

Constructing Motivational Meaning through Self-Mention Markers in Joshua Hong's UNESCO Speeches

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Abstract. Motivational speeches by public figures play a critical role in inspiring audiences, fostering engagement, and promoting social responsibility. This study investigates how self-mention markers contribute to the construction of motivational meaning in Joshua Hong's UNESCO speeches. Guided by Hyland's (2005) interactional metadiscourse framework, a qualitative discourse analysis was conducted on two speeches delivered at the UNESCO Youth Forum (2023) and the Goodwill Ambassador for Youth Nomination Ceremony (2024). A total of 93 self-mention markers were identified, with *we*, *our*, and *us* being the most frequent. Four main functions were found: constructing collective identity, expressing commitment and responsibility, sharing personal experiences and authenticity, and highlighting perseverance and struggle. The findings indicate that motivational meaning is discursively constructed through these markers, fostering solidarity, credibility, collective responsibility, and resilience among audiences. Self-mention markers thus function as central interpersonal resources in motivational discourse, highlighting the role of strategic speaker positioning in shaping audience engagement and motivation.

Keywords: self-mention markers, interactional metadiscourse, motivational meaning, Joshua Hong, UNESCO speeches

Introduction

Motivational speeches delivered by public figures have become increasingly prominent in international forums and global communication

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contexts. These speeches not only convey information but also aim to inspire audiences, shape attitudes, and encourage collective engagement through language (Fairclough, 1989; Charteris-Black, 2014). Motivation, therefore, should not be understood solely as an individual psychological construct but as a socially and discursively constructed phenomenon shaped through interaction and communication (Ushioda, 2016; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017). In this sense, motivational discourse plays an important role in examining how language functions interpersonally to influence, inspire, and engage audiences.

From a discourse perspective, motivational speeches encourage audiences to take action and adopt positive attitudes and behaviors (Sherwani, 2020). The effectiveness of such speeches depends not only on their content but also on how speakers construct interpersonal meanings through linguistic choices that position audiences within shared perspectives (Dong & Zhang, 2026; Martin, 2022). Through these choices, speakers negotiate alignment, establish credibility, and build emotional engagement with audiences (Zhang et al., 2026). Thus, motivational meaning is constructed through discourse rather than merely transmitted through explicit messages.

To examine how motivational meaning is discursively constructed through interpersonal interaction, this study employs Hyland's (2005) interactional metadiscourse framework as an analytical lens. The framework explains the interpersonal linguistic resources through which speakers express stance, project identity, engage audiences, and negotiate relationships. In motivational discourse, these interpersonal resources contribute to the construction of motivational meaning by fostering solidarity, commitment, credibility, and audience engagement (Ushioda, 2016; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017). The framework consists of five categories: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, and self-mentions (Hyland, 2005). Although originally developed for written academic discourse, it has been widely applied to spoken discourse where interpersonal engagement plays a central role (Ädel, 2006; Yang, 2023).

Among these categories, self-mention markers are particularly significant because they explicitly project speaker presence and identity. According to Hyland (2005), self-mentions are realized through first-person pronouns and possessive forms such as *I*, *me*, *my*, *we*, *us*, and *our*. These markers allow speakers to establish credibility, express commitment, and construct collective identities. Dontcheva-Navratilova (2023) further emphasizes that self-mentions are among the most visible indicators of authorial presence in discourse. In motivational contexts, self-mentions are particularly relevant because they connect personal and collective experiences with broader aspirations and shared goals.

Previous studies have examined self-mention markers in political and institutional discourse. Kapranov (2024) and Kapranov (2025) found that self-mentions in climate change speeches function to construct collective identity, strengthen authorial presence, and emphasize shared responsibility. Similarly, research on public speeches by cultural figures, such as K-pop artists, highlights the importance of linguistic strategies for audience engagement and persuasion (Hasanah et al., 2019; Diffani & Hikmah, 2023). However, these studies largely focus on identity construction, ideology, or speech acts, rather than motivational meaning as a discourse outcome.

Despite growing attention to interactional metadiscourse, limited research has examined how self-mention markers contribute specifically to the construction of motivational meaning in international youth advocacy discourse. Existing studies tend to focus on political and environmental speeches (Kapranov, 2024; Kapranov, 2025), while studies on celebrity discourse emphasize broader communicative strategies rather than motivational construction. As a result, the role of self-mention markers in constructing motivational meaning remains underexplored, particularly in speeches delivered in institutional global settings.

Joshua Hong's speeches at the UNESCO Youth Forum (2023) and the UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Youth Nomination Ceremony (2024) provide an appropriate context for addressing this research gap. As a member of SEVENTEEN and UNESCO's Goodwill Ambassador for Youth, he delivers motivational messages on education, youth empowerment, personal growth, and social responsibility to a global audience. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine political speeches or analyze celebrity discourse through frameworks such as Speech Act Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (Hasanah et al., 2019; Diffani & Hikmah, 2023), this study investigates his speeches through the lens of interactional metadiscourse. His dual role as a public celebrity and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador requires him to balance personal credibility, audience engagement, and institutional values, creating a discourse context that differs from more commonly studied political and academic speeches. Examining this context extends the application of Hyland's (2005) interactional metadiscourse framework and provides further insight into how self-mention markers construct motivational meaning in international youth advocacy discourse.

Therefore, this study investigates the linguistic realization of self-mention markers in Joshua Hong's UNESCO speeches and examines how these markers contribute to the construction of motivational meaning. Although Hyland's (2005) interactional metadiscourse framework was originally developed for academic discourse, its conceptualization of self-mentions as explicit markers of speaker presence and identity is equally applicable to spoken motivational discourse, where speakers position themselves, establish credibility, and build relationships with audiences. Accordingly, no adaptation of the self-mention category was required, as first-person references in Joshua Hong's speeches perform the same interpersonal functions described by Hyland. In this study, motivational meaning refers to the interpersonal meanings constructed through discourse that encourage audiences by fostering solidarity, commitment, authenticity, hope, and a shared sense of purpose. Rather than representing a psychological state, motivational meaning is understood as a communicative effect emerging from speakers' strategic interpersonal linguistic choices. Drawing on this framework, the study aims to explain how motivational meaning is discursively constructed through speaker presence, collective identity, commitment, authenticity, and perseverance in contemporary public speeches.

Method

This study employed a qualitative discourse analysis approach to examine how self-mention markers contribute to the construction of motivational meaning in Joshua Hong's UNESCO speeches. The analysis was guided by Hyland's (2005) interactional metadiscourse framework, focusing specifically on the self-mention

category, which refers to explicit linguistic realizations of speaker presence through first-person pronouns and possessive forms.

The data consisted of two prepared speeches delivered by Joshua Hong at UNESCO events, namely the UNESCO Youth Forum speech (November 2023) and the Goodwill Ambassador for Youth Nomination Ceremony speech (June 2024). The speeches were obtained from publicly available YouTube videos uploaded by daisyso_o and SEVENTEEN's official YouTube channel. Both speeches were delivered in English to international youth audiences and addressed themes of education, personal growth, youth empowerment, and social responsibility.

The speeches were first transcribed using an automated transcription tool and subsequently verified through repeated listening and comparison with available English subtitles to ensure accuracy. After transcription, all instances of self-mention markers, including first-person pronouns and possessive forms such as *I*, *me*, *my*, *we*, *us*, and *our*, were identified and extracted for analysis.

The analysis combined interactional metadiscourse analysis, pronoun-reference analysis, functional discourse analysis, and thematic interpretation to examine how self-mention markers construct motivational meaning. First, the transcripts were reviewed line by line to identify all explicit first-person singular and plural pronouns and possessive forms functioning as self-mention markers according to Hyland's (2005) framework. Each occurrence was coded as a separate analytical unit, even when multiple markers appeared within the same utterance. Second, the coded markers were analyzed within their immediate discourse context to determine their interpersonal functions in the construction of motivational meaning. Third, functionally similar instances were synthesized into four overarching motivational meaning categories: constructing collective identity, expressing commitment and responsibility, sharing personal experiences and authenticity, and highlighting perseverance and struggle. Finally, frequency counts were used to complement the qualitative interpretation by providing an overview of the distribution patterns across the two speeches.

To ensure analytical rigor and consistency, the coding process was conducted iteratively, with all identified self-mention markers repeatedly reviewed and cross-checked against Hyland's (2005) coding criteria. The coding procedures, functional categorization, and thematic interpretation were subsequently reviewed by an expert in discourse analysis and pragmatics from Universitas Negeri Semarang to verify the consistency of coding decisions and the alignment of interpretations with Hyland's (2005) framework. Feedback from the expert review was incorporated into the final analysis to enhance the credibility, consistency, and trustworthiness of the findings.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

This section presents the findings regarding the use of self-mention markers in Joshua Hong's UNESCO speeches. Based on Hyland's (2005) interactional metadiscourse framework, 93 occurrences of self-mention markers were identified. The markers were realized in various linguistic forms, such as 'we', 'our', 'us', 'I', 'my', and several phrase-level forms.

Table 1. Distribution of Self-Mention Markers

Self-mention Markers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I	2	2.15%
I'm	3	3.3%
Me	1	1.08%
On behalf of	1	1.08%
Our	30	32.26%
Our very own lives	1	1.08%
Ourselves	1	1.08%
SEVENTEEN's	1	1.08%
Speak on behalf of	1	1.08%
Us	8	8.60%
We	41	44.09%
Himself	1	1.08%
My	1	1.08%
We're all	1	1.08%
Total	93	100%

As shown in Table 1, 'we' was the most frequently used self-mention marker, accounting for 44.09% of the total occurrences. This was followed by *our* (32.26%) and *us* (8.60%). In contrast, individual-oriented markers such as *I*, *I'm*, *me*, and *my* appeared less frequently. The predominance of collective pronouns indicates that Joshua Hong primarily positioned himself as part of a collective entity rather than as an individual speaker. This pattern suggests that the speeches' motivational meaning was largely constructed through inclusiveness, solidarity, and shared identity.

Table 2. Self-Mention Markers Function in Constructing Motivational Meaning

Self-mention Functions	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Constructing Collective Identity	42	42
Expressing Commitment and Responsibility	24	24
Sharing Personal Experience and Authenticity	12	12
Highlighting Perseverance and Struggle	15	15
Total	93	100%

As presented in Table 2, the most dominant function was constructing collective identity (45.2%), followed by expressing commitment and responsibility (25.8%), highlighting perseverance and struggle (16.1%), and sharing personal experience and authenticity (12.9%). These findings indicate that motivational meaning was primarily achieved through the construction of a sense of shared belonging and collective goals.

Table 3. Representative Examples of Self-Mention Functions

Self-mention Functions	Example	Linguistic Realization	Motivational Meaning
Constructing Collective Identity	“Our music has talked about our own experiences and genuine emotions.”	Our	Creates a sense of shared identity and belonging
Expressing Commitment and Responsibility	“We began our donations to children's organizations in 2017.”	We	Demonstrates responsibility and social commitment
Sharing Personal Experience and Authenticity	“We have already experienced what...”	We	Enhances credibility through lived experience
Highlighting Perseverance and Struggle	“We could overcome the hardships with gratitude.”	We	Encourages resilience and perseverance

Table 3 presents representative examples of self-mention markers and their motivational functions. The examples illustrate how self-mentions contribute to the construction of collective identity, commitment and responsibility, authenticity, and perseverance. Rather than merely indicating speaker presence, these markers serve as interpersonal resources that strengthen audience engagement and reinforce motivational messages.

Discussion

The findings indicate that self-mention markers function as important interpersonal resources in constructing motivational meaning in Joshua Hong's UNESCO speeches. This observation supports Hyland's (2005) argument that self-mention markers operate as interactional resources, enabling speakers to project their presence, construct particular identities, and establish interpersonal relationships with audiences through first-person references. Such markers are particularly crucial in public speaking, where speakers must not only convey information but also negotiate alignment and engagement with their audiences in real time (Hyland & Jiang, 2016). The predominance of self-mention markers in the present study, therefore, suggests that motivational meaning is constructed through active speaker positioning rather than through propositional content alone.

Self-Mention Markers and Collective Motivation

The findings reveal that self-mention markers primarily function to construct collective motivation in Joshua Hong's UNESCO speeches. First-person plural pronouns (*we*, *our*, and *us*) dominate the discourse, creating solidarity and a shared identity among the speaker, SEVENTEEN, and the global youth audience. By positioning achievements, experiences, and aspirations as collective rather than

individual, the speeches frame motivation as a communal endeavor grounded in shared experiences and goals.

The predominance of first-person plural markers can be understood not only in relation to the communicative purpose of motivational discourse but also to Joshua Hong's role as a representative of SEVENTEEN in an institutional setting. Motivational discourse typically encourages audiences through shared identity rather than individual achievement (Ushioda, 2016; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017), making inclusive pronouns particularly effective in fostering solidarity. At the same time, Joshua Hong speaks on behalf of SEVENTEEN, whose educational initiatives and youth advocacy activities are presented as collective rather than individual accomplishments. Consequently, the frequent use of *we*, *our*, and *us* reflects both the rhetorical purpose of motivational discourse and the speaker's representative role.

These findings support Hyland's (2005) argument that self-mention markers enable speakers to construct interpersonal alignment and shared identity. However, not all first-person plural references perform identical interactional functions. Some refer specifically to SEVENTEEN as the speaker's collective identity, whereas others extend the reference to the audience by inviting listeners to participate in shared aspirations for education, personal growth, and social responsibility. This flexible use of plural self-reference allows Joshua Hong to alternate between representing the group and fostering audience inclusion within the same motivational discourse.

The findings are also consistent with previous studies on public and persuasive discourse. Farghal and Kalakh (2019) found that first-person plural pronouns strengthen speaker–audience alignment in political debates, while El-Masry (2020) reported that UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador speeches similarly employ inclusive pronouns to establish solidarity and emotional engagement. These findings suggest that collective self-references effectively reduce interpersonal distance and encourage audience participation.

In Joshua Hong's UNESCO speeches, collective self-mentions also function as markers of commitment and responsibility. References to educational initiatives, charitable activities, and youth empowerment position SEVENTEEN as an active contributor to social change. This finding is consistent with Kashiha (2022), who argues that self-mentions reinforce speaker credibility, and with Angraini and Effrianti (2020), who found that self-mentions strengthen authority and identity projection by linking speakers to concrete actions and responsibilities. Consequently, motivational meaning is constructed not only through encouragement but also through the representation of collective responsibility and social engagement.

The institutional context of UNESCO further shapes the realization of these self-mentions (Hyland & Jiang, 2016), consistent with studies showing that public figures strategically align their interpersonal language with institutional values while maintaining audience engagement (El-Masry, 2020; Dininta et al., 2023). Unlike informal celebrity communication, UNESCO speeches encourage self-representation that prioritizes collective advocacy and shared responsibility over individual self-promotion. Consequently, Joshua Hong's self-mentions reflect multiple identities, namely those of a celebrity, a representative of SEVENTEEN, and UNESCO's Goodwill Ambassador for Youth. Each identity serves a distinct

communicative purpose. His celebrity identity enhances relatability through personal experiences, his representative identity emphasizes collective responsibility, and his institutional identity reinforces credibility by aligning his message with UNESCO's educational and humanitarian mission. Taken together, these overlapping identities demonstrate how the institutional setting shapes speaker identity while strengthening the motivational appeal of the speeches.

Self-Mention Markers and Authentic Motivation

The findings further indicate that self-mention markers contribute to authentic motivation by grounding motivational messages in lived experiences. References to challenges, perseverance, and personal growth allow Joshua Hong to present motivation as something personally experienced rather than abstract advice. As a result, these self-mentions enhance the speaker's credibility and make the messages more relatable to the audience.

In contrast to the predominance of first-person plural references, first-person singular markers *I*, *me*, and *my* primarily function to establish personal authenticity. Rather than emphasizing collective identity, these references introduce personal experiences, emotions, and reflections that position Joshua Hong as an individual who has faced challenges and experienced growth. Such personal positioning enhances the credibility of motivational messages by presenting them as authentic experiences before extending them to broader collective concerns. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that self-mentions contribute to speaker credibility, authorial presence, and interpersonal engagement in public discourse (Kashiha, 2022; Koukposi, 2024).

According to Hyland (2005), self-mention markers establish an identifiable authorial presence and demonstrate the speaker's personal involvement in the discourse. In motivational speeches, this explicit self-reference enhances credibility because audiences are more likely to engage with messages grounded in authentic personal experience.

The present findings also support Ushioda's (2016) view that motivation is socially and discursively constructed through interaction rather than merely transmitted as information. By drawing on experiences of hardship, growth, and achievement, Joshua Hong constructs motivation through authenticity and shared understanding, allowing audiences to connect with the message on a more personal level.

Previous studies similarly emphasize the role of personal narratives in enhancing audience engagement. Bullock et al. (2021) argue that authentic narratives strengthen identification because audiences are more likely to connect with messages rooted in real experiences. Likewise, Åhlvik et al. (2024) note that motivational meaning is often constructed through narratives that encourage audiences to reinterpret challenges as opportunities for growth. Research on leadership and public speeches also suggests that narratives of resilience and perseverance contribute to emotional engagement and persuasive effectiveness (Liu & Li, 2025).

In the present study, self-mention markers frequently accompany references to overcoming difficulties and learning from challenges. By presenting these struggles as sources of learning and growth, Joshua Hong transforms personal experiences into motivational narratives that encourage resilience and persistence.

It should also be acknowledged that not every self-mention marker performs a motivational function. Some merely identify the speaker or refer to SEVENTEEN as a collective entity. Nevertheless, within the broader discourse context, these referential uses still contribute to interpersonal positioning and support the construction of motivational meaning across the speeches.

Self-Mention as a Strategy for Constructing Motivational Meaning

Taken together, these findings indicate that self-mention markers function as a multifaceted strategy for constructing motivational meaning. Through collective identity, commitment and responsibility, authenticity, and perseverance, they enable Joshua Hong to establish interpersonal connections with audiences while fostering motivation and engagement.

These findings support a study from Hyland and Jiang (2016) that argues interactional metadiscourse facilitates persuasion by enabling speakers to negotiate interpersonal relationships and position themselves in relation to their audiences. They also support Ushioda's (2016) perspective that motivation is discursively constructed through language and social interaction rather than existing solely as an internal psychological phenomenon.

Within the context of UNESCO's international youth advocacy, self-mention markers transform individual and collective experiences into motivational narratives that resonate with culturally and socially diverse audiences. By combining inclusive and authentic self-references, Joshua Hong constructs motivational meaning that promotes solidarity, reinforces global citizenship, and encourages youth empowerment.

Conclusion

This study investigated the linguistic realization of self-mention markers in Joshua Hong's UNESCO speeches and examined how these markers contribute to the construction of motivational meaning. Drawing on Hyland's (2005) interactional metadiscourse framework, the analysis identified 93 occurrences of self-mention markers, with *we*, *our*, and *us* emerging as the most dominant forms. The findings revealed four primary functions of self-mention markers: constructing collective identity, expressing commitment and responsibility, sharing personal experiences and authenticity, and highlighting perseverance and struggle.

The findings demonstrate that self-mention markers function as central interpersonal resources for constructing motivational meaning through strategic speaker positioning. First-person plural references primarily foster solidarity, collective responsibility, and audience inclusion, whereas first-person singular references establish personal authenticity and strengthen speaker credibility. The findings further suggest that the realization of these self-mentions is shaped not only by the communicative purpose of motivational discourse but also by Joshua Hong's multiple identities as a celebrity, a representative of SEVENTEEN, and UNESCO's Goodwill Ambassador for Youth. Overall, this study contributes to interactional metadiscourse research by demonstrating how self-mention markers operate as linguistic strategies for constructing motivational meaning within the context of international youth advocacy discourse.

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