

# GENDER DIFFERENCES OF STUDENTS' ABILITY IN WRITING

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## GENDER DIFFERENCES OF STUDENTS' ABILITY IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXT

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### Abstract

Language has an important role for every member of the speech community. The connection between language and society is recognized as the main interest of sociolinguistics. Nowadays, sociolinguistic has involved many significant research topics. One of them is the relationship between gender and language. Studies about gender differences have been conducted for many years, which also deals with the use of a language as a foreign language. For instance, studying English as a foreign language (EFL) among the nonnative speakers and its gender-sensitive investigation. The current article provides insights on gender differences among senior high school students with a focus on their writing ability. The purposes of this article were to find the linguistic feature that male and female students tend to use and to find out the gender differences reflected on the students writing ability. The article used a qualitative design with document analysis as the approach. The subject of this article was one class of X MIPA 2 at MAN 6 Jombang. The source of the data was students' writings, while the data were all linguistics components of the students' works. The data contain some types of linguistic features based on Mulac's theory. This article found four linguistic features used by the students. It can be concluded that males often used locative feature and females often used a reference to quantity feature and "I" reference feature.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to Wardhaugh (2006:13), sociolinguistics is the study investigating the relationships between language and society by understanding the structure and function of a language in communication. Nowadays, sociolinguistics has involved many significant research topics. One of them is gender and language. Gender and language describe how men and women are different when they interact with people. The interaction between men and women can be done by spoken or written form. Since the publication of Lakoff's classic work in 1975, there are a variety of perspectives in language and gender. The study of gender is significant for the study of language. It aims to explore the differences between men and women. Do men and women use language differently? This question is commonly asked.

The difference between men and women is viewed as a gender issue, not sex. Sex refers to a very large extent biologically whereas gender is a social construct involving the whole of genetic, psychological, social, and cultural differences between males and females (Wardhaugh, 2006:315). Meaning, gender is something that cannot be avoided. Gender is also a reflection of human characteristic and it has happened in the community of society.

Writing is one way for students to communicate and convey their ideas (Haerazi et al., 2018; Jupri, 2018). It is in accordance with Brown (2000: 232) and Alviana (2019) who state that writing deals with productive skill and writing has an important role in every language. It

can be used to convey information without face to face interaction. Teaching writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom is dominated by the process of writing (Haerazi, Vikasari, & Prayati, 2019; Yulandari & Rahman, 2019). In EFL classrooms, writing is considered as a challenging subject. There are various types of text in teaching writing such as; descriptive text, narrative text, recount text, report text, and several other types of text (Aprianoto & Haerazi, 2019; Haerazi et al., 2020). One of the texts that should be taught in senior high school student is descriptive text. Descriptive text is a kind of text to describe a person, place, or a particular object (Haerazi & Irawan, 2019).

Some previous studies had been taken by the writer to support the article. First, it is taken from a journal by Yuka Ishikawa, (2005) by the title *Gender Differences in Vocabulary Use in Essay Writing by University Students*. The researcher analyzes a corpus of written essays by university students from ten regions in Asia. Second, it is taken from Hamdi and Dabaghi, (2012) by the title *Gender Differences in Iranian EFL Students' Letter Writing*. The researcher takes 64 Iranian EFL learners (30 male and 34 female) as participants. Also, it was taken from Indonesia journal by Mahmud and Nur, (2018) by the title *Exploring Students' Learning Strategies and Gender Differences in English Language Teaching*. All of them had focused on writing with the different subjects of the research. In this article, the researcher focused on analyzing gender differences between male and female students in their writings on descriptive text. The article began with a curiosity about whether gender also influenced student's writing.

Gender, as one of the main variables of learning, plays a vital role in writing. There is a link between language and gender. Men and women use language differently and acquire vocabulary uniquely (Haerazi & Irawan, 2020). Knowing gender differences is very important, especially in the EFL class. Mahmud & Nur (2018), revealed that the main characteristics of male and female students in their learning strategies and the reason for the differences by interviewing the students. Considering this issue, this article aimed to find out the linguistic feature used by male and female students and also the gender differences reflected on the students writing ability. According to Mulac et al. (2001), that linguistic feature is divided into 6 features. They are *judgmental adjectives, reference to quantity, locative, "I" reference, intensive adverbs and images*.

This article attempt to prove that what linguistic feature do male and female student tend to use and how gender differences reflected in writing descriptive text between male and female students. The article is the newest one because the article focused on writing descriptive text material. The descriptive text was chosen because this article was conducted on 10<sup>th</sup>-grade senior high school students at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 6 Jombang, an Islamic public school and to look for the differences in language use between male and female indicated by the way they used language in writing. The reason shows there is a different thing with previous studies above. This article was expected to be useful for anyone eager to conduct research on gender differences in writing ability, by focusing on the descriptive text.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Research Design

This article used a qualitative design. Ary et al. (2010: 424) stated that qualitative is to obtain information to determine the nature of the situation and to objectively describe what is in the current article. This article used a document analysis approach. The source of data in this article would be taken from 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students at MAN 6 Jombang. Data were taken from one class, X MIPA 2, which consisted of 32 students. The data were in the form of words in students' descriptive text. In this article, the data only took from 9 male and 12 female writing assignments because the other students did not collect their works. The data analyzed are words that consist of the linguistic feature mentioned by Mulac, et al, (2001).

The data of this article were collected by seeing the document of students' task of writing descriptive text. To validate the data, the study used *member checking* to determine the accuracy of the qualitative data by giving back the data to the teacher to get feedback.

### Research Instruments

The instrument of the article was the writer himself as the primary instrument. Sugiyono (2018: 22<sup>35</sup>) stated that in qualitative research, human or the researcher is the instrument, it means that the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing the data. To support human as primary instrumentation is needed the secondary instrumentation. It was documented. The document form is the result of students' task on writing descriptive text.

### Data Analysis Technique

In the analysis data, the data would be classified into part of a linguistic feature. In this step, the writer read students writing assignments to classify the linguistic feature. The writer looks for the linguistic feature by underlying the word in the form of a table. Then describes the linguistic feature, in this step researcher describes the findings and concludes the linguistic feature that students tend to use. The last, the writer made a reflection of students writing related to Mulac et al. (2001).

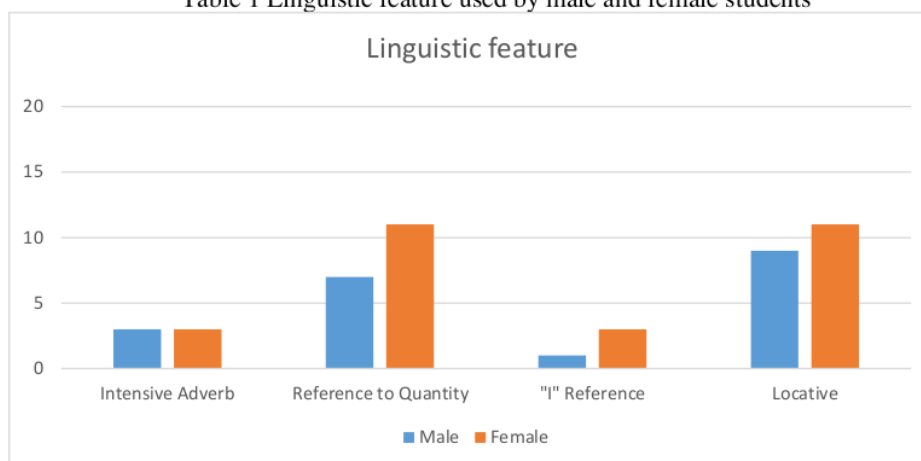
## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Research Findings

#### 1. The linguistic feature used by male and female students

Results of data analysis on gender differences in writing descriptive text by students of MAN 6 Jombang gave outlooks upon the inquiries of the current study. The data were taken from the result of students' task on writing descriptive text. The findings of the study are presented in the table below.

Table 1 Linguistic feature used by male and female students



The result showed that male and female students used four linguistic features, i.e. *intensive adverb*, *references to quantity*, *"I" reference*, and *locative*, except two linguistic features, i.e. *judgmental adjective* and *hedges* in writing descriptive text. This result answered the first problem of the article. The chart above indicates how many male and female students

used a linguistic feature of all twenty-one students. From this chart, it can be seen that three male and three female students used intensive adverbs; seven male and eleven female students used the reference to quantity; only one male and three female used "I" reference, and the last nine male and eleven female students used *locative*.

a. *Intensive adverb*

Feature of *intensive adverb* was used by three out of nine male students (M3, M6, and M7) and three out of twelve female students (F3, F5, and F6). They used this linguistic feature more often to emphasize something rather than to give force to something.

b. *Reference to quantity*

*Reference to quantity* was used by seven out of nine male students (M1, M2, M4, M5, M6, M7, and M8) while eleven of twelve female students (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F10, and F12) used it. They used this feature more frequently to show the amount of something, but some others used this feature to show the scale of measurement and the level of comparison.

c. "I" reference

"I" reference was only used by one out of nine male students (M7) and three out of twelve female students (F3, F9, and F11). This feature was used to refer to the first person singular and to show what the writer is doing.

d. *Locative*

*Locative* was used by all nine male students (M1, M2, M3, M4, M5, M6, M7, M8, and M9) and eleven out of twelve female students (F1, F2, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F10, F11, and F12). They used this feature more often to show a location, while others used this feature to show the position of an object.

## 2. Gender differences reflected in writing descriptive text between male and female students

Data showed that four linguistic features were used by the students in their writing. The most features used by the students were *locative* and *reference to quantity*. This result answered the second research problem of the article. *Locative* was often used by all nine male students and eleven out of twelve female students when they were trying to show the location and position of an object. For example, "Pasar Kedung Maling is located at Jl. Kemakmuran." They used *locative* to show the location of Pasar Kedung Maling. This linguistic feature was also found in male writings. *Reference to quantity* was used by seven of nine males and eleven of twelve female students. This indicates that almost all female students used this feature. They use the *reference to quantity* is used to mention the amount of something. For example, "So many kind vegetables, meat, and fish." They used the *reference to quantity* to mention the number of vegetables, meat, and fish. This linguistic feature was also found in the male students' writings. Students also used *intensive adverbs* and "I" references, but only a few of them. Three of nine males and three of twelve female students used *intensive adverbs* in their writing. They used *intensive adverbs* only when they wanted to emphasize something. For example, "The place is very beautiful." This feature was used by the students to emphasize the conditions of a place that was very beautiful. For "I" reference, only one of nine males and three of twelve female students used this linguistic features. They used it when they wanted to show what they do as writers. For example, "I use jacket when going there." This linguistic feature showed that the writer as the first person was in the middle of doing something. From the example given, the writer showed that he wore a jacket.

## Discussion

This part conveys the finding of the article supported by some related theories and previous studies. This study found four linguistic features that were used by the male and female students in writing descriptive text.

### 1. Linguistic features often used by male and female students

By referring to a theory suggested by Mulac et al. (2001), this article analyzed words from the students' work. Mulac, et al. (2001) mention six linguistic feature male and female language style, including *judgmental adjective*, *"I" reference*, *intensive adverb*, *references to quantity*, *locative*, and *hedges*. In this article, only found four linguistic feature that male and female students used, those were *"I" reference*, *intensive adverb*, *references to quantity*, and *locative*. The total number of linguistic feature found in the descriptive text are eighty-one words of twenty-one students. From those linguistic features, males and females often used linguistic features that they were a *reference to the quantity* and *locative*. Almost, all students use this linguistic feature in their writing. Those linguistic features are discussed as follows:

#### a. Judgmental adjective

Based on the data above, this article found that male and female students used some linguistic feature mentioned by Mulac et al. (2001). It can be seen from the analysis that has been done. But, in these findings, there is no male or female use *judgmental adjective*. Mulac, et al, (2001) mentioned that the male language feature uses *judgmental adjective* than female. *The judgmental adjective* is used to judge personal evaluation rather than mere description. Because this article analyzes descriptive text (descriptive of place) might be both males and females not use a *judgmental adjective*. Because they have to describe a place and not a person. It is in line with Aristiawan (2019) who found that students faced difficulties in judgment adjective features. When students faced difficulties in this, they were able to find some strategies to learn the kind of English grammar such as English adjectives (Ismiati & Pebriantika, 2020).

#### b. "I" references

For *"I" reference*, only one of nine male students use this feature and three of twelve female students use it. This is different from Mulac et al. (2001) that categorized *"I" reference* as a male language feature. But this finding is the same as Ishikawa (2015) that found female students use more pronouns than male students. *"I" reference* used by student here refers to the first person singular pronoun. It indicates the position of the writer. In students writing found four-word related to *"I" reference*, they are M7.D4, F3.D2, F9.D4, and F11.D3. For example in M7.D4 "I use jacket when going there." The word "I" in students writing refers to the first person as the writer and explains what he/she does. These findings indicate that female students prefer to express their presence in their writings. It is in keeping with Prayati (2020) who found that students felt uneasy to express some kinds of English pronouns. Therefore, they use personal pronouns more in their writing. Additionally, although *"I" references* were rated relatively personal, there is a sense that "personal" may relate to women's language style as well. By contrast, Mulac et al. (2001) state that *"I" reference* appears to reflect an ego-centric orientation as male languages. Whereas, the female language style is relatively socio-centric, oriented to others' psychological states and to relationships. For example F11.D3 "if there are more or less I apologize." It is indicated that females use *"I" references* to show their emphatic.

#### c. Intensive adverb

This linguistic feature, Mulac et al. (2001) categorized it into female language features. In this finding, both males and females use this linguistic feature in the same way. In students writing found that seven-word related to this linguistic feature. Students used *intensive adverbs* to emphasize the condition of something, such as in finding M3.D2, M6.D2, M7.D2, M7.D5, F3.D1, F5.D2, and F6.D4. For example in finding M3.D2 "The place is very beautiful." The word "very" here use to emphasize the view of the place. F6.D4 "The yard is very spacious and clean". Word "very" here use to emphasize the conditions of the place. According to Mulac et al. (2001), this linguistic feature uses more by the female. This is because the female language style is elaborate. They use *intensive adverbs* to elaborate on

their idea. The difference between male and female students in using *intensive adverbs* here is, male students use *intensive adverbs* when they show the view of the place. While female students use *intensive adverbs* to indicate the condition of the place.

d. References to quantity

According to Mulac (2001) categorized this feature to male language feature. But in these findings, both males and females used this feature are the same. There is a twenty-nine word related to this linguistic feature. *References to the quantity* used by the male and female student are <sup>27</sup> in the term of any amount, and measurement. This linguistic feature found in finding M1.D2, M2.D3, M2.D5, M2.D6, M4.D2, M4.D3, M4.D<sup>30</sup>, M5.D2, M5.D4, M6.D3, M7.D3, M7.D5, M8.D2, M8.D3, F1.D3, F2.D2, F3.D3, F4.D1, F4.D3, F4.D4, F5.D3, F6.D5, F7.D2, F8.D2, F9.D3, F10.D1, F10.D3, F12.D2, and F12.D3. For example in finding F1.D3 “Many people pray and read Al-Qur’an.” This underline word shows the number of visitors and people. Both male and female students use this linguistic feature because they use to show the amount of something. In this case, they use the *reference to quantity* mostly at showing the number of visitors or people that visit the place. Even this linguistic feature indicates the male language feature, both male and female students use it.

e. Locative

The linguistic feature of *locative* here shows the location or the position of the object. In writing, they are words <sup>21</sup> indicate this linguistic feature. This linguistic feature found in finding M1.D1, M1.D3, M2.D1, M2.D2, M2.D4, M2.D6, M3.D1, M4.D1, M<sup>31</sup>.D3, M4.D5, M5.D1, M5.D3, M6.D1, M7.D1, M8.D1, M8.D2, M9.D1, M9.D2, M9.D3, F1.D1, F1.D2, F2.D1, F2.D3, F2.D4, F4.D2<sup>25</sup>, F5.D1, F6.D1, F6.D2, F6.D3, F6.D5, F6.D6, F7.D1, F8.D1, F9.D1, F9.D2, F10.D1, F10.D2, F11.D1, F11.D2, F12.D1, and F12.D2. The example in finding M3.D1 “Keplaksari Park is located in Jombang area.” This underline word “Jombang area” indicates the location of Keplaksari Park. This linguistic feature is the most used by students in writing descriptive text. Surely both male and female students use this linguistic feature. Even Mulac et al. (2001) categorize this linguistic<sup>3</sup> feature belong to the male language style. In the descriptive text, this linguistic feature is used by both male and female students. Because the subject is descriptive of place.

f. Hedges

There are no male or female students who use *hedges*. According to Mulac (2001) *hedges* is one of the linguistic features that use by fe<sup>2</sup>male. *Hedges* usually indicates a lack of confidence. The use of hedges itself indicates women’s language. According to Lakoff, (1975) women use *hedges* when one really needs for protection. *Hedges* in speaking use as the impression of a speaker that has a lack of authority or doesn’t know what they are talking about. In writing, Mulac, (2001) categorizes this as a female style. This use as a politeness strategy that minimizes their imposition when responding to a request.

2. Gender differences reflected in writing descriptive text between male and female students

The linguistic fe<sup>9</sup>ture used by students in their writing. It indicates the style that they use in their writing. The male language feature is perceived as relatively direct, succinct, personal, and instrumental. Whereas female language feature is perceiv<sup>3</sup>ed as relatively indirect, elaborate, and effective. In finding the *reference to quantity* is perceived to be relatively direct. *Reference to the quantity* used as a reference to any mention of amount, a unit of measurement, and could be in the terms of degree comparisons. In the example “So many kind vegetables, meat, and fish.” they use the *reference to quantity* to mention the number of vegetables, meat, and fish. In this finding show that seven of nine male and eleven of twelve female used this feature. It means that both of them use male language style in their writing.

Another linguistic feature that used often by students is *locative*. This linguistic feature is perceived to be relatively direct. It means this linguistic feature indicates a male language feature. *Locative* used to show the location or position of the object. In examples “Pasar

Kedung Maling is located at Jl. Kemakmuran.” they use *locative* to show the location of Pasar Kedung Maling. In this finding, all of nine male students and eleven of twelve female students use this linguistic feature. It means that both students used the male language style in their writing.

Students also used *intensive adverbs* and “*I*” *references*. But only a few students used this linguistic feature. Three of nine males and three of twelve female students used *intensive adverbs* in their writing. They used *intensive adverbs* only when they want to emphasize something. In the example “The place is very beautiful.” This linguistic feature used by the student to emphasize the conditions of the place that is very beautiful. The difference between male and female students in using *intensive adverb* here were male students used intensive adverb when they show the view of the place. While female students used intensive adverbs to indicate the condition of the place. For “*I*” *reference*, only one of nine males and three of twelve female students used this linguistic feature. They used it when they want to show what they do as a writer. In the example “I use a jacket when going there.” This linguistic feature shows the writer as the first person is doing something, in this example, the writer shows that he wears a jacket.

This article doesn't find any of the *hedges* uses by both male and female students. Mulac, et al, (2001) mention this feature as a female language feature. According to Lakoff (1975) state that females use hedges when they really have a legitimate need for protection. Here female students don't use any of *hedges* in their descriptive writing. Also, there are no *judgmental adjective* uses by both male and female students. This linguistic feature uses to indicate personal evaluation. So, in descriptive of place, this feature might be rarely used.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the result of this article, concludes that in MAN 6 Jombang, class X MIPA 2 used four linguistic features. This feature was found in students writing. For the linguistic feature male students and female students use all of them. From twenty-one students in class X MIPA 2 the most used linguistic feature in their descriptive text is *locative* and *reference to quantity*. They use *locative* more often to show the location of the object. In the example “Keplaksari Park is located in Jombang area.” In this example, the linguistic feature of *locative* is used to show the location of Keplaksari Park. For *reference to quantity* is often used to show the amount of something. In the example “There is 2 swimming pool there.” This example uses the *reference to quantity* to show the amount of swimming pool.

The linguistic feature of *locative* and *reference to quantity* indicates as male language style. And almost all of the students in class X MIPA 2 use this feature. It can be concluded that in this class, students are dominated by male language features in writing descriptive text. This could be happening because the data was taken from the uncontrolled condition. So, the students write the descriptive text by their own ability. It might be the treatments of the teacher are different. The different things between the article with previous studies are not all linguistic features used by the students at MAN 6 Jombang. It tends to the characteristic of how students of MAN 6 Jombang deliver linguistic features on their writing. In the previous studies, the subject of the research is a letter-writing and vocabulary on essay writing. But, this article focuses on students' writing descriptive text.

The implication of the article is the teacher should make a formula for how students writing descriptive text using the good linguistic feature. In order for male or female students can apply their writing based on the linguistic feature, the next researcher needs to pay attention to how to write an article with different subjects of the research related to linguistic features with a different gender. From this, the writer would like to give some suggestions for the next researcher who wants to conduct the same article. The language used between men and women is different. The easiest way to know the differences is from speaking and the



activity of the students. Consider that different factors exclude gender may also affect students' writing. So the next researcher can try to analyze using any different instrument and subject. Different treatments might be needed to reveal their differences in writing. May this article be helpful and give beneficial reference to English language learning especially in sociolinguistic. The recommendation of the article is for English teachers should give understanding and example to male and female students about the linguistic feature on their writing in order to in using linguistic features there is a no different perception.

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