



## **Involved or Informative: A Gender Perspective on Using Pronouns and Specifiers in EFL Students' Writing**

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### **Abstract**

Set in the context of educational concerns about boys' and girls' achievements in writing, the present study investigates gender differences in the written performance of native and Iranian non-native ESL students. It is an attempt to find out how gender, based on the style of writing, particularly the frequency of using pronouns and specifiers, is manifested in students' writings. In other words, how subjects refer to things by using 'referring expressions' based on their gender. The results offer convincing evidence that different strategies are employed by non-native males and females in setting forth information and especially in encoding the relation between writer and reader at sentence, paragraph and text levels. Though the results showed no significant difference in respect of using specifiers in either gender, pronouns in non-native females gained higher frequency of usage. These findings may contribute to teaching and testing in writing courses.

**Keywords:** Involved; Informative; EFL Writing; Gender Difference; Specifiers

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The question of identifying possible differences in linguistic styles especially in speech between males and females has been researched for years (e.g., Coates, 1998; Labov, 1990; Lakoff, 1975; Trudgill, 1972). Most previous works have investigated apparent micro and macro linguistic differences between male and female language use in speech (e.g., Eckert, 1997; Holmes, 1990; Key, 1975; Labov, 1990; Trudgill, 1972), in electronic messaging (Herring, 1993), and to some extent, in informal writing (Calvert, Mahler, Zehnderl, Jenkins, & Lee, 2007; Jones & Myhill, 2007). Still, the extent to which gender, as one of the constant learner variables, might be effective and influential in writing, is one of the questions which has not received much attention with regard to its role in pedagogy and needs to be researched and answered academically. On the



other hand, as far as standard writing is concerned, many variables should be considered.

This study will approach the problem regarding gender. It is going to find out whether gender has any effect on the writing ability of natives' and non-natives' performance. Likewise, it seeks to compare the performance of two nationalities to investigate the extent of difference between natives and non-natives. The reason behind including gender is that it is probable that the difference in writing ability of students may be attributable to it. The result of this study would be valuable for methodologists, syllabus designers, material developers, teachers and learners.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

The last several decades have seen an explosion of research on the nature of differences between men and women. One particularly popular question has been the extent to which men and women use language differently. Number of theorists has argued against the existence of any meaningful differences in men's and women's language (e.g., Bradley, 1981; Weatherall, 2002). One contributor to this debate may be the lack of a commonly accepted technique of analysis among empirical studies of language.

Recent studies in language and gender have not presented a unified result about women's talk in the public domain either. In some cases, women are found to adopt more oppositional information-focused style characteristic of all-male talk. Differences in the ways that men and women use language have also been of interest in the study of discourse. Despite extensive theorizing, actual empirical investigations have yet to converge on a coherent picture of gender differences in language. Again, a significant reason is the lack of agreement over a reliable way to analyze language.

In recent years, the issue of gender has gained greater prominence in second language research. However, gender has received little, if not any attention, in the study of classroom discourse, despite the claim that communication in the L2 is often both the means and the goal of language instruction. Yet, gender is perhaps the best learner variable in second language acquisition which is worth being researched (Chavez, 1999). At least three reasons may account for this: (1) Gender, as a stable trait, can be



assessed directly. (2) The large number of gender-based studies in first language allows second language research to build on a substantial body of previous and established work. (3) Gender figures prominently in explaining differences in language learning behavior or outcome.

Gender roles and their linguistic manifestation must be expected to vary according to both native and non-native speakers' status ('expertness') and cultural background (e.g., Thanh Tran, 1988). Both factors further differentiate between participants in second as opposed to those in foreign language interaction. In second language contexts, differences in native speaker status and cultural background frequently reach into the classroom; often the teacher is a native speaker and does not share the students' cultural background, whereby the students themselves may represent a culturally (and perhaps even socio-economically) diverse group. In foreign language classrooms, by contrast, many teachers share the first language and cultural background of a generally quite homogeneous student body. Therefore, special care must be taken not to combine issues of gender, native speaker status, pragmatic competence and students' culture (or to combine them very carefully). These requirements lay further emphasis on how desirable it may be to distinguish between second and foreign language settings. Gender may be observed more easily as a distinct variable in a foreign language context. There, issues of native speaker status and biculturalism (at least at the earlier stages of learning) are less prominent. Clearly, studies of second language acquisition serve as valuable examples of which direction related research in foreign language learning could take, but at the same time, they cannot speak clearly of gender issues in the foreign language classroom. This is true not only with regard to the type of language which is being modeled for the learners, as described above. Also in foreign language settings, learners depend much more on the classroom for interactional opportunities, i.e., the chance to use the language in a meaningful and contextual manner. As Brooks (1993) summarizes: "The formal classroom setting is, in many cases, the only place where any kind of social interaction in the foreign language is made available. It is in this environment that the language and communication are to be learned".



If gender were to influence a foreign language learners' ability to make use of this typically unique opportunity, both researchers and classroom teachers would be interested to know. In sum, the ultimate goal of foreign (and second) language instruction is to have students of either sex become proficient. Particularly, in a foreign language setting, the classroom offers the primary (if not the only) opportunity to acquire and practice the necessary skills, including, and arguably especially, speaking. Research in first language, and to a more limited extent in second language interaction, indicates that the gender of all contributors (students, teacher, peer groups) will play an important role in interaction.

Native-speaker status and cultural background are likely to interact with gender. Beginning foreign language students taught by a non-native speaker teacher, all of whom share a similar cultural background, offer the most unadulterated look at gender issues in language learning and thus a good starting point for a yet developing field of research. Again, it must be stressed that ultimately, once more basic findings are available, the influence of cultural (first language) background, pragmatic (second/foreign language) acculturation (presumably of more advanced students), and native-speaker versus non-native speaker status must be explored thoroughly in the context of foreign (as opposed to second) language (Brooks, 1993).

Not too long ago, Tannen (1996b) did a research study on gender-related patterns in (ESL) classroom discourse. In her statement, a similar cautionary note resounds when she writes:

It is important, however, to bear in mind that gender-related patterns merge with all other dynamics of language behavior: Ethnic, class, regional, and age differences all affect speaking styles, along with such influences as sexual orientation, professional training, and individual personality (p. 341).

Similarly, Tannen concludes her contribution by asserting that: "Interest in gender-related patterns of classroom discourse will enrich an understanding of the dynamics of the TESOL classroom" (p. 343).



Back to the main locus of the present study and regarding the dynamic nature of TESOL classrooms, as Tennen noted, several statistical phenomena have emerged that appear to be fairly stable across a variety of contexts in gender based studies. For example, females seem to talk more about relationships than do males (Aries & Johnson, 1983; Tannen, 1990) and use more compliments and apologies (Holmes, 1988; Holmes, 1989) and facilitative tag questions (Holmes, 1984). Holmes (1993) has suggested that these and other phenomena might be generalized to a number of “universals” concluding that females are more attentive to the affective function of conversation and more prone to use linguistic devices that solidify relationships.

However, interpretation of the underlying linguistic phenomena, particularly as regards their specific communicative functions, is the subject of considerable controversy (Bergvall, Bing, & Freed, 1996). For example, it has been argued (Cameron, McAlinden, & O'Leary, 1988) that the use of facilitative tag questions by women might be more plausibly interpreted as signs of conversational control than as signs of subordination, as had been previously contended (Lakoff, 1975).

Broadly speaking, the differences between female and male language use appear to be centered on the interaction between the linguistic actor and his or her linguistic context (the listener as well as the larger speech community). Hence it is not surprising that nearly all of the work on male/female linguistic difference has focused on speech and other high-interaction linguistic modalities (such as correspondence). Formal written texts such as books and articles, on the other hand, which are intended for a broad unseen audience, lack the intonational, phonological and conversational cues that are involved in speech and to a lesser extent in correspondence. One might therefore expect, especially in view of the interactional nature of the differences seen thus far between female and male language use, that such differences would be reduced or even eliminated in such formal written texts. Indeed, some authors (Berryman-Fink & Wilcox, 1983; Simkins-Bullock & Wildman, 1991) have asserted that no difference at all between male and female writing styles should be expected in more formal contexts.

Among all these findings which to some extent prove the existence of difference, Argamon, Koppel, Fine, and Shimoni, (2003) in their study argued that there are



significant differences between male- and female-authored documents in the use of some more frequent types of pronouns and certain types of noun modifiers: females use many more pronouns and males use many more noun modifiers. More generally, it is found that even in formal writing, female writing exhibits greater usage of features identified by previous researchers as “involved” while male writing exhibits greater usage of features which have been identified as “informational”. Traditionally, research on writing composition has focused on the complex cognitive processes underlying writing (e.g., Flower & Hayes, 1981; Scardamalia, Bereiter, & Goelman, 1982). Some researchers have addressed this complexity by investigating affective factors involved in composing prose (e.g., Elbow, 1993; Hull & Rose, 1989). These factors include the confidence with which students approach writing tasks, the writing apprehension that students feel as they attempt writing tasks, how useful they perceive writing to be, the self-regulatory strategies in which they engage, and the feelings of self-worth associated with writing (Pajares & Valiante, 1999).

### 3. METHOD

In the present study, the effect of gender on linguistic characteristics of writing in natives and non-natives is examined.

#### 3.1. Participants

The sample chosen for the study consists of 47 non-native fourth- and fifth-semester B.A. students majoring in English from different universities; 12 learners (5 male and 7 female) from Payam-e-Noor university of Tehran, 16 students (6 males and 10 females) from Payam-e-Noor university of Damavand, 19 participants (8 male and 11 female) from Azad University of Varamin and 2 native speakers of English (1 male and 1 female) from England. Therefore, the sample consisted of 20 males and 29 females. The participants' ages were between 19 and 26. They (except the 2 natives) all had passed at least two university courses – 4 credits – on writing.

#### 3.2. Materials

Since the topic itself was considered as the only means through which students would reveal their attributions in writing, topic selection was carried out with the help



of teachers. A few topics were proposed to the teachers of classes to pick the best ones. After discussing about the topics, they chose the ones which were based on their students' knowledge and level of proficiency in writing. Seeing that the aim of choosing a topic was to some extent to encourage the students to write more, and to help us extract the intended linguistic characteristics, it has been tried to stimulate students' motivation as much as possible. Therefore, the following topics were chosen because:

- 1- They were far from any gender bias.
- 2- They were based on the level of students' knowledge.
- 3- They were based on the students' expertise in writing.
- 4- The students were interested in writing about the topics (based on their teachers' statements).

The topics chosen were:

Topic # 1: The characteristics of a good English teacher.

Topic # 2: Best ways to learn English better.

### 3.3. Design

This study sought to find the difference between male and female as well as native and non-native learners (as independent variables) in using special linguistic features (as dependent variables) in their writing. Because of the absence of any kind of treatment in the study, the research design used is *ex post facto* in which, the researcher just looks at the type and strength of connection between dependent and independent variables without considering what went before. As Hatch and Lazaraton (1991, p.101) state: "The research tells us about the relationship of variables in the data, not about the effectiveness of some instructional program or treatment."

In this regard, Hatch and Farhady (1981) state:

Ex post Facto designs are often used when the researcher does not have control over the selection and manipulation of the independent variable. This is why researchers look at the type and/or degree of relationship between the two variables rather than at a cause-and-effect relationship.



### **3.4. Procedure**

The first part of the study went on with a pre-test writing. Seventy five students from different universities were our first participants. Since there was no proficiency test to screen the participants, those students who were at the same major, same level, and had passed same course in writing (4 credits) were selected. In order to achieve inter rater reliability, all writings were judged and scored by three raters. First, to stay far from any unfairness or prejudice about the gender, name, and hand scripts of the students, the writings were typed as anonymous 'MS Word' documents and then coded. Forty seven compositions from a pool of 75 (and based) which gained the score of 15 and above out of 20, were selected for the second phase.

During the second stage, the teachers were asked to collect post-test writing but on the chosen topics (as mentioned before). Not only had the students not been informed about the purpose of the writing, just like the usual class session to perform as natural as possible and to prevent any possible effect of destructive bias about their gender, but also they had not been told even who their exact reader would be to put off any effect of the reader's gender on their scripts as well. Based on the codes, those 47 students' writings were included in the research study. Then the second codes based on their gender were given to the writings: number 1 for males and 2 for females. Then the analysis phase started. All words, sentences, and paragraphs in each composition were counted and the percentages of applying all sorts of intended linguistic elements i.e., pronouns as well as spesifiers, were carefully calculated.

It should be mentioned that the writings of 2 native-participants of the study, just like non natives, came to the analyzing part of the study.

#### **3.4.1. Pilot Study**

To set the scene for the main study, the writings of 9 M. A. English students of Kish International Campus and 1 male English teacher of Iliia institute in Sirjan were collected to have the same number of participants in each group. The reason for





selecting these students was that generally speaking, advanced and graduate students are more skilful and better writers.

There were no preplanned and prepared materials but the topic for their writings. The students were not informed about the purpose of the writing to perform as naturally as possible without any destructive bias about their gender. So, the session was exactly the same as the previous ones.

Each paragraph of their writings was carefully studied and the numbers of singular and plural pronouns as well as all specifiers were counted. The ratio of using each feature per total number of words was calculated. The results of the detailed counting are shown in Table 3.1. As Argamon et al. (2003) stated, determiners (*a, the*) are expected to be male indicators. Conversely, the pronouns (*subjective, objective, possessive and reflexive pronouns*) are all expected to be strong female indicators.

Table 3.1.

*A Comparison for Percentage of Using Pronouns and Specifiers Across Gender*

	<b>Singular Pronouns</b>	<b>It</b>	<b>Plural Pronouns</b>	<b>Specifiers</b>
<b>Male</b>	1.1%	0.1%	1.4%	14.5%
<b>Total Male</b>	<b>2.6%</b>			<b>14.5%</b>
<b>Female</b>	1.5%	0%	3.4%	13.3%
<b>Total Female</b>	<b>4.9%</b>			<b>13.3%</b>

As Table 3.1. shows, pronouns were found more frequently in women's writing (Female = 4.9%, Male = 2.6%) sending the message of "involving" and specifiers were found more frequently in men's writings (Male = 14.5%, Female = 13.3%), sending the message of "informing". As is shown in the Table 3.1. there is a difference between males and females in singular pronoun usage (Male = 1.1%, Female = 1.5%) and even in plural pronouns (Male = 1.4%, Female = 3.4%). On the other hand, 'its' is used more frequently by males (Male = 0.1%, Female = 0%). This is perhaps to be expected since 'its' is both impersonal (as opposed to *his* and *her*) and is a type of specifier. The overall



pattern of greater usage of pronouns by female authors is clear (Male = 2.6%, Female = 4.9%). In the current study, because the number of subjects was limited, no significant difference between specifiers used by either group was found.

The results presented above offer convincing evidence that there are indeed different strategies employed by men and women in setting forth information and especially in encoding the relation between writer and reader in texts.

### 3.4.2. Data analysis

In the current study, appropriate data analysis procedures were used. First of all, by means of 'Find and Replace' option in 'Microsoft Office Word', all kinds of pronouns and specifiers were counted. The same procedure was used later for the whole number of words used in each composition. Then the percentage of each intended linguistic feature (based on total words), was calculated. Each instance of the use of a given linguistic element was given a rate and then the rates were added up and divided by the total to give the mean. After that, the mean of every linguistic feature of the participants was calculated. The next step was leaving the stage for statistics. As the data were nonparametric and nominal, Mann-Whitney U Tests were run to detect the predicted significant difference between dependent (pronouns and specifiers) and independent (gender) variables. Finally, a few comparisons were made to check the probable difference between two genders' text length, number of paragraphs and paragraph length. It should be mentioned that all steps and procedures described above, were repeated for the 2 native participants of the study and the result was compared to non natives.

## 4. RESULT

The first concern of this study is to find out the existence of any probable difference between non-native male and female learners with respect to the use of pronouns in their writings.

Table 4.1. illustrates the means of using pronouns in non native males' and female's writing. It should be mentioned that because of the very specific nature of the pronouns



'you, yours, yourself', these three pronouns have been counted separately from those singular and plural pronouns:

Table 4.1.

*A Comparison for Percentage of Using Pronouns Across Non-native Males and Females*

<b>Pronouns</b>	<b>Total Singular Pronouns</b> =(23)	<b>Total Plural Pronouns</b> =(8)	<b>You Yours Yourselves</b> =(3)	<b>Total Pronouns</b> =(26)
<b>Non-native Females' Mean</b>	4.01% <i>Out of total words:</i> (7425)	2.21% <i>Out of total words:</i> (7425)	0.97% <i>Out of total words:</i> (7425)	7.19% <i>Out of total words:</i> (7425)
<b>Non-native Males' Mean</b>	1.67% <i>Out of total words:</i> (6786)	1.39% <i>Out of total words:</i> (6786)	1.51% <i>Out of total words:</i> (6786)	4.57% <i>Out of total words:</i> (6786)

As Table 4.1. shows, it can be clearly recognized that pronouns in female participants are more prevalent and favorable than in male ones (Female = 7.19%, Male = 4.57%). A Mann-Whitney U test was run to find the existence of any significant difference between them (Table 4.2.):

Table 4.2.

*Mann-Whitney U Test for Pronouns Across Non-native Males and Females*

	<b>Pronoun</b>
<b>Mann-Whitney U</b>	122.000
<b>Wilcoxon W</b>	312.000
<b>Z</b>	-3.123
<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	0.002
<b>Mean Rank</b>	Male=16.42, Female=29.14
<b>r</b>	0.47



According to Table 4.2., the Z value is  $-3.123$  with a significance level of  $p = 0.002$ . The probability value ( $p$ ) is less than  $0.05$ , so the result is significant. Therefore, there is statistically significant difference in the using of pronouns between non-native males and females. A Mann-Whitney U test revealed a statistically significant difference in the use of pronouns of males ( $Md= 3.2$ ,  $n=19$ ) and females ( $Md=6.35$ ,  $n=28$ ),  $U=122.00$ ,  $Z=-3.123$ ,  $P= 0.002$ ,  $r= 0.47$ ). In this analysis  $r$  shows the size of the difference between males and females in the use of pronouns. According to Cohen (1988) the size of the observed difference was medium (with  $0.1$ =small effect,  $0.3$ =medium effect, and  $0.5$ =large effect).

To describe the direction of the difference and find out which group is higher, the median values for each group should be reported so an additional step was taken (Table 4.3.).

Table 4.3.

*Median Scores for Using Pronouns Across Non-native Males and Females*

	<b>Pronoun</b>
<b>Female</b>	6.3500
<b>Male</b>	3.2000

As Table 4.3. shows, the median score for using pronouns in females (6.35) is greater than in males (3.20) which means females used more pronouns in their writings.

Figure 4.1. drawn based on Mean Ranks, shows the difference in a better view:

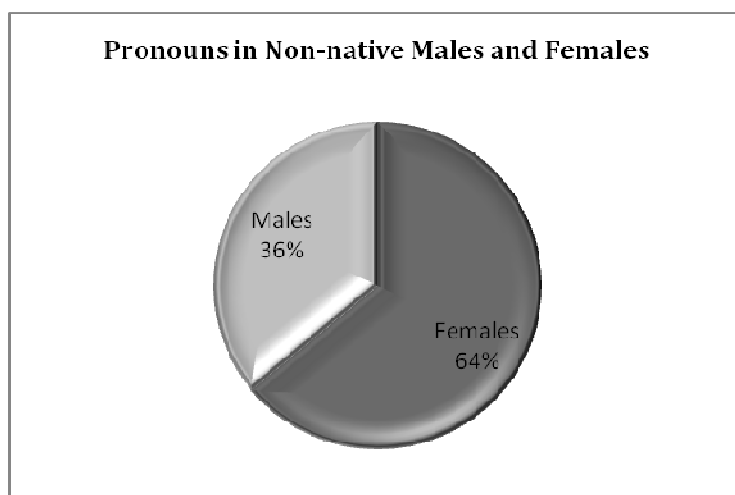




Figure 4.1. Mean rank plot for pronouns across non-native males and females.

The second concern of the study is to realize the existence of any probable difference between non-native male and female EFL writers with respect to the use of specifiers. To investigate the answer, first the frequencies of specifiers were compared in Table 4.4.:

Table 4.4.

*A Comparison for Percentage of Using Specifiers Across Non-native Males and Females*

Specifiers	Total
	=(17)
<b>Non-native Females</b>	8.09%
<b>Mean</b>	<i>Out of total words: (7425)</i>
<b>Non-native Males</b>	8.65%
<b>Mean</b>	<i>Out of total words: (6786)</i>

According to Table 4.4., the percentage of using specifiers by non-native males is a bit more than females (Females = 8.09%, Males = 8.65%) and from this subtle difference it can be hypothesized that the patterns of using these elements in the two groups are very close to each other. Once more to detect the statistical significance of the observed difference, a Mann-Whitney U test was run (Table 4.5.):

Table 4.5.

*Mann-Whitney U Test for Specifiers Across Non-native Males and Females*

	Specifiers
<b>Mann-Whitney U</b>	255.500
<b>Wilcoxon W</b>	445.500
<b>Z</b>	-0.228
<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	0.820
<b>Mean Rank</b>	Male=23.45, Female=24.38
<b>r</b>	0.03



The Z value in Table 4.5. is  $-0.228$  with a significance level of  $p = 0.820$ . The probability value ( $p$ ) is not less than or equal to  $0.05$ , so the difference is not significant. There is statistically no significant difference in the using of specifiers between non native males and females. A Mann-Whitney U test revealed statistically no significant difference in the use of specifiers of males ( $Md= 3.2$ ,  $n=19$ ) and females ( $Md=6.35$ ,  $n=28$ ),  $U=255.500$ ,  $Z= -0.228$ ,  $P= 0.820$ ,  $r= 0.03$ ). In this analysis  $r$  shows the size of the difference between males and females in the use of specifiers. According to Cohen (1988) the size of the observed difference was small (with  $0.1$ =small effect,  $0.3$ =medium effect, and  $0.5$ =large effect).

Figure 4.2. drawn based on Mean Ranks, shows this subtle difference in a better vision:

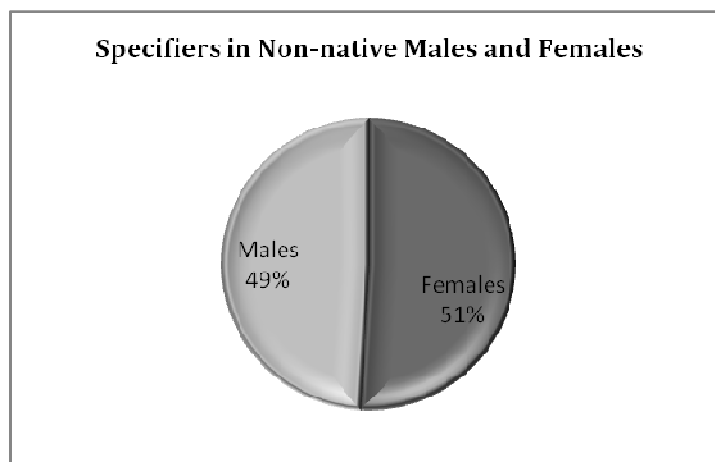


Figure 4.2. Mean rank plot for specifiers across non-native males and females.

Since the main purpose of the study is its pedagogical implications and since native like writing is one of those objectives, some more analyses have been made to estimate the distance between natives and EFL language learners. To do so, the first step might be the probable existence of the same difference between native male and female participants with respect to the use of pronouns and specifiers. Table (4.6.) illustrates the difference in using pronouns in male and female native speakers:



Table 4.6.

*A Comparison for Percentage of Using Pronouns Across Native Males and Females*

<b>Pronouns (Percentage)</b>	<b>Total singular pronouns</b>	<b>Total plural pronouns =(8)</b>	<b>You Yours Yourselves</b>	<b>Total Pronouns =(26)</b>
<b>Native Females' Mean</b>	1% <i>total words:</i> (376)	1.1% <i>total words:</i> (376)	0.1% <i>total words:</i> (376)	2.2% <i>total words:</i> (376)
<b>Native Males' Mean</b>	1.1% <i>total words:</i> (408)	1.3% <i>total words:</i> (408)	0% <i>total words:</i> (408)	2.4% <i>total words:</i> (408)

According to Table 4.6., the total usage of pronouns in native males (2.4%) and females (2.2%) is close to each other. Furthermore, the frequency of applying singular and plural pronouns in native speakers in both male and female participants shows a similarity in their occurrence. A Mann-Whitney U test was run for native writers to see if the difference was statistically significant:

Table 4.7.

*Mann-Whitney U Test for Pronouns Across Native Males and Females*

	<b>Specifires</b>
<b>Mann-Whitney U</b>	0.0
<b>Wilcoxon W</b>	1.0
<b>Z</b>	-1.0
<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	0.317
<b>Mean Rank</b>	Male=2, Female=1
<b>r</b>	0.07

The Z value is – 1.0 with a significance level of  $p = 0.317$ . The probability value (p) is not less than 0.05. There is statistically no significant difference in using pronouns between native males and females.



Now to find out whether the difference exists with respect to the use of specifiers between native male and female participants, the results of counting dependent variables of the question (specifiers) were compared in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8.

*A Comparison for Percentage of Using Specifiers Across Native Males and Females*

<b>Specifiers</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Native Females Mean</b>	10%
<b>Native Males Mean</b>	10.4%

Once more, according to the results (Male = 10.4%, Female = 10%), there is a difference between native males and females in using specifiers in their writings but according to another Mann-Whitney U test (table 4.9.), this difference is not statistically significant:

Table 4.9.

*Mann-Whitney U Test for Specifiers Across Native Males and Females*

	<b>Specifires</b>
<b>Mann-Whitney U</b>	0.0
<b>Wilcoxon W</b>	1.0
<b>Z</b>	-1.0
<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	0.317
<b>Mean Rank</b>	Male=2, Female=1
<b>r</b>	0.07

The Z value is – 1.0 with a significance level of  $p = 0.317$ . The probability value ( $p$ ) is not less than or equal to 0.05. So there is statistically no significant difference in the using of specifiers between native males and females.

Before we make any claim on the interpretation of the findings of the sentence level analysis, it is important to discuss the results of other comparisons in paragraph and text level analysis to gain a broader view of the male and female Iranian EFL students'





performance. The following is an analysis of all participants' writings at paragraph and text level. The frequency of whole words in each table shows 'text length', number of paragraphs is representative of the 'nature and quality of paragraphing', moving beyond mere identification of the presence of paragraphing to a more detailed look at the number of paragraphs, and number of lines in each paragraphs, corresponds to the 'paragraph length'.

In order to find out which gender from which mother tongue used more words, more paragraphs and more words in each paragraph in their writings and then to reveal the distance between natives and non natives, the following comparisons were made:

Table 4.10.

*A Comparison for Text and Paragraph Level Analysis Across Non-native Males and Females*

	Text Level Analysis (Average)	Paragraph Level Analysis (Average)	
	<b>Text Length</b> (Words)	<b>Number of Paragraphs</b>	<b>Paragraph Length</b> (Lines)
<b>Non-native Males Mean</b>	423.3	5	7.2
<b>Non-native Females Mean</b>	265.2	4.25	5.16

In terms of the frequency of whole words, non-native males used more words in their writings (Males = 423.3, Females = 265.2), and consequently more (Males = 5, Females = 4.25) and longer paragraphs (M = 7.2, F = 5.16). Males prefer to talk, argue, and discuss more than the other gender. To check if the same thing is true about the native group, results in Table 4.11. are presented:

Table 4.11.

*A Comparison Between Native Males and Females at Text and Paragraph Level Analysis*



	Text Level Analysis (Average)	Paragraph Level Analysis (Average)	
	<b>Text Length</b> (Words)	<b>Number of Paragraphs</b>	<b>Paragraph Length</b> (Lines)
Native Male Mean	204	5	3.5
Native Female Mean	204.5	4	4.4

According to Table 4.11. native males and females used a slightly different number of words in their writings (Male = 204, Female = 204.5), but fewer number of paragraphs for females (Male = 5, Female = 4), and naturally longer paragraphs for females again (Male = 3.5, Female = 4.4) were observed. It seems that, native females prefer to talk, argue, and discuss more than the other gender (with a small difference).

## 5. DISCUSSION

The researcher tried, as far as possible, to avoid baseless speculation and relied on actual collected data to find out how gender, based on the style of writing particularly the frequency of using pronouns and specifiers, can be recognized in students' writing.

The data included in this study were all derived from students' compositions. As was expected from the previous studies, differences between non-native male and female authored documents in the use of referring expressions as well as specifiers were found, though the differences in using specifiers were not statistically significant. Male and female native participants, on the other hand, performed slightly differently in applying pronouns and specifiers in their writing.

At sentence level analysis according to Table A.5. and based on the findings, native females (2.2%) are seemingly not as interested in using pronouns as non-native females are (7.19%). More interestingly, this discrepancy is more evident in using singular pronouns. Non-native females used more singular pronouns than plural ones (single = 4.01%, plural = 2.21%), though the percentages of using singular and plural pronouns in natives are almost the same (single = 1%, Plural = 1.1%) (see Table A.5.). The only favorable pronoun in natives was 'you' with the existence of a very subtle difference



(Native = 1%, Non-natives = 0.97%) which probably shows native female's tendency to make readers engaged with the text and to imagine themselves in the situation (see also Figures A.1. and A.2.).

As Table A.6. shows, native males are seemingly more interested in using specifiers than non-native males are (Native = 10.4%, Non-native = 8.65%), and the frequency of applying the most common specifiers (the, a, an) in natives (the = 4.6%, a/an = 4.1%) tends to be closer to each other than in non natives (the = 3.7%, a/an = 2.7%).

Again, turning to the results of the investigations and regarding the above findings, one can say that in non-natives there is a noteworthy difference between the two genders in applying some of the linguistic features (pronouns) in their writing but not in using specifiers. Furthermore, in natives regardless of their genders the patterns of using pronouns and specifiers are very close to each other.

Argamon et al. (2003), argued that there are significant differences between male and female authored documents in the use of pronouns and certain types of noun modifiers: females use many more pronouns and males use many more noun specifiers. It has been observed that how subjects refer to "things" by using 'referring expressions' based on their gender. Since pronouns send the message that the identity of the "things" involved is known to the reader, and because pronouns were used with greater frequency in female authored documents, non-native female EFL writers are known as "involved". Specifiers, on the other hand, provide information about "things" that the writer assumes the reader does not know but as our male participants did not exhibit greater usage of features which have been identified as 'informational' than females, they are not known as "informative".

The comparison at the text level showed the existence of difference between native and non native males (see Table A.7.) in total words used (Native = 204, Non-natives = 423.3) and paragraph length (Native = 3.5, Non-native = 7.2), but not in number of paragraphs: (Native = 5, Non-native = 5).

The same comparison was made for the other gender in Table A.8. As the table indicates, the total mean score of the intended characteristics of writings are seemingly



different for native and non-native females at text and paragraph level analysis; non-native females tend to write more (Non-native = 265.2, Native = 204.5), in more (Non-native = 4.25, Native = 4) and longer paragraphs (Non-native = 5.16, Native = 4.4). Again, the results confirm not only the existence of difference between the two genders, but also in the same gender in two different contexts.

Results at text level from another angle show that one aspect of difference is worth further reflection. In almost all the occurrences of gender difference that emerged, the pattern of the boys' writing mirrored some of the patterns of more skillful writers. This finding at text level might be linked to the fact that non-native boys wrote longer sentences, itself a feature of better writing. Another aspect of difference was related to the text length. Non-native girls tended to have shorter paragraphs both in number and length, and consequently shorter scripts than boys. Their average text length was shorter (Non-native Male = 423.3, Non-native Female = 265.2), and their number of paragraphs was smaller than those of the boys (Non-native Male = 5, Non-native Female = 4.25). These differences in natives showed a slight difference between the two genders. Native females wrote a bit more than males (Native Male = 204, Native Female = 204.5), with smaller number of paragraphs (Native Male = 5, Native Female = 4).

Although the exact amount of these differences or similarities could not be easily determined through just one single analytical approach or procedure, these findings suggest that not only the difference exists but also this existence probably 'affects' our teaching and learning style.

## 6. CONCLUSION

We reveal a lot about ourselves by what we write and how we write it. Because language both communicates and shapes our thoughts about ourselves and others, we need to avoid language that makes us seem unfriendly or inappropriate, and instead employ language that matches the expectations others have from us and that reflects the goals of the people with whom we interact. Our use of language is a function of situational variables, such as the purpose of an interaction and our current psychological state, as well as more stable factors, including our status and gender. Thus, both how



people speak and what they say have been the focus of studies of the nature of language use (Brownlow, et al., 2003).

On the other hand, researchers and educators generally agree that the beliefs that people develop about their academic capabilities play a critical role in their success during their education. What students believe about themselves and about their academic competence helps determine what they do with the knowledge and skills they possess. Consequently, their school success is in part determined by what they actually come to believe that they can accomplish. Once more, it has been confirmed how supportive knowing the dissimilarities in an EFL classroom would be. The more an instructor knows about students, the more successful the teaching is.

Whereas gender has been considered as a variable in many studies on foreign and second language receptive skills, particularly strategic behavior, it has not received much attention with regard to its role in productive skills, especially speaking. This lack of attention contrasts sharply with oral proficiency arguably being at the core of communicative language teaching and second language learners and teachers frequently citing oral proficiency as their ultimate objective. Therefore, the findings of this study have implications for teachers. We should aware and inform pupils that through their communication and based on their gender not only are they performing differently in their speaking, but also in their writing. Therefore they should be taught how to exchange a few words in a gender free form. It can be said to male members, through more practice and by means of applying pronouns, how they can write more influential as it has been shown that pronouns carry the message of existing a shared knowledge and that this feeling in writing makes the interrelationship between the reader and writer easier. On the other hand learning these so called strategies in writing turns communication easier: the very main aim of EFL classes.

It is also hoped that findings of this study would provide useful insights and encourage language teachers to be well informed of their profession. The implication of these findings can also be that teachers should not expect male and female students to have the same performance even when all the external conditions are the same. Gender is one of the most influential variables in nearly all social phenomena. Language as a basic



social phenomenon is not an exception. Physical differences of students, which can be a considerable source of variation among language learners, should be considered seriously at any time. In order for them to make sure that they are addressing the whole class when they teach, teachers have to bear in mind the impact of different factors (gender) on language learning.

Along with teachers, syllabus designers and material developers can benefit from results of this research too. They have to include different materials to satisfy gender differences. It has been always said that more reading leads to better writing. Guided reading and consequently guided writing rather than more reading is suggested. Organized teaching of grammatical points regarding pronouns and specifiers seems more practical as well. Because a good academic writer, regardless of his/her gender and based on a native's writing, writes in a null and standard manner, and because the aim of pedagogy is supposed to be standard, standard writing should be taught both to the teachers as well as students and this is the implication of the findings for syllabus designers and material developers.

As it was mentioned before, female students in their compositions behaved differently from the natives. Since we are trying to learn a native language, it is recommended that faculty members find out how they can teach those strategies applied in native speakers' writing. One might suppose that our students behave differently because they have been trained differently. Therefore, it is better to devote more research studies to gain better scope of our educational system first and then categorize the dissimilarities and finally homogenize all subject materials and methods to access to a normal and typical teaching technique.

What implication this research might have in a broader educational context is that psychological and physical differences should be determined in every educational system. There should be some arrangement to help educationalists to decide on these differences in order to help them assess students more fairly.

Finale: teaching today's student is complex and worthy of the best and brightest educators that universities can prepare. Students deserve teachers who understand how they learn, how their curiosity can be captured, and how their learning can be



measurably increased. Furthermore, our nation needs the talents of all its citizens for education to remain a feature of Iran's superiority. This is absolutely vital to the educational research studies that devote research and evaluation programs to better understand the complexities in educating both boys and girls, to recognize the need to better understand the degree to which schools and educators behave, act, and make decisions which impact performance differences in boys and girls. In today's highly charged national debate about how to improve individual student and school performance, understanding the differences between male and female students may be an important element for increasing student and school success.

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