chapter, the second research question of the study was: Does academic self-concept affect Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' amounts of coordination in their speaking skills? Since coordination was operationalized in this study through calculating coordinate phrases per clause (CP/C), coordinate phrases per T-unit (CP/T), and sentence coordination ratio (T/S), independent-samples *t*-test was used three times to compare the HASC and LASC learners' CP/C, CP/T, and T/S, and thus to reach the answer to the second research question:

Table 4. *Results of Independent-Samples t-Test Comparing HASC and LASC Learners'*
Coordination

		N	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*t*	*df*	*Sig.* (2-tailed)
CP/C	HASC	24	.26	.20	.87	43	.38
	LASC	21	.21	.11			
CP/T	HASC	24	.40	.35	-1.16	43	.25
	LASC	21	.30	.20			
T/S	HASC	24	1.23	.35	-.96	43	.36
	LASC	21	1.15	.16			

Table 4 shows that concerning CP/C, CP/T, and T/S, HASC learners used more coordination devices than did the LASC learners. However, it shows that the differences between HASC and LASC learners on CP/C (p = .38), CP/T (p = .25), and T/S (p = .36) failed to reach statistical significance as all these p values were larger than the significance level. Thus, the conclusion to be made from these analyses would be that the HASC and LASC learners were not significantly different in terms of their amount of coordination in speaking (which comprised CP/C, CP/T, and T/S). This approximate parity between the two groups in terms of the three above-mentioned measures of coordination is displayed in Figure 2.
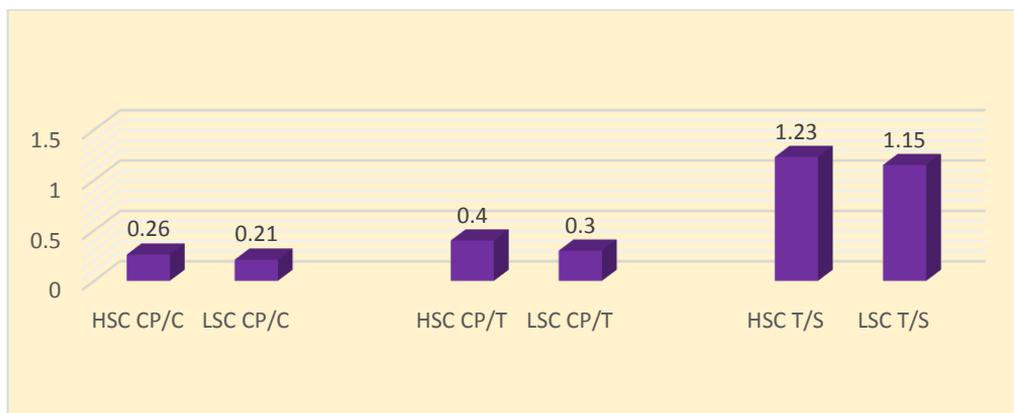

Figure 2. HASC and LASC Learners' Mean Scores for Different Components of Coordination (CP/C, CP/T, and T/S)

Figure 2 shows that on the three measures of coordination, the HASC learners could obtain slightly higher mean scores than the LASC learners, and the differences between the two groups were not statistically significant. These results lead to the confirmation of the second null

hypothesis of the study, and to the conclusion that academic self-concept does not significantly affect Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' amount of coordination in their speaking.

3.3. Results for the Third Research Question

The third research question of the study was: Does academic self-concept significantly affect Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' amounts of subordinations in their speaking skills? As subordination was measured through calculating T-unit complexity ratio (C/T), complex T-unit ratio (CT/T), dependent clause ratio (DC/C), and dependent clause per T-unit (DC/T), an independent-sample *t*-test was conducted to compare the HSC and LSC learners in terms of these four measures of subordination

Table 5. *Results of Independent-Samples t-Test Comparing HASC and LASC Learners' Subordination*

		N	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*t*	*df*	*Sig.* (2-tailed)
C/T	HASC	24	1.64	.39	-.07	43	.000
	LASC	21	1.43	.32			
CT/T	HASC	24	.41	.23	-.19	43	.03
	LASC	21	.29	.19			
DC/C	HASC	24	.34	.15	.28	43	.04
	LASC	21	.22	.14			
DC/T	HASC	24	.49	.31	.23	43	.04
	LASC	21	.36	.23			

It can be seen in Table 5 that with regard to C/T, CT/T, DC/C, and DC/T, HSC learners made use of more subordination markers than did the LSC learners and that the differences between HASC and LASC learners on C/T (*p* = .000), CT/T (*p* = .03), DC/C (*p* = .04), and DC/T (*p* = .04) reached statistical significance since all these *p* values were found to be smaller than the significance level. Accordingly, it could be inferred that the HASC and LASC learners were significantly different in terms of their amount of subordination in speaking (which comprised C/T, CT/T, DC/C, and DC/T). The differences between the two groups concerning the three above-mentioned measures of subordination are displayed in Figure 3:
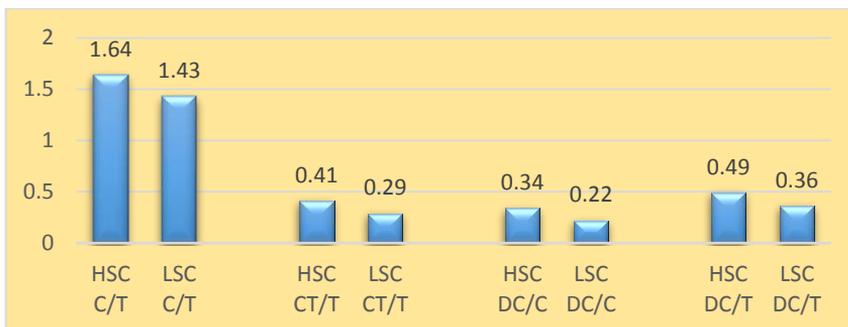
Figure 3. HASC and LASC Learners' Mean Scores for Different Components of Subordination (C/T, CT/T, DC/C, and DC/T)

It could be noticed in Figure 4.3 that concerning the three measures of subordination, the HASC learners significantly outperformed the LASC learners, which gives rise to the rejection of the third null hypothesis of the study, and to the corollary that academic self-concept significantly affects Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' amount of subordination in their written productions.

3.4. Results for the Fourth Research Question

The final research question of the study in hand was: Does academic self-concept significantly affect Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' phrasal sophistication in their speaking skills? Since phrasal sophistication was operationalized through the three measures of complex nominals per clause (CN/C), complex nominals per T-unit (CN/T), and verb phrase per T-unit (VP/T), independent-samples *t*-test was employed to compare HASC and LASC learners in terms of their phrasal sophistication.

Table 6. *Results of Independent-Samples t-Test Comparing HASC and LASC Learners' phrasal sophistication*

		N	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*t*	*df*	*Sig.* (2-tailed)
CN/C	HASC	24	.84	.31	4.98	43	.000
	LASC	21	.41	.22			
CN/T	HASC	24	1.29	.53	5.67	43	.000
	LASC	21	.54	.34			
VP/T	HASC	24	1.98	.43	3.42	43	.001
	LASC	21	1.52	.44			

Table 6 shows that concerning CN/C, CN/T, and VP/T, HSC learners outperformed the LSC learners and that the differences between HSC and

LSC learners on CN/C (p = .000), CN/T (p = .000), and VP/T (p = .001) were found to be statistically significant since all these p values were lower than the significance level. Hence, the conclusion to be made from these analyses would be that the HASC and LASC learners were significantly different in terms of their phrasal sophistication in speaking (which is realized as CN/C, CN/T, and VP/T). These differences between the two groups in terms of the three above-mentioned measures of phrasal sophistication are graphically represented in Figure 4 below.
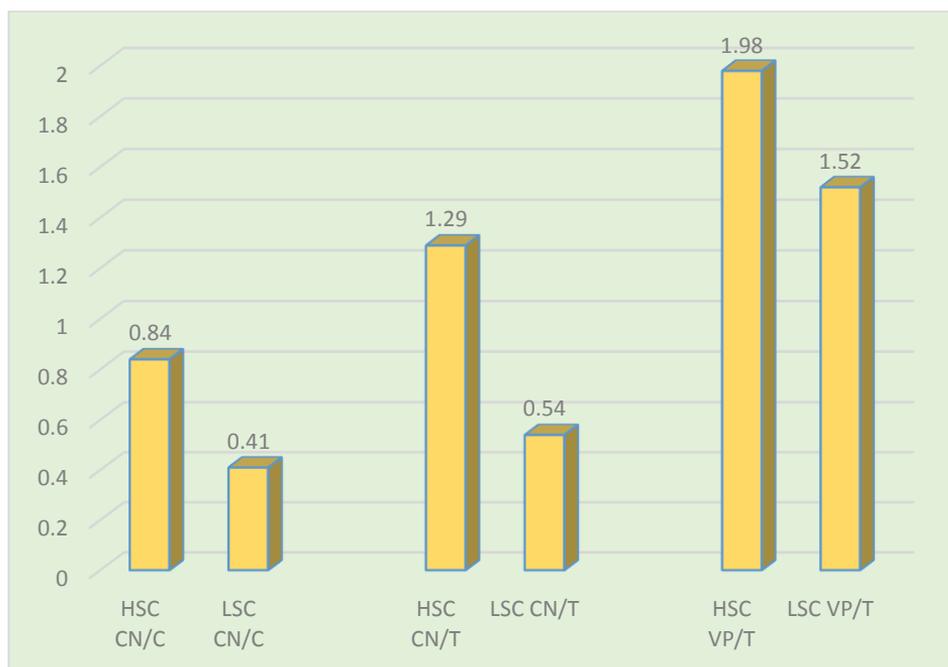

Figure 4. HASC and LASC Learners' Mean Scores for Different Components of Phrasal Sophistication (CN/C, CN/T, and VP/T)

Figure 4 shows that on the three measures of phrasal sophistication, the HASC learners could obtain significantly higher mean scores than the LASC learners, and the differences between the two groups were statistically significant. These results lead to the rejection of the fourth null hypothesis of the study, and to the conclusion that academic self-concept significantly affects Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' phrasal sophistication in their speaking.

Apart from the statistical analyses presented above, the effect of academic self-concept on the sentence complexity ratio (C/S) of the participants of the study was investigated. Table 4.6 shows the results of this analysis:

Table 7. *Results of Independent-Samples t-Test Comparing HSC and LSC Learners' Sentence Complexity Ratio*

		N	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*t*	*df*	*Sig.* (2-tailed)
C/S	HASC	24	1.91	.54	-.70	43	.01
	LASC	21	1.63	1.03			

Table 7 shows that concerning C/S, the HASC learners (*M* = 1.91) and their LASC counterparts (*M* = 1.63) were found to be significantly different since the *p*-value under the *Sig.* (2-tailed) the column corresponding to this comparison was lower than the significance level (.01 < .05). Thus, it could be concluded that academic self-concept significantly affects the sentence complexity of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners. The difference between HASC and LASC learners concerning sentence complexity is evident in Figure 5:
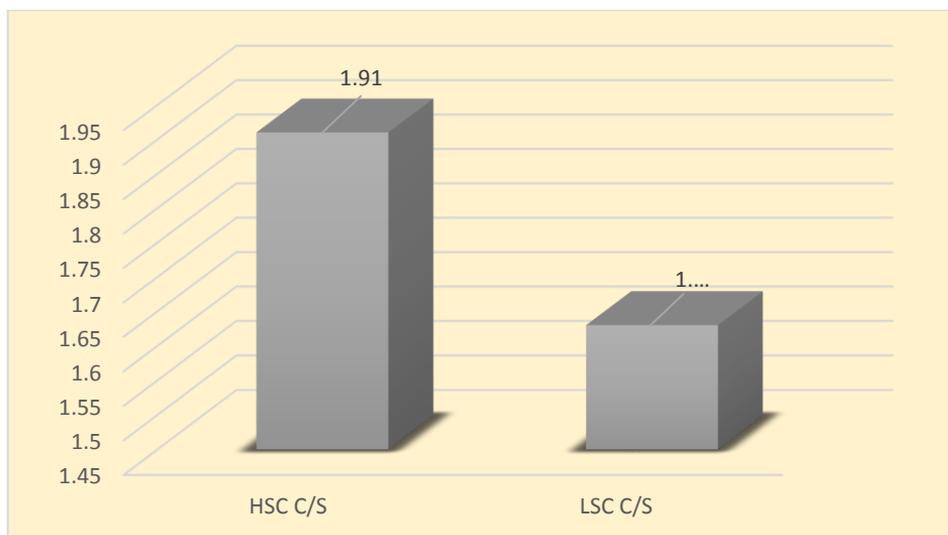

Figure 5. HASC and LASC Learners' Mean Scores for Sentence Complexity

Figure 5 shows the conspicuous difference between the HASC and LASC learners in terms of their sentence complexity ratio in speaking.

4. Discussion

The obtained results indicated that HASC learners significantly outperformed LASC learners on (a) length of production, (b) subordination, and (c) phrasal sophistication. However, the difference

between HASC and LASC learners on the measures of coordination was not found to be statistically significant. Research hypotheses are discussed in the following sections:

4.1. Addressing Hypothesis One

H01: Academic self-concept does not have any significant effect on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' length of production units in their speaking skills.

Independent-Samples *t*-test was run between HASC and LASC groups to compare each of the three measures of mean length of clause (MLC), mean length of sentence (MLS), and mean length of T-unit (MLT). Results indicated that the HASC and LASC learners were significantly different in terms of their overall length of production units in speaking. Concerning the three measures of length of production, the HASC learners significantly outperformed the LASC learners, giving rise to the rejection of the first null hypothesis of the study, and to the conclusion that academic self-concept does affect Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' length of production in their speaking skill.

Hunt (1970) argued that the mean length of T-units and clauses per T-unit, together with words per clause were the three most reliable indicators of syntactic complexity. After that, this argument has been supported by the overwhelming majority of researchers in the following decades. In the two early research syntheses on syntactic complexity by Wolfe-Quintero et al. (1998) and Ortega (2003), they agree that this measure serves as the most reliable measure for discriminating proficiency levels based on their review of over 40 studies in total. Even in some new studies, the mean length of the T-unit is still used as the major measure for discriminating syntactic complexity.

The findings of the present study are consistent with the findings of many studies available in this field. Findings obtained by Nasim, Roberts, Harrell, and Young (2005) concluded that academic self-concept is the only non-cognitive predictor for the academic achievement of college students. According to Nasim et al. (2005), the length of production units in speaking tasks could be considered as an indicator of learners' high academic self-concept. According to Lent, Brown, and Gore (1997), academic self-concept refers to specific attitudes, feelings, and perceptions about an individual's intellectual or academic abilities which represent that individual's self-belief and self-feelings regarding the academic setting. Concerning this statement, it is predictable that HASC learners feel more confident and secure to produce longer sentences.

According to Purkey (1970), there is a continuous interaction between self-concept and academic achievement, and each directly influences the other.

4.2. Addressing Hypothesis Two

H02: Academic self-concept does not have any significant effect on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' academic self-concept and amounts of coordination in their speaking skills.

In this study, coordination was operationalized by calculating coordinate phrases per clause (CP/C), coordinate phrases per T-unit (CP/T), and sentence coordination ratio (T/S). Independent-samples *t*-test was used to compare the HASC and LASC learners' CP/C, CP/T, and T/S, and the HASC and LASC learners were not significantly different in terms of their amount of coordination in speaking. These results lead to the confirmation of the second null hypothesis of the study, and to the conclusion that academic self-concept does not affect Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' amount of coordination in their speaking. These findings could be attributable to the linguistic features of coordination. Concerning grammatical perceptions, coordinating conjunctions are considered to be easier than subordinations. It implies that learners with lower academic self-concept feel more secure and comfortable using coordinating conjunctions in their speakings. Another grammatical structure, which is always compared with coordination, is subordination. It is believed that subordination is more complex than coordination. Then it is predictable that coordination could be more preferable than the use of subordination.

4.3. Addressing Hypothesis Three

H03: Academic self-concept does not have any significant effect on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' academic self-concept and amounts of subordinations in their speaking skills.

As subordination was measured through calculating T-unit complexity ratio (C/T), complex T-unit ratio (CT/T), dependent clause ratio (DC/C), and dependent clause per T-unit (DC/T), an independent-sample *t*-test was conducted to compare the HASC and LASC learners in terms of these four measures of subordination. The HASC and LASC learners were significantly different in terms of their amount of subordination in speaking. The HASC learners significantly outperformed the LASC learners, which gives rise to the rejection of the third null hypothesis of the study, and to the corollary that academic self-concept affects Iranian

upper-intermediate EFL learners' amount of subordination in their written productions.

These results could be due to the linguistic features of coordination and subordination structures. Based on available research in linguistics subordination in speaking is considered to be more complex than coordination (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Hopper & Traugott, 2003; Purpura, 2004; Willis, 2003). Therefore, it implies that learners with lower academic self-concept are not willing to take risks and use more complicated structures in their speakings. Therefore, LASC students tend to rely on the use of coordination but not subordinations. Concerning the number of subordinations in speaking, which leads to higher syntactic complexity, the impact of academic self-concept is obvious. The aforementioned results are consistent with numerous findings related to academic self-concept and its effect on academic performance.

According to Liu (2009), students who have less satisfying academic performance may develop less positive academic confidence, which in the end, may lead to lower academic self-concept. On the other hand, students with less positive academic self-concept are more likely to lack learning motivation, which may result in poor academic performance. Liu (2009), thus, concluded that academic self-concept and academic achievement tend to affect and determine each other.

4.4. Addressing Hypothesis Four

H04: Academic self-concept does not have any significant effect on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' phrasal sophistication in their speaking skills.

Phrasal sophistication was operationalized through the three measures of complex nominals per clause (CN/C), complex nominals per T-unit (CN/T), and verb phrase per T-unit (VP/T). Independent-samples *t*-test was employed to compare HASC and LASC learners in terms of their phrasal sophistication. Obtained results indicated that on the three measures of phrasal sophistication, the HASC learners could obtain significantly higher scores than the LASC learners, and the differences between the two groups were statistically significant. These results lead to the rejection of the fourth null hypothesis of the study, and to the conclusion that academic self-concept affects Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' phrasal sophistication in their speaking.

These findings agree with related studies on the impact of academic self-concept on the academic performance of EFL learners. Skaalvik,

Valas, and Sletta (1994) declared that students with high academic self-concept focus on outperforming their colleagues academically. This could be achieved through the use of more sophisticated phrases in speaking tasks.

In a study, Guay, Rattelle, Soy, and Litalien (2010) found that learners who perceived themselves as academically competent obtained higher grades because their academic self-concept lead them to be more autonomously motivated at school. In contrast, students with negative perceptions about their academic capabilities, according to Bandura et al., as cited in Williams and Williams (2010), are reluctant to academic tasks because they view them as personal threats, and have low aspirations and weak commitments to task-related goals.

Zimmerman and Martinez-Pans cited in Williams and Williams (2010) explain that once these beliefs are formed, they affect a student's performance through their influence on the choice of activities, the amount of effort applied, the level of persistence, and the kinds of meta-cognition learning strategies invoked. It is inferable that prior academic self-concept influences subsequent academic performance, in this study, the choice of more complex syntactic structures, including the use of more sophisticated phrases

It is hoped that the insights offered can contribute in some small part towards a greater understanding of the role of the individual's academic self-concept in the process of Foreign Language Learning (FLL).

5. Conclusions and Implications of the Study

This study has provided evidence to indicate that academic self-concept has a significant effect on the speaking performance of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners concerning syntactic complexity. Results indicated that HASC learners significantly outperformed LASC learners on (a) length of production, (b) subordination, and (c) phrasal sophistication. However, the difference between HASC and LASC learners on the measures of coordination was not found to be statistically significant.

This study may shed light on the following aspects: Pedagogically, the implications drawn from the research findings may help educators improve their teaching methods. It is important for teachers to become more sensitive to the psychology of learners and to better understand how a learner's academic self-concept can affect their performance in the FLL context. In short, language teachers should try to help learners to develop a positive but realistic academic self-concept in the domain of FLL.

A wide range of factors may contribute to the formation of learners' self-concept in general and academic self-concept in particular. It may involve not only learners' self-perceptions but also learners' reciprocal relations with their teacher, peers, school, and classroom environmental factors. Thus, there is always hope for more effort to enhance students' academic self-concept construct. Researchers such as Marsh et al. (2005) have suggested that improving student academic achievement without enhancing self-concept in related academic domains is most likely to lead to only short-term gains. Academic self-concept is not only an important outcome variable but also is a mediating variable that facilitates the gain of related academic performance outcomes (Marsh & Yeung, 1997).

Developing effective instructional materials considering psychological factors involved in the EFL context is another implication drawn from the results of the present study. In developing materials, the writer's understanding of self-related constructs will have a major impact on material design, since it will play a role in determining the goals of the materials, the content of the materials, and the activities and exercises within them. Thus, developers should be much more cautious about the psychology of learners and decisions on the kinds of exercises, tasks, and activities to be employed in materials, they have to be in a way that targets psychological traits, specifically learners' academic self-concept. Effective tasks and exercises provide opportunities for learners to build up their academic self-concept and to perform better in the academic context.

6. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The present study may suffer from certain unavoidable limitations and may suggest some directions for future related studies. It is hoped that the following suggestions, which are made based on the results of the current research, help broaden the insights of researchers.

First of all, concerning the generalization of the research findings, it is noted that the sample size was small in the present study. With a larger sample size, the results could have revealed more significant differences hinted at by the numerical trends.

Another notable limitation is that the speaking samples in the present study were relatively short speaking with some 25 sentences, which make some less infrequent syntactic structures less visible on the whole. Preferably, future research could consider longer speaking samples, say, 50 or more sentences for each sample while the number of participants should be ensured for the sake of representativeness.

Various factors seemed to be connected with the learners' academic self-concept. Most notably, these included a learner's goals, strategies, and motivation. As the data in this study did not indicate whether or not these factors could affect the academic self-concept directly, it implies that further, and more focused research is needed to understand these factors and explore how they interconnect with each other and a learner's academic self-concept.

In respect to variation across learners, the present study did not examine any demographic factors that may cause differences in academic self-concepts, such as gender, or age. Thus, there is a need for further research to examine how these factors may affect the learners' academic self-concept

The primary focus of the present study was on the syntactic aspect of complexity. It is suggested for future research to consider lexical complexity as one of the important components of complexity.

References

Archibald, A. (2004). Speaking in a second language. Retrieved from http://www.lang.itsn.ac.uk/index.aspx

Apter, T. (1998). *The confident child.* New York: Bantam Books.

Bacha, N. N. (2002). Developing learners' academic writing skills in higher education: A study for educational reform. *Language and Education, 16*(3), 163-173.

Beach, R. (1989). Showing students how to assess: Demonstrating techniques for response in the writing conference. In C. M. Anson (Ed.), *Writing and response* (pp. 127- 148). Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Beers, S. F., & Nagy, W. E (2011). Writing development in four genres from grades three to seven: syntactic complexity and genre differentiation.

Biber, D. (1988). Variation across Speech and Writing. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Bong, M. & Clark, R. E. (1999). Comparison between self–concept, and self–efficacy in academic motivation research. Educational Psychologist, (Vol.34, pp.139-153).

Bong, M., & Skaalvik, E. M. (2003). Academic self-concept and self-efficacy: how different are they really? *Educational Psychology Review, 15*(1), 1-40.

Bracken, B. A. (2009). Positive self-concepts. In R. Gilman, E. S. Huebner, & M. J. Furlong (Eds.), Handbook of positive psychology in the schools (pp. 89–106). New York, NY: Routledge.

Branden, N. (1994). The six pillars of self-esteem. New York: Bantam Books.

Brown, H. D. (2000). Principles of language learning and teaching (4th Ed.). San Francisco: Addison Wesley Longman. Inc.

Burns, R. (1982). Self-concept development and education. London: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston.

Celce-Murcia, M. (1991). Language teaching methodology. London: Prentice-Hall

Celce-Murcia, M., 2001. Teaching English as a second or foreign language (3rd ed.). Boston: HeinleandHeinle.

Cheng, Y.S., Horwitz, E., Schallert, D.L. (1999). Language anxiety: differentiating speaking and speaking components. *Language Learning 49*(3), 417-446.

Choi, N. (2005). Self–efficacy and self–concept as predictors of college student's academic performance. *Psychology in the Schools* (Vol.42, pp.197-205)

Csizer, K., Lukacs, G. (2010). The comparative analysis of motivation, attitudes, and selves: the case of English and German in Hungary. *System 38*(1), 1-1

Csizer, K., Magid, M. (Eds.). (2014). The impact of self-concept on language learning. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Dastjerdi, H. V., & Samian, S.H. (2011). Quality of Iranian EFL learners' argumentative essays: cohesive device in focus. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 2*(2), 65-76.

Davidson, F. (1991). Statistical support for training in ESL composition rating. In L. Hamp-Lyons (Ed.), Assessing second language speaking (pp. 155-165). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

De Fraine, B., Van Damme, J., & Onghena, P. (2007). A longitudinal analysis of gender differences in academic self-concept and language achievement: A multivariate multilevel latent growth approach. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 32*, 132-150.

De Haan, P., & van Esch, K. (2006). Assessing the development of foreign language writing skills: syntactic and lexical features. *Language and Computers, 60*(1), 185-202.

Dornyei, Z. (2005). The Psychology of the Language Learner. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, NJ.

Dornyei, Z., Ushioda, E. (Eds.). (2009). Motivation, language identity, and the L2 self. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Ellis R, Barkhuizen G. 2005. Analyzing learner language. Oxford: Oxford University Pres

Erkan, D. Y., & Saban, A. I. (2011). Speaking performance relative to speaking apprehension, self-efficacy in speaking, and attitudes towards speaking: A correlational study in Turkish tertiary-level EFL. *Asian EFL Journal, 5*(4), 164-192

Faigley, L. (1990). Competing theories of process: A critique and a proposal. In R. L. Graves (Ed.), Rhetoric and composition. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Faigley, L., Cherry, R. D., Jolliffe, D. A., & Skinner, A. M. (1985). Assessing writers' knowledge and processes of composing. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Foster, P., & Skehan, P. (1996). The influence of planning and task type on second language performance. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition,18*(1), 299-324.

Graham, S., 2007. Learner strategies and self-efficacy: making the connection. *Language Learning Journal, 35*(1), 81-93.

Grodnick, J. R. (1996). Self-esteem and speaking achievement (Unpublished Master's Thesis). New Jersey, USA.

Guay, F., Ratelle, C. F., Roy, A., & Litalien, D. (2010). Academic self-concept, autonomous academic motivation, and academic achievement: mediating and additive effects. *Learning and Individual Differences, 20*, 644-653.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1998). Things and relations: Regrammaticising experience as technical knowledge. In J. R. Martin, & R. Veel (Eds.), Reading Science: Critical and Functional Perspectives on Discourses of Science (pp. 185-235). New York: Routledge.

Harter, S. (1998). The development of self-representations. In Damon, W., & Eisenberg, N. (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology, 3*(5), 553-617. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Hayes, J. (2006). New directions in speaking theory. In C. A. MacArthur, S. Graham, & J. Fitzgerald (Eds.), Handbook of speaking research (pp. 28-40). New York: Guilford Press.

Hsieh, P.P., Schallert, D. L., 2008. Implications from self-efficacy and attribution theories for an understanding of undergraduates' motivation in a foreign language course. *Contemporary Educational Psychology 33*(4), 513-532.

Homstad, T., & Thorson, H. (2000). Quantity versus quality? Using extensive and intensive speaking in the FL classroom. In G. Bräuer (Ed.), Speaking across languages (pp. 141-152). Stamford, CT: Ablex.

Henry, A., 2009. Gender differences in compulsory school pupils' L2 self-concepts: a longitudinal study. *System, 37*(2), 177-193.

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 70*(2), 125-132.

Huitt, W. (2004). Self–concept and self–esteem. Educational Psychology Interactive. Retrieved from http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/col/regsys/self.html.

Hull, G., & Rose, M. (1989). Rethinking remediation: Toward a social-cognitive understanding of problematic reading and speaking. *Written Communication*, 6, 139-154.

Jafari, N., & Ansari, D. N. (2012). The effect of collaboration on Iranian EFL learners' speaking accuracy. *International Education Studies, 5*(2), 125-131

Jun, Z. (2008). A comprehensive review of studies on second language speaking. Papers in *Applied Language Studies, 12*, 89-123

Khansir, A. A., & Abdolahi, Z. (2014). Self-Esteem and Speaking Achievements of Iranian EFL Learners. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies, 3*(2), 155-164.

Larsen-Freeman, D. (2006). The emergence of complexity, fluency, and accuracy in the oral and written production of five Chinese learners of English. *Applied Linguistics, 27*(4), 590-619.

Leary, M. R., & Tangney, J. P. (2003). The self as an organizing construct in the behavioral and social sciences. In M. R. Leary, & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), Handbook of self and identity (pp. 3-14). New York: The Guilford Press.

Liu, Hui-Ju (2009). Exploring changes in academic self-concept in ability-grouped English classes. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2*(2) 411-432.

Liu, W. C. & Wang, C. K. J., (2005). Academic self–concept: A cross-sectional study of grade and gender differences in a Singapore secondary school. *Asia Pacific Education Review, 6*(l), pp.20-27.

Liu, W. C., Wang, C. K. J., & Parkins, E. J. (2005). A longitudinal study of students' academic self–concept in a streamed setting: The Singapore context. British Journal of Educational Psychology. (pp. 567-586).

Marsh, H. W., Relich, J. D., & Smith, I. D. (1983). Self-concept: The construct validation of interpretations based upon the SDQ. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 4*(3), 173-187.

Marsh, H, W., Smith, I.D., & Barnes, J. (1983). Multitrait-multimethod analyses of the Self-Description Questionnaire: Student-teacher agreement on multidimensional ratings of student self-concept. *American Educational Research Journal, 20,*333-357.

Marsh, H. W., Trautwein, V., Ludtke, O., Koller, O., & Baumert, J. (2005). Academic self-concept, interest, grades, and standardized test scores: Reciprocal effects models of causal ordering. *Child Development, 76*(2), 397-416.

Marsh, H. W. (2007a). Physical self-concept and sport. In S. Jowette, & D. Lavallee (Eds.), Social psychology in sport (pp. 159–179). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Marsh, H. W. (2007b). Self-concept theory, measurement, and research into practice: The role of self-concept in educational psychology. Leicester, United Kingdom: British Psychological Society.

Mercer, S. (2011). Towards an Understanding of Language Learner Self-Concept. Dordrecht: Springer.

Mercer, S., & Williams, M. (Eds.). (2014). Multiple perspectives on the self in SLA. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Michel, M., Kuiken, F., & Vedder, I. (2007). The influence of complexity on monologic versus dialogic tasks in Dutch L2. *International review of applied linguistics in language teaching, 45*(3), 241-259

Morita, N. (2004). Negotiating participation and identity in second language academic communities. *TESOL Quarterly, 38*(4), 573-603.

Norris, J. M., & Ortega, L. (2009). Towards an organic approach to investigating CAF in instructed SLA: The case of complexity. *Applied Linguistics, 30*(4), 555-578.

Norton, B. (2000). Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Change. London: Longman.

Pajares, F. (2006). Self-efficacy and adolescence: Implications for teachers and parents. In F. Pajares & T. Urdan (Eds.), *Adolescence and education, Vol. 5*: Self-efficacy beliefs of adolescents. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Pajares, F. (2003). Self-efficacy beliefs, motivation, and achievement in writing: A review of the literature. *Reading and Writing Quarterly, 19*, 139-158.

Pellegrino, V.A. (2005). Study Abroad and Second Language Use: Constructing the Self. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rubio, F. (2007). Self-esteem and foreign language learning: an introduction. In: Rubio, F. (Ed.), Self-Esteem and Foreign Language Learning. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Pajares, F., & Schunk, D.H. (2005). Self-efficacy and self-concept beliefs. In H. W. Marsh, R. G. Craven, & D. M. McInerney (Eds.), *International advances in self-research: Vol. 2*. (pp. 95–121). Greenwich, Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.

Pellegrino, V. A. (2005). Study Abroad and Second Language Use: Constructing the Self. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Perl, S. (1979). The composing processes of unskilled college writers. *Research in the Teaching of English, 13*, 317-336.

Polit, D., & Beck, C. T. (2004). Nursing Research: Principles and Methods. (7th ed.). Philadelphia, PN: Lippincott, Williams, & Wilkins.

Rorschach, E. (1986). The effects of reader awareness: A case study of three ESL student writers. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 47*(12), 4311

Rimmer, W. (2008). Putting grammatical complexity in context. *Literacy, 42*(1), 29-35.

Rubio, F. (2007). Self-esteem and foreign language learning: an introduction. In: Rubio, F. (Ed.), Self-Esteem and Foreign Language Learning. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing,

Sandler, K. W. (1987). Letting them write when they can't even talk? Speaking as discovery in the foreign language classroom. In T. Fulwiler (Ed.), The journal book (pp. 312-320). Portsmouth, NH: Boyntod Cook.

Schleppegrell, M. J. (2004). The language of schooling: A functional linguistics perspective. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

Shavelson, R. J., Hubner, J. J., & Stanton, G. C. (1976). Self-concept: Validation of construct interpretations. *Review of Educational Research, 46*, 407-441.

Trembley, D. (1993). Guidelines for teaching speaking to ABE and ASE learners. (ERIC Reproduction Service No. ED 361741)

Tuan, L. T. (2010). Enhancing EFL learners' speaking skills via journal speaking. *English Language Teaching, 3*(3), 81-88

Strein, W. (1995). Assessment of self-concept, Retrieved from http://www.ericdigests.org/eric-digests.html

Yuan, F., & Ellis, R. (2003). The effects of pre-task planning and online planning on fluency, complexity, and accuracy in L2 monologic oral production. Applied Linguistics, 24, 1 27.

Vaughan, C. (1991). Holistic assessment: What goes on in the rater's mind. In L. Hamp-Lyons (Ed.), Assessing second language speaking academic contexts (pp. 111-125). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Williams, M., R.L. Burden, G. Poulet, and I. Maun. 2004. Learners' perceptions of their successes and failures in foreign language learning. Language Learning Journal 30(1): 19–29.

Zaree, A., & Farvardin, M. T. (2009). Comparison of university-level EFL learners' linguistic and rhetorical patterns as reflected in their L1 and L2 speaking. *Navista-Royal, 3*(2), 143-155.

Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Self-efficacy: An essential motive to learn. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*, 82-91.