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# Being Involved or Informative: Gender Differences in the Use of Pronouns and Specifiers in Writing Conclusions

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The conclusion comprises the summary of the study. It is where the authors present their last words about the findings while introducing some suggestions on the issue. Gender is believed to be one of social factors that shapes someone's communication style, be it oral or written. This study aimed to explore the differences in the use of pronouns and noun specifiers by authors of different genders in composing the conclusions of their research articles. It observed how pronouns and specifiers are manifested differently in the texts and the different intentions behind their use. Ten research articles' conclusions were randomly selected based on gender of the authors five of each gender from one Indonesian journal in the field of language study. This study is qualitative, thus, the data are analyzed and presented in words to a draw clear interpretation of the issue. The findings revealed the differences in the tendency of female and male authors in utilizing both linguistic features in the conclusions. It was discovered that female authors utilized more pronouns and male authors, on the other hand, used more noun specifiers in their texts.

Keywords: conclusion; gender difference; pronoun; scientific writing; specifier

## INTRODUCTION

The rise of gender studies has been linked with the academic field particularly language learning for the past few decades as the result of the women's movement. Observing how men and women interpret messages differently in their speeches and texts has since been receiving major attention. One of the very first works on the essence of gender in the variation of language use and linguistic choices is that of Lakoff (1975). Following his findings, the studies underlying the question of the differences in linguistic styles between male and female has since begun to take place (Labov 1990; Ishikawa 2015; Alkrisheh et al. 2019; Bacang et al. 2019; Franco et al. 2021). Some other studies have examined the differences in syntactical and lexical aspects between genders in written texts (Argamon et al., 2003; Llach 2010; Baker 2014). Other several studies have also inspected how gender influences the process of sentence and discourse production (Tannen 1994; Newman et al. 2008; Abdurrahman 2017).

Compared to speaking, in writing, the authors are restricted by conventional norms of the way the texts should be compiled. In verbal communications, the speakers are assisted with broader options of words they can access from despite of the context. Hence, one's language competence is often time measured by how well he or she speaks (Waskita 2008). Fluent speaking proficiency has thus become the ultimate objective of second or foreign-language learners. However, the current status quo of writing and its contribution particularly in the higher education setting has changed the way people view it.

Since writing has become one tool in measuring one's active participation in higher education, more and more academic discourse members try to compete to gain recognition in the research publication, thus, weighing in more to the fact that the writing skill should receive an equal amount of attention. Despite individual uniqueness of seeing, describing, and conveying messages based on their beliefs, experience, and genders, in writing there are rules that the authors

must comply with. Specifically, when it comes to academic writing, there are conventional rules in the community that all members should adhere to. Academic writing is basically composed of high lexical density, high nominal style, and impersonal construction (Hyland 2004).

In writing, the authors try to convey their personality, credibility, and consideration of the subject matter to the readers by using certain devices in their texts (Seyyedrezaie & Vahedi 2017). While constructing the sentences, besides sending certain messages, male and female authors may retain different semantic goals in their minds (Newman et al., 2008). The variety of word choices between men and women appears to be attuned according to the variety of contexts. According to Giles et al. (1991) that individuals change their linguistic choices depending on the situation on their communicative goals. Lakoff (1975, 205) mentions far earlier that "in stable sociolinguistic stratification, men use a higher frequency of nonstandard forms than women".

In a research article, however, where the intended readers are not limited to a specific gender, the properties of the writing must reflect the character of the writer. Several prior studies found the fact that men talk more about objects, while women talk more about relationships (Aries & Johnson 1983; Tannen 1994; Argamon et al. 2003). Hence, the language features in women's writings reveal the feature of 'involved' as they tend to use more pronouns than men do, while in men's writings, the features shown to be those identified as 'informational' by the frequency of the use of nouns (Biber 1995).

Regardless of the conventional norms within the academic community, each individual has their way of expressing themselves through their writings and it is affected by a few factors including gender. Boettger & Wulff (2014) propose that gender is only one of a few social variables that can be observed as the source of inquiry to learn the tendency of word choices in technical and scientific writing. However, studies in this aspect can contribute some understanding of what can be used to promote effective written communication and to provide more data for future related investigations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research in these few decades has been giving much attention to the nature of gender in communication. Texts of various types and genres of authors of different genders were investigated to contribute to the knowledge of how men and women use language differently. While female and male speakers use language differently depending on the listeners and the speech community in a larger context, it can be expected that fewer conversation cues will be involved in formal written texts (Argamon et al. 2003).

Abdurrahman (2017) argues that particular language properties largely employed within a text can reveal the gender of the author. In addition to the studies of sentence and discourse production process, differences in various linguistic features have as well been examined such as the aspects of phonological and pragmatic (e.g., Labov 1990; Su & Chang 2019), syntax (e.g., Lakoff 1975; Ishikawa 2015; Kramer 2016), and phonology and pronunciation (e.g., Moyer 2016; Kim et al. 2016). In a study conducted by Argamon et al. (2003) in which 604 fiction and non-fiction texts from British National Corpus (BNC) were analyzed, they found that women used more pronouns in their writings (e.g., I, you, she, her, their, yourself, etc.) and men utilized more noun specifiers and determiners (e.g., a, the, that, these) as well as quantifiers (e.g., one, two, more, some). From this result, they came to the conclusion that in writing men and women tend to present things differently. The intention of women to be involved

in the text through the great use of pronouns appeared to be proved in this study which gives more validation to the prior result of Biber (1995).

Fuertes-Olivera (2007) through a large corpus-based study attempted to present evidence of lexical gender in written Business English. He analyzed approximately 10 million corpora of Wolverhampton Corpus of Written Business English (WBE) which is a specialized corpus concerned with Business English from 23 different business websites. Lexical gender nouns in English can be referred to as female-specific, male-specific nouns, or even gender-neutral nouns. Specifically focused on the forms of address, professional titles, and 'generic man', two important conclusions were drawn. First, the 'Male-As-Norm' underlying principle of lexical gender was found in the WBE due to the domination of males in filling most of the positions in the business affair. However, language in Business English was also found to have been influenced by the non-sexist stance. Upon his findings, a suggestion was offered for future business English teaching. He suggested that by bringing in gender sensitivity and making it an integral part of the teaching activities and also by identifying "potential areas of conflict in multicultural settings" some considerable improvements can be achieved.

Another study by Newman et al. in 2008 in which they compiled 14,000 text samples from within the year 1980 until 2002 including samples of fiction from as far as the 17<sup>th</sup> century and transcribed speech. The texts represented 70 studies from 22 laboratories from the U.S., England, and New Zealand. Their goals were to see if "men and women use language differently" and whether the texts' context influenced the differences in the way both genders use language (p. 218). In line with the results of Argamon et al.'s study, they found that women used more pronouns (e.g., I, you, he, she, etc.), social words (e.g., sister, friends), and psychological process vocabularies (e.g., mad, uneasy, remember, nervous). While men, on the other hand, used more numbers, articles, and prepositions (e.g., on, to, from). These findings revealed how men tend to focus more on conveying information, while women more on fostering social connections (Newman et al. 2008 in Ishikawa 2015).

Ishikawa (2015, 596-599) in her study of analyzing the corpus of 200 essay texts written by 100 native English-speaking university students consisting of 56 males and 44 females from The International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE), found similar results as the two previous studies. Her results showed that male students were more likely to use nouns than females did, and the more nouns are used in the text, the more prepositions are likely to exist. At the same time, female students used pronouns more frequently than male students. Consistent with the results of Newman et al.'s study, female students used more psychological processes-related words (e.g., think, disgusting). However, at the end of the study, she found a contrasting result with other previous studies that females used more determiners "that" more frequently than male students. They used it mostly as a conjunction in phrases. Thus, Ishikawa then concluded that men tend to use language to convey information, while women tend to use language to develop a bond with others.

In a non-formal setting, the tendency of using particular language features such as pronouns is easier to be discovered. For example, the results of the study by Abdurrahman (2017) where he investigated different language choices between men and women on Twitter proved that among the kinds of personal pronouns, first-person singular devices (I and me) are used mostly by women. This reflects the fact that women try to be 'involved'. Meanwhile, the first-person plural (we and us) were found more in men's texts which underlines how men tend to distance themselves by using more generic pronouns. However, in an

academic writing context, it seems to be a common agreement that the use of pronouns is depended upon the discipline it was written (Abdurrahman 2017).

Having stated that a certain type of writing that requires specific language pattern is beyond what can be discussed merely on the basis of gender, Boettger & Wulff (2019) went on to examine the effects of gender in technical and scientific writing. They propose that biological, cultural, and social factors are among the traits that influence one's inclined actions, writing included. Within their study, they analyzed sample texts which were a subset of the Technical Writing Project (TWP), "a corpus of student technical writing" (p. 243) of 46 female and 41 male writers. Mainly concentrated on the use of adverbs and passive voice, they discovered that female and male writers employed different types of adverbs and they used passive voice to describe different sections of the scientific paper. Overall, the two genders used similar types of markers in efforts to meet different rhetorical functions, however, female writers used considerably more both features in their texts.

With regard to the gender effects on scientific writing, the present study aims to provide a picture of the gender issue in the conclusion section of Indonesian research articles. The conclusion mainly contains the summary of the study. It provides the authors' suggestions while at the same time highlighting their position on the topic. The focus of this study is limited to personal pronouns and noun specifier that are believed to represent the indication of being involved and informative. Overall, it intends to prove whether Indonesian writers have similar tendencies in the way they present themselves in their conclusion texts in particular. In the sense that, women are likely to be involved with the readers, whereas men try to be more straightforward and distant themselves from the readers. In here the linguistic devices are focused mainly on the use of personal pronouns and noun specifiers. Moreover, the findings are expected to contribute to the existing literature in the field.

# RESEARCH METHOD

This study is qualitative in nature where the data are in the form of words and sentences. The corpus was taken from one Indonesian reputable journal on the field of language study which is currently accredited in Indonesian web-based research information system Science and Technology Index (Sinta) level 4. As stated by Arsyad (2013) that articles from one journal might have gone through a standard editing and reviewing process which controls the writing style and linguistics choices. Thus, all the conclusions from one journal would likely to be written in a very comparable writing style. Using the random sampling technique, ten research articles' conclusions five of each gender were selected based on the year of publication. The articles and authors' identities are kept confidential to maintain data eligibility. The general details of the conclusions as the objects of this study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Details of the Conclusions

Olstant	Nui	Tatal		
Object	Male	Female	<del></del> Total e	
Article Conclusions	5	5	10	
Words	1,667	1,027	2,694	

The linguistic features in this study are limited to pronouns (subjective, objective, possessive, and reflexive) and noun specifiers. Each paragraph and sentence was carefully studied. All types of personal pronouns found in the texts were investigated including subject and object pronouns as well as possessive

pronouns and possessive determiners. Noun specifiers addressed here are words that come before a noun to specify the noun or to explain the quantity including determiners, articles, and quantifiers. Conclusion texts written by female authors appear to contain more words than the texts of male authors, hence, in order to get a fair comparison, the number of each linguistic feature was converted into percent. The collected data were analyzed and presented narratively supported with some excerpts derived from the conclusion texts.

## **FINDINGS**

To limit the enormity of scope, this study is referring to the results of the study of Argamon et al. (2003, 334) which show that female authors tend to use more personal pronouns as the strategy of being involved. While the large use of determiners, quantifiers, and articles are included as male indicators, which implies that male authors are more likely to "specify the things that they write about." The written language features such as the use of pronouns, determiners, quantifiers, and articles are taken as indicators to measure the tendency between female and male authors. Table 1 shows the summary of the data corpus in this study. In general, from ten RA conclusion texts, each text of the female author is observed to have a greater number of words than male authors', thus the frequencies are viewed from their percentages of occurrences within the texts.

Table 2: The Comparison of the Use of Pronouns and Noun Specifiers across Gender

Linguistic	Evamples	Female		Male	
Feature	Feature Examples		Pct.	Freq.	Pct.
Pronouns					
First-person	I, me, mine, myself, we	36	2.2	4	0.4
Third-person	her, they, their, them	43	2.6	18	1.7
	it, its	8	0.5	10	1
Noun Specifiers					
Articles	a, an, the	144	8.6	94	9.2
Determiners	this, these, that, those	21	1.3	14	1.4
Quantifiers	one, two, some, several	14	8.0	8	8.0

Table 2 shows evidence that female authors employed a greater number of pronouns in their conclusions. The most remarkable one is the big difference in the total use of pronouns where female authors exceed more than twice of males. The use of the first-person singular (e.g., I, me, my, myself, mine) is found in four of five women's RA conclusions, however, there is only one text among men's texts which contains first-person pronouns. These pronouns in female authors' texts are used to provide explanations of the process of conducting the research, and the findings, and to state some suggestions. Women tend to engage themselves in their writings. Presented here are some sentences from both men and women's texts highlighting the use of pronouns.

Observing *my* students during the peer review sessions makes *me* aware more of the roles I have to play as a teacher. (Female 4)

As a teacher-researcher, designing and conducting this study has encouraged *me* to adopt an additional technique in *my* second language reading class. (Female 2)

Yet, /still think that a more specific guiding instruction is still needed for the peer editing session. (Female 3)

A comparable usage was found once more in the subject of third-person devices. Since all of the research articles are taken from an educational journal, the third-person plural in men's and women's texts are mostly referring to the learners and teachers. However, there is a wide gap in the occurrences of these devices in both genders. In pointing at the students or themselves as the teachers in the text, they prefer to be more concrete by using noun phrases rather than using third-person devices.

Moreover, as the students could evaluate and improve *their* own works, *they* could direct *their* own learning and engage in lifelong learning. (Female 4)

Finally, *they* need to arrange *their* materials along five parameters, which include linguistic characteristics, explicitness, organization, content, and context. (Male 2)

To find out whether there are significant differences in the employment of pronouns of all types between two genders, each occurrence is calculated and presented in percent in Table 3.

Dronoun	Mond	Female		Male	
Pronoun	Word	Freq.	Pct.	Freq.	Pct.
1st pronoun and	1	18	1.1	3	0.3
possessive adjective	Me	7	0.4	0	0
	Му	8	0.5	0	0
	Mine	0	0	1	0.1
	Myself	1	0.1	0	0
	We	2	0.1	0	0
3rd pronoun and	Her	1	0.1	0	0
possessive adjective	Him	0	0	1	0.1
	They	12	0.7	5	0.5
	Their	25	1.5	11	1.1
	Them	5	0.3	2	0.2
	lt	8	0.5	9	0.9
	lts	0	0	1	0.1
Total		87	5.2	33	3.2

Table 3: Pronouns in the Texts

Table 3 shows more detailed information on the quantity of each personal pronoun and possessive adjective used in the conclusions. It is seen that the total usage of pronouns and possessive adjectives in females (4.74%) and males (3.02%) is quite different. Female authors appear to have the tendency of conveying their opinions in a more personal way which is shown in the generous number of pronouns traced in their texts.

For *myself*, / have found that designing tasks series for an ER class is a rewarding way of discovering how students approached reading, and to *me*, this has proved invaluable as a way to develop *my* skill ... (Female 1)

Four different pronouns were used in this one sentence alone. This once again shows the desire to be directly involved in the written conversation with the readers by presenting her own experience.

Male authors employed more noun in their texts too as proved by the greater usage of noun specifiers, as seen in Table 4. However, only a slight difference of the opposite genders in using articles to explain their nouns.

Table 4: Noun Specifiers in the Texts

Noun Specifier	Word -	Female		Male	
		Freq.	Pct.	Freq.	Pct.
Articles	a	28	1.7	14	1.4
Determiners	an	6	0.4	3	0.3
	the	110	6.6	77	7.5
	this	16	1.0	8	8.0
	that	0	0	2	0.2
	these	3	0.2	4	0.4
Quantifiers	those	2	0.2	0	0
	numbers	7	0.4	2	0.2
	quantifiers	7	0.4	6	0.6
Total		179	10.7	116	11.3

A class feedback could be held after *the* peer back session to evaluate *the* peer feedback and to figure out whether *the* students would be able to close *the* gap between their current level and desired level of achievement. (Female 4)

*This* study found that the Australian students were knowledgeable of *the* notion of plagiarism, *a* favorable condition in relation to *the* standards in academic writing. (Male 5)

From the percentage, determiners were identified to be used slightly more by the males (1.4%). Determiners were mostly used in reference to the process-nouns involved in the study. It seems to be driven by the intention of providing thorough explanation of the process.

*These techniques* start with activating the appropriate schemata ... (Male 2)

Quantifiers were found more in male authors' conclusions as well. An excerpt from a female's text shows a type of quantifier was used more than once in a single sentence.

*One* limitation of the study is that it was conducted only in **one** of the international schools in South Jakarta, where the majority of the students belong to *one* nationality and culture. (Female 2)

Each word 'one' was used in a similar way yet was used to refer to different objects. Meanwhile, the same word did not appear in any of the males' texts. There was only one quantifier for showing quantity from the males, yet other types of quantifiers were found greater in male authors' texts, one of which was used a few time by a single author as shown in the two latter excerpts.

Two major conclusions can be drawn from this paper. (Male 3)

- ... the participants had *some* interests in using English ... (Male 1)
- ... also contains *some* features of Bahasa Indonesia ... (Male 1)

Male writers were proved to have used more noun specifiers in all types of those investigated within this study. The small contrasts in percentage are believed to be due to the limited number of texts being studied.

#### **DISCUSSIONS**

Several considerations are either consciously or subconsciously made during the interaction be it spoken or written in regard of the purpose and the conveyers' psychological state including gender at the time the interaction takes place. Therefore, it is interesting and worth conducting research in an attempt to uncover the different ways people express themselves through their choice of words and how they string them into sentences. The data of the present study were taken from ten conclusions of research papers from one journal and analyzed based on gender perspective.

The differences in personal pronouns and noun specifiers usage between female and male authors are found in this study as they were in earlier related studies. Hyland (2004) mentions that textual properties act as an interpersonal function to represent the authors' efforts in emphasizing certain features in the text to accommodate the readers' understanding and to guide them to the authors' preferred interpretations. Even though there is no significant difference, authors of both genders show different intentions in using pronouns and specifiers in their conclusions.

Based on the data in Table 2 and the findings, female authors are seemingly more inclined in expressing themselves more openly through personal pronouns. Despite the general agreement that academic writings should avoid subjectivity at any cost which can mostly be shown through the use of first-person pronouns, Hyland (2002) suggests that the use of these pronouns is the best in revealing the author's identity. Overall, from the five conclusion texts of female authors, the language was more likely to be used to describe the study from their point of view and relate it to their own experiences. Which resulted in the abundance used of pronouns, specifically first-person singular (e.g.: I, me, my).

From the gender perspective, it can be seen that the dissimilarities between male and female authors in the use of pronouns are quite significant both concerning the first and third-person pronouns. Female authors employed more pronouns and possessive adjectives of almost all types in their conclusions. First-person singular devices 'me' and 'my' are used to show how the study has a direct correspondence with their actual lives. It supports the existing literature of Argamon et al. (2003) and Newman et al. (2008) that female authors involve themselves in their texts by utilizing more personal pronouns.

However, the pronouns 'me' and possessive adjective 'my' are absent in male author's texts. It reveals their efforts in withdrawing themselves from the readers and making their texts sound more objective. Overall, according to the percentage of each pronoun, as shown in Table 3, women employed pronouns more overwhelmingly than men in their texts to focus on developing social connections. The greater use of pronouns emphasizes the attempt of the writer in being 'involved' in order to interact with the reader indirectly through the text (Argamon et al. 2003). Another explanation worth considering in regard to the excessive usage of pronouns in female texts is from the pioneering study of Lakoff (1975) who states that women tend to use extra-polite forms in the same situation as men. The cultural background of the authors may as well have played a role in molding the females' use of pronouns. Male authors on the one hand, are likely to distant themselves from their readers through a greater use of generic pronouns, as it is suggested earlier by Argamon et al. (2003)

Research article is one of a few ways to communicate and exchange new knowledge within the academic community. Again, apart from being any place where new findings are communicated mostly through writings by the community members who are different in many aspects including cultures and genders which are the most natural and indelible aspects one could possess, still

there are some shared regulations that must be obeyed. One of which is the sense of being subjective. One way to sound subjective is through the use of personal pronouns (Swales & Feak 2012) which is highly not suggested if not prohibited for novice authors. Thus, the excessive use of personal pronouns that is found in females' texts should not be generalized to other contexts.

Findings in noun specifiers as the indicators of men's tendency in writing, such as quantifiers, determiners, and articles, support the findings of prior research. All types of specifiers discussed in this study are found to appear more in males' texts. A higher number of noun specifiers equals to a higher use of noun within the texts that indicates the intention of being more informative. Specifiers as according to Argamon et al. (2003) are mostly utilized with the intention of being informative about something that the readers are assumed to have no knowledge of.

Having a lot of nouns has never been a problem in scientific writing and it should remain as is. Research findings are mostly in noun forms and are interpreted in the best way to be comprehensible for the readers. Hence, the massive use of specifiers is considered as fair. Besides being informative, a great number of noun specifiers indicates male authors' way of being specific of the things they are telling the readers about. Each specifier is put purposively to specify which and the state of things they are writing. Female authors on the other hand, are seen to employ not far less noun specifiers in their texts. The insignificant difference of occurrences might emerge due to the limited number of corpus.

The findings have answered the primary goal of this study, it has proved that female and male authors have different styles in written communication and it supports the previous findings of other earlier studies. As the conclusion section covers the summary of the findings, the implication of the study for a certain field, and some articles also cover the suggestions for further research, there is undoubtedly a possibility that the content is mostly the results of the authors' own thinking in correlation with the research findings. Thus, the features employed in this section reflect the intentions of the writers in showing the significance of their studies.

# **CONCLUSIONS**

The findings of this study provide two different evidences compared to those of prior related research findings. However, there are indeed different strategies used by male and female authors in utilizing the linguistic features within their conclusions. First, the gap in frequency between both genders in the case of pronouns is rather huge. There is a tendency of female authors in employing more pronouns in their texts as a strategy to build a relationship with the readers while connecting their texts to their own understandings. While male authors employ a fewer number of pronouns as the way to distant themselves. The least use of pronouns is confirmed as male authors are likely to display the conclusions and to suggest an idea in an informational way by directly pointing on the objects of the studies.

Simultaneously, this study has drawn a result which is in in line with the previous research findings in terms of noun specifiers of male authors. Though the difference is not significant, yet, greater use of determiners, articles, and quantifiers are found within men's conclusion texts. The findings of the present study are hoped to have provided useful insights mainly English writing lecturers. Students' psychological traits should be considered in determining the appropriate treatment for them in order to facilitate all the differences and assist them more fairly. Another task for the lecturers is to shed light and deepen the

understanding for the students of what are and are not accepted in writing scientific paper for publication.

Becoming fluent in all forms of communication is generally the ultimate target of all learners in learning a foreign language. And among various factors, gender has been proved to play a role in the way learners use the language, thus, bring it into consideration can be beneficial for teachers and all parties involved in the learning process. This study only limited to ten research articles from one Indonesian journal. In spite of the limited scale of data, the similar outcomes are still found. For that reason, to prove the consistency of findings, further studies with larger scales of corpus may be beneficial to depict the differences more cogently and to provide more understanding of the way different genders develop their ideas within their texts. As well the representativeness of each gender should be enlarged from various linguistic variables to get the better evidence of whether gender plays an essential role in one's tendency of word utilization.

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