

Investigating the Presence of Gendered Language in Master Research Proposals of Applied Linguistics

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Received: 01/01/2024

Accepted: 09/04/2025

Published: 02/06/2025

Abstract:

This study examines the use of the gendered pronoun 'he' in Master research proposals in Applied Linguistics. Thirty research proposals, written in the academic year 2019-2020, were selected as a sample for the study. A questionnaire was also administered to sixty one teachers of writing from eight Algerian higher education institutions. Data were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed, first for the presence of the generic pronoun in research proposals, and second to explore the writing teachers' practices in teaching gendered language. The results show that there is a predominantly exclusive use of the masculine generic pronoun 'he', thus making writing purely masculine. The results of the questionnaire show that teachers of writing do not place importance on teaching the use of inclusive rather than exclusive language in their academic writing. In light of the results, the study calls for more gender inclusive language practices in the genre of research proposals, in particular, and in academic writing, in general.

Keywords: Academic writing; Applied linguistics; Inclusive language; Pronoun; Research proposal

1. Introduction

In the past, there used to be a great dominance of male gender in most fields and domains such as politics, business, economics, academia and so on. Female's gender used to be largely excluded. Attitudes started to change over time and women started to gain some space in many areas. One context where gender used to be dominantly noticeable and present is that of language, and mainly in written language. Male's dominance used to be explicitly exhibited, and is still present, in different writings including novels, academic books, research articles, speeches, advertisements, job applications and so on.

Nowaday's, tendencies to produce gendered language started to disappear. There is more support and encouragement to forsake previously held concepts related to gender's dominance. People now are becoming more aware of the importance of this central matter

which started to be considered as a central issue ; they became more sensitive towards the use of words that refer to one specific gender, that of males, to the exclusion of the other gender, that of females.

One of the major language aspects where gender dominance is greatly remarked is in the use of 'pronoun' words in academic writing. The pronoun is referred to as 'gendered pronoun'. Generally, this involves the use of the masculine pronoun 'he' as a generic term and the exclusion of the pronoun 'she'. Actually, it is claimed that the male pronoun 'he' is usually used in order to refer to any non-specific person.

The main aim of the present research paper is to explore the use of masculine pronouns by examining and identifying language bias in academic writing. Focus is placed on the an analysis of master research proposals written by Algerian non-native speakers of English in the field of Applied Linguistics. The aim of this research is also to explore the teaching practices of teachers of writing with regard to placing focus on the use of inclusive or exclusive language in academic writing. This is of central importance since it provides us with insights that can help us understand the students' tendency to use inclusive or exclusive pronouns in writing.

2. Research Questions and Research Hypothesis

The present research is based on the following research questions and hypothesis.

- a. Do students use mainly and exclusively gender exclusive pronouns in their academic writing of research proposals?
- b. Do teachers of writing focus on teaching and raising students' awareness to the importance of inclusive language in terms of the use of gender inclusive pronouns rather than gender exclusive ones ?

The present research is based on the following hypothesis : Algerian Master students' use of gendered language in their academic writing, mainly in writing research proposals, is due to the lack of teaching focus on that central academic language aspect.

3. Review of Literature

Academic writing is usually male-dominated. We usually find many instances of masculine generic pronoun's use. In fact, there are many cases where gender bias against women may appear either implicitly or explicitly through the use of written (or spoken) language. Male bias in language use reflects the dominance of masculinity or the dominance of men (Hellinger, 2002). It is usually argued that the use of male language represents the norm for humanity (Bailey and LaFrance, 2017).

Gendered language, or male bias language, carries the implicit assumption that an undefined person is automatically a man (Meritt and Harrison, 2006). In this sense, the use of language is associated mainly with masculinity. This association can be shown in the use of words that reflects male bias or gendered language. In other words, gendered language involves expressions with reference to men only. The words are referred to as masculine generics and they are represented mainly by the pronoun 'he/him/his' (Bailey and LaFrance, 2017). Put simply,

according to the traditional gender hierarchy, the masculine forms 'he/him/his/himself' can represent all human beings.

Today, we can come across a great deal of instance where many language users, especially English as a foreign language students, have a strong tendency to use the generic term 'he' especially in written discourse. However, a newly rising tendency is that language practices, written or spoken, started not to favour the use of the generic 'he' since the latter contributes to gender bias and female exclusion. In the English language, the generic pronoun 'he' is, actually, used to refer to male persons, but it can not at all be considered as an all-inclusive term for human beings or for humanity (Silvera, 1980). In fact, the generic pronoun 'he' is considered as presumptive.

Languages have different gender asymmetry. An influential research focused on societal gender inequity and its impact on language performance through the analysis of language used by women and language used to refer to women (Lakoff, 1975). The results showed the predominant presence of gender asymmetry in language use. Gendered language can exhibit itself through an overt expression of gender bias. It can be displayed in different domains of language like in lexis and syntax. In other words, language inequity manifests itself in various patterns including the use of the masculine generic pronoun 'he'.

The interesting sociolinguistic research of Lakoff (1975) inspired the rising of subsequent research about the correlation between language and gender. In a study documenting the use the masculine pronoun forms 'he' and 'his' and the feminine pronoun forms 'she' or 'hers' in written texts (books written between 1900-2008 taken from Google Books database), the results showed that the use of specific personal pronoun, 'he' in this case, reflect women's status in the United States during the 20th century (Twenge et al., 2012). When women are not involved in labour force and have low educational attainment, their status was low and the proportion of female pronoun's use was also low and the opposite is true of male pronoun.

The asymmetry of language gender is specific to different languages. Several comparative studies were conducted to study the gender asymmetry of various languages. In a study that involved an analysis of 30 languages, including Arabic and English, it was found that there is a universal asymmetry in the use of masculine generics (Bußmann and Hellinger, 2003). In the case of the English language, for instance, the generic 'he' (the teacher ... he ... his ..., the student he ... his ..., the applicant ... he ...his ..., the worker ... he ... his ..., the player he ...his ...) is found to be the norm used to show gender irrelevance. In this case, the use of such masculine forms is for purposes of not only designating men gender, in particular, but also for purposes of reflecting unspecified or unknown gender. The study concludes with statements that confirm the idea that masculine forms have a generic function, while those of women can not have this function (Hellinger and Bußmann, 2001).

In a large scale study of Reuters news messages (800,00) that were published between the years 1996 and 1997, it was found that the pronoun 'he' was the more frequently used pronoun, while the pronoun 'she' was used in rare cases. The results of the study communicated another very interesting information: the pronoun 'he' is considered more positive since it appeared in more positive contexts (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2014).

The use of masculine generics is an explicit sign that there is a male bias in the mental representations of language users. This calls readers, writers, speakers and listeners' attention to male presence and dominance more than that of female (Stahlberg et al., 2007). Some research studies were conducted to closely examine the effect of gendered language and the significant presence of certain linguistic forms on mental representations. In a study conducted by Jacobson and Insko (1985), for instance, the research contained a question that asked learners to complete sentences with different pronouns and nouns (he, she, he/she, the lawyer, the client). The study focused on the way learners correlate nouns like (lawyer and client) to pronouns. Other studies focused on giving students instructions to write short stories about fictitious characters starting with an introductory sentence in the masculine or in gender-fair language, or to name male and female representatives (musician, singer, writer, player) in response to either masculine nouns or a combination of feminine and masculine forms (Heise, 2000; Stahlberg et al., 2001). These studies provided interesting results that show that masculine pronouns are frequently used and even associated with certain jobs.

Gender asymmetries exist in many languages. According to Stahlberg et al. (2007), three types of languages can be distinguished. In other words, there are three language typologies vis-à-vis language and gender asymmetry. First, there are grammatical gender languages such as French and German, and even Arabic, which contain nouns that have a grammatical gender and personal pronouns express the gender of the referent. Second, there are natural gender languages like English and Swedish, which have personal nouns that are gender-neutral (neighbor) and referential gender is expressed pronominally by (he/she). Third, there are genderless languages like Turkish and Finnish, where personal nouns and pronouns do not at all signal gender. Such genderless languages use attributes such as 'male' (teacher) or lexical gender words like 'woman' or 'father' to express gender.

Gender asymmetries can be more visible in grammatically gendered languages than in the other language typologies (Hellinger and Bußmann, 2001). This is the case of the Arabic language. Unlike genderless languages which do not require any strategies to avoid the use of gendered and exclusive language, grammatical gender languages and natural gender languages reflect different linguistic gender characteristics which require the adoption of gender-inclusive policies. This is the case of the English language. There should be specific strategies (like neutralization) at the disposal of language users to deal with the issue of gendered language and its negative effect on people's comprehension,

way of thinking and attitudes and so on. Language strategies should help learners, especially foreign language learners, to achieve gender-fairness in language use.

4. Methodology

The sample in the present study includes 30 master students studying at the university of Skikda in the academic year 2019-2020. The sample is taken randomly from a list of research proposals, and no focus has been placed on the gender of the students who wrote the proposals. We believe that an analysis of samples of students' academic writing, from both males and females, in the genre of research proposals can yield interesting and informative results vis-a-vis the issue of gendered language in the academic writing practices of Algerian master students. The sample is relevant to the study because it was chosen from master level. At this level, students have developed sufficient knowledge and skills related to academic writing and have been prepared to write an academic research in their related field of academic research (Applied Linguistics). The sample included ten male students and twenty female students.

The present study is based on a corpus analysis of master research proposals in Applied Linguistics that contain from four to six pages. For research purposes, corpus analysis is the most appropriate and relevant research instrument to be used in order to investigate the research issue. The main purpose of this research is, as it has been previously mentioned, to examine the academic writing of master students in the genre of research proposal writing in terms of the use of the generic pronoun 'he' as the exclusive pronoun used to refer to both males and females alike. That is to say, this research started with a hypothesis that 'Algerian EFL master students' research proposal writing is characterized predominantly by the use of the exclusive male pronoun 'he' due to absence of focus on teaching such a central academic writing aspect.

The sample was collected in the academic year 2019-2020. The It contains ten male research proposals and twenty female research proposals. Data were analyzed for the presence of the generic pronoun 'he', following the quantitative method of data analysis.

Besides the analysis of a sample of research proposals, it was necessary for us to use another research tool, which is that of the questionnaire. A questionnaire was sent to sixty one teachers from eight Algerian higher education institutions. The use of the questionnaire is of central importance because it helps the researcher gain information related to the teaching practices and focus of teachers of writing. That is to say, it helps us to examine whether, or not, teachers of writing give importance to teaching or raising students' awareness vis-à-vis the use as well as the presence of gender exclusive words in academic writing.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Results of the Analysis of the Corpus

The present research examined the academic writing of thirty Algerian Master students in Applied Linguistics. Focus was placed on the use of the gendered pronoun 'he' in the genre of research proposals. The sample was taken from the research projects submitted by students in the academic year 2019-2020 at the university of 20 August 1955-Skikda.

The thirty research proposals were analyzed quantitatively. Focus was on the identification of the generic pronoun 'he'. The reason behind that is to come to a better understanding of Algerian Master students' attitudes, beliefs and practices vis-à-vis gendered pronouns' use in academic discourse.

The following tables provide information about the presence the generic masculine pronoun 'he'. Data analysis also shows the frequency of the use of the pronoun 'he' both in female students and male students' research proposal writing.

Table 1. The Presence of Masculine Generic Pronoun in the Twenty Female Research Proposals

Female Student Number	Number of Pronoun Use	'he' Pronoun Used	Percentage %
Female Student 01	10	10	100 %
Female Student 02	08	06	100 %
Female Student 03	14	14	100 %
Female Student 04	08	07	100 %
Female Student 05	12	12	100 %
Female Student 06	08	06	100 %
Female Student 07	13	13	100 %
Female Student 08	08	07	100 %
Female Student 09	17	17	100 %
Female Student 10	08	08	100 %
Female Student 11	09	09	100 %
Female Student 12	09	09	100 %
Female Student 13	10	10	100 %
Female Student 14	08	08	100 %
Female Student 15	09	09	100 %
Female Student 16	12	12	100 %
Female Student 17	08	08	100 %
Female Student 18	14	14	100 %
Female Student 19	09	09	100 %
Female Student 20	11	11	100 %
Total Number	205	205	100 %

Table 2. The Presence of Masculine Generic Pronoun in the Ten Male Research Proposals

Male Student Number	Number of Pronoun Use	‘he’ Pronoun Used	Percentage %
Male Student 01	06	06	100 %
Male Student 02	08	08	100 %
Male Student 03	12	12	100 %
Male Student 04	08	08	100 %
Male Student 05	10	10	100 %
Male Student 06	04	04	100 %
Male Student 07	11	11	100 %
Male Student 08	09	09	100 %
Male Student 09	06	06	100 %
Male Student 10	09	09	100 %
Total Number	83	83	100 %

From the results in the two tables above (1 and 2), there seems to be no difference at all between female and male students. The two sexes have the same tendency in the exclusive use of the generic pronoun ‘he’ to refer to both sexes. Male students tend, however, to less use the generic pronoun ‘he’ compared to female students’ use.

If we take a look at the highest number of pronoun use, we find that female students’ use reached the number of 17-14-13. The highest number of generic pronoun use in male students reached 12 only. In a similar manner, the least number of the generic pronoun ‘he’ us in the female students’ corpus is 8 while that of male students is 04.

The analysis of data provided interesting information related to the generic masculine pronoun ‘he’ use. This pronoun was used to refer to backward to certain nouns in the context of language use. The following table shows the types of nouns that were present in master research proposals and the pronoun used to refer to each of them.

Table 3. The Types of Nouns Used with the Pronoun Reference

Types of Words Used	Pronoun Reference Used
A/The person	He (his, him, himself)
A/The student	He (his, him, himself)
A/The speaker	He (his, him, himself)
A/The learner	He (his, him, himself)
A/The teacher	He (his, him, himself)
A/The writer	He (his, him, himself)
A/The individual	He (his, him, himself)

The length of writing can have an influence on the number and frequency of the generic masculine pronoun ‘he’ use. The use of many and various nouns can also have a great influence on frequent use of pronouns by students. Table 3 shows the various nouns that were present in Master students’ researcher proposals. The nouns include ‘a person’, ‘a/the student’, ‘s/the speaker’, ‘a/the learner’, ‘a/the teacher’, ‘a/the

writer' and 'a/the individual'. Both female and male students used a variety of these nouns in their research proposals when they refer to the teaching and learning process that involves the mention and the use of such nouns. Students seem to have a hidden inner thought that drives their language use practices. This thought is that all these nouns are to be referred to by using the generic pronoun 'he'.

The reason behind that can be traced in two main sources. The first reason can be traced due to mother tongue influence. All participants in this study are Algerian Master students whose first language is Arabic. In the Arabic language, it is quite common that a noun like 'student', 'teacher', 'learner', 'individual' and so on are thought to be referring to masculine persons. Their counterpart words in Arabic involve طالب/الطالب، متعلم/المتعلم، أستاذ/الأستاذ، فرد/الفرد

The second reason can be traced in the mis-conception that students have in the use of the English language vis-a-vis singular pronoun use. Students might be influenced by their teachers' use of language (speech/writing) and teaching of pronouns, for instance. If many teachers use only the pronoun 'he' when explaining lessons and providing examples, students will follow such uses and practices in speech and in writing. Student might do that without any intentional purpose behind that. Frequent use of the pronoun 'he' can influence students' language production.

The analysis of the thirty research proposals, as shown in the previous tables, shows that Master candidates use the pronoun 'he' in an exclusive way. There was no one mention of the pronoun 'she' or even the combination of the two pronouns together 'he/she' or the plural pronoun 'they'. Students used, however, a variety of nouns like : person, student, speaker, learner and teacher and so on. When referring to the previous nouns, Algerian English as a foreign language students (EFL) tended to use the masculine generic pronoun (he/his/him/himself).

The results show, hence, that there is a complete dominance of the generic pronoun 'he' in the research proposals of Algerian Master students, which confirms the research hypothesis stated at the beginning of this research :Algerian Master students in Applied Linguistics predominantly use the exclusive masculine generic pronoun in their academic writing.

The writing tendency of the master students is similar and there is no sign of variation vis-à-vis the use of different personal pronouns (like she, he/she, or 'they'). This use of the generic 'he' in the genre of research proposals shows explicitly the influence of Algerian students' Arabic language, which is a grammatically gendered language. Gendered languages, like Arabic, have a traditional practice of masculine generic language use. As a grammatically gendered language, Arabic may have an influence on the way Algerian students think and write or speak in English.

5.2. The Results of the Analysis of The Teachers' Questionnaire about Teaching or Raising Students'

Awareness about the Use of Gendered Language in Academic Writing

Prior to delving into deep questions that require information related to the teachers' opinion with regard to the presence of gendered language in students' academic writing as well as their teaching practices, some essential questions were asked to understand the teaching experience background of the participants. The questions of the first section (background information) center around the teachers' gender, their degree, their experience in teaching the English language at university as well as their experience in teaching writing.

Section 01 : Background Information

The questionnaire has been sent to sixty one teachers from various Algerian higher education institutions, during the academic year 2024-2025. The teachers belong to the following eight institutions : University of Skikda (12 teachers = 19.67 %), ENS Constantine (08 teachers = 13.11 %), University of Brothers Mentouri (06 teachers = 09.83 %), University of Khenchela (07 teachers = 11.47 %), University of Larbi Tebessi (07 teachers = 11.47 %), University of Biskra (06 teachers = 09.83), ENS Oran (07 teachers = 11.47 %), ENS Bouzaréah (08 teachers = 13.11 %). It was very important for the current research to get information and insights about teachers' opinion and teaching practices that will help the researcher understand better the presence or absence of gendered language in students' academic writing.

Forty five of the teacher participants (73.77 %) were female teachers, while sixteen (26.22 %) were male teachers. This reflects an overdominance of female teachers' presence in higher education as far as the teaching of English language is concerned.

All the teachers are permanent teachers. Twenty five of them (40.98 %) hold the Magistère degree, forty five (39.34 %) hold a doctoral degree (MC B) and the remaining twelve teachers (19.67 %) hold a post doctoral degree (habilitation-MC A) degree. This reflects the fact that all teachers are considered as qualified teachers to teach at the level of university.

Section 02 : Teaching Background and Experience

The focus of this second very important section is to get informed about the teaching experience of the teacher participants. It focuses on their years of teaching the English language, in general, and the teaching of writing, in particular. The section also focuses on the levels of teaching writing and the teachers' opinion about the presence or absence of gendered language in the academic writing of their students.

When asked for how many years they have been teaching the English language, twenty teachers (32.78 %) said that they have been doing between 4-8 years. Thirty teachers (49.18 %) said that they have been teaching English between 8-12 years, eight teachers (13.11 %) said that it was between 12-16 years and the remaining three teachers (4.91 %) said that it was for more than sixteen years.

The teacher participants have a different experience in teaching

the subject of writing. Seventeen teachers (27.86 %) have said that they taught the subject between 1-3 years, sixteen teachers (26.22 %) between 3-6 years, nine teachers (14.75 %) between 6-9 years, thirteen teachers (21.31 %) between 9-12 years and six teachers (9.83 %) between 12-15 years. From the percentages provides, one can say that all teacher participants have an acceptable teaching experience in the subject of writing that ranges mainly between 3 to 9 and 12 years.

In terms of the levels of teaching the subject of writing, most teachers teach writing at the undergraduate level. Forty teachers (65.57 %) teach at the BA level, while twenty one teacher (34.42 %) teach at the MA level. This information is very important because teaching writing at the undergraduate level allows teachers of writing, not only to teach different essential aspects related to writing and grammar, but also to work on raising students' awareness to other essential aspects before reaching advanced levels of writing where teaching intervention may not have a good place. Teaching and raising students' awareness to the importance of avoiding the use of gendered language should start right from the first, second and third years of undergraduate teaching and learning. When students start practicing writing, they should focus on such aspects so that their academic writing will always keep improving, without being judged as irrelevant, exclusive or negative in any sense.

Section 03 : The Writing Practices of Students vis-à-vis the Use of Gendered Language

The third section in the questionnaire covers teachers' opinion about their students' writing practices with regard to the presence of gendered language (pronouns in particular). Eighty five teachers (95.08 %) said that their students use gendered pronouns (he) in their academic writing. The other three remaining teachers (4.91) said that their students make a mixture between the two pronouns he/she, which makes it, according to them, non gendered language use because it involves both parts: male and female.

The students' use of gendered pronouns (he) seems to be persistent in their writing. Thirty two teachers (52.45 %) said that gendered pronoun (he) is always present in students' writing, twenty six teachers (42.62 %) said that it is often present, and the other three teachers (4.91 %) said that it is only sometimes present. From these results one can confirm the fact that students' academic writing, at BA and MA levels, is characterized by being greatly exclusive because it involves just one gender, that of male as represented by the pronoun 'he-him-his'.

Section 04 : Teaching and Raising Students' Awareness towards the Use of Gendered Language in Writing

In this last essential section of the questionnaire, teachers were asked questions that center around their focus on teaching aspects related to gendered language in academic writing and whether they raise their students' awareness to that central aspect of academic writing. Sixty one teacher (100 %) said that they do not at all focus on teaching aspects of gendered language (the use of pronouns) in writing. All

teachers (100 %) also said that they do not at all focus on teaching aspects of gendered language (use of words, pronouns) in academic writing.

Since reading is a necessary skill that is involved in the teaching of writing, the teacher participants were asked about the language that is used in the texts that they provide for students to read in class. All teachers (100 %) said that the texts that they use contain gender exclusive pronouns (he-his-him). When asked whether, or not, they adapt the language of the text to eliminate any instance (s) of gendered language, mainly the use of exclusive pronouns, fifty eight teacher (95.08 %) said that they do not do so, while a very small percentage of teachers (4.91 %) said that they adapt the texts that they give to students to exclude any gendered language.

Besides that, despite not focusing on gendered language's use in their teaching to promote more inclusive language, all teachers agree upon the fact that it is an important aspects. Forty five teachers (73.77 %) said that it is very important and the remaining sixty teachers (26.22 %) said that it is important.

The previous essential point is supported by the fact that when asked for their opinion about the necessity to include aspects of inclusive language teaching in their BA and MA teaching, all teachers (100 %) expressed their agreement. They expressed their consent to place a major focus on the teaching of gendered language to help students achieve inclusive and gender free writing practices.

To fully understand the teacher participants opinion about the central importance of the use of non gendered language (pronouns in this case) in academic writing, we asked them a central question related to its influence on the good quality of the academic text. Fifty nine teachers (96.72 %) said that the presence of gendered language influences negatively the quality of the academic text, while the other two teachers (3.27 %) said that it does not. These results reflect the central importance that gendered language should have to improve the academic writing practice of students.

The findings of the analysis of the corpus suggest that the topic of gendered language use presents a serious issue for foreign language students in the academic writing of research proposals. This might also be the case in other genres of academic writing like essays, abstracts, research articles and so on. This is why the issue of gender bias language is dealt with in the present study. This topic is of central importance and should also be dealt with in the teaching of grammar, speaking, writing and academic writing to Algerian EFL students at undergraduate, graduate and even post graduate levels for teaching and academic research purposes. Student-writers' awareness should be raised to gain knowledge related to issues of generic pronoun use. Providing language users with strategies and guidelines will help them in changing their writing practices and moving towards the adoption of inclusive language or gender-fair language in academic writing.

The first aim of the present research was to investigate the use of gendered language in the academic writing of thirty master students in the field of Applied Linguistics. The focus was placed mainly on the use of the generic masculine pronoun 'he' in master research proposals. The second aim of the study was to explore the teaching practices of teachers of writing with regard of whether, or not, they place focus on the teaching of exclusive and inclusive language in academic writing.

In light of the analysis of the written samples, the first research question that states 'Do students use mainly and exclusively gender exclusive pronouns in their academic writing of research proposals?' was answered. There is a complete and exclusive use of gender exclusive pronouns in the academic writing of research proposals written by male and by female students alike. The second research question that states 'Do teachers of writing focus on teaching and raising students' awareness to the importance of inclusive language in terms of the use of gender inclusive pronouns?' is also answered through the questionnaire that was submitted to sixty one teachers of writing from eight different Algerian universities. The results of the questionnaire show that teachers of writing, in BA or MA level, do not focus on the teaching of aspects related to inclusive language or gender fair language use.

On the basis of the analysis of both research tools' results, we can say that the research hypothesis that states that 'Algerian Master students' use of gendered language in their academic writing, mainly in writing research proposals, is due to the lack of teaching focus on that central academic language aspect' is confirmed. The strong tendency of master students to over-use the masculine pronouns is strongly due to the fact that their teachers do not focus on teaching it. Teachers of writing do not also draw their students' attention to this essential academic writing aspect even when reading sample texts in class or when students are involved in classroom practices that require rich and informative feedback from the teacher with regard to the points that students should correct and should avoid in future writings.

It is sufficiently clear from the results of the questionnaire that the presence of gendered language in students' academic writings is persistent and can negatively influence the quality of their academic texts. The presence of such a language aspect can be attributed to several factors including the fact that this aspect is not given due importance in the teaching of writing. Even the texts that are given to students, and which contain instances of gendered language, also have a negative influence on students' learning of writing and hence their written productions. This serious concern call for attention on the part of teachers of writing to include aspects of inclusive language in the teaching of writing from the undergraduate level. Teachers should also assume responsibility by adapting the texts that they give to their students to read because such texts are also important in helping students learn what is academically acceptable and appropriate and what

is not.

The huge absence of the teaching of inclusive language in BA and MA levels provides clear insights about the writing of research proposals at Master level. Students use the language that they have been taught and that they have seen in the texts that they used to read and analyze in the classroom. Not focusing on teaching aspects of gender inclusive language on the part of teachers made students not at all aware about the negative effects that the presence of gender exclusive language can have on the quality of their different academic texts (essays, research proposals, reports and so on). In order to help students improve their academic writing, teachers should focus on teaching such a central aspect at the BA level and should keep raising students' awareness towards the use of gender inclusive language at MA, and even doctoral, level.

Male's bias in academic language use is, and will remain, of central importance because it has certain practical consequences in our language and behavior. In academic writing, the issue of gender bias or gendered language use has become a central issue that requires serious consideration in academic writing and research. In the Algerian EFL context, attention should be directed to the academic writing, and mainly to research proposal writing, of Algerian EFL students, even teachers and researchers. This should be done to identify cases of gendered language in order to understand such practices and provide language learners with appropriate academic writing courses to help them overcome gender-language writing problems. Since language can be used to reduce stereotypes and implicit discrimination (Hellinger, 2002), the introduction of gender fair language or gender inclusive language courses can have a psychological and practical impact on language users' behavior (Bem and Bem, 1973).

Today, there is an increasing demand for the use of gender-fair language in academic writing. To avoid the use of gendered language, language users, especially Algerian EFL learners, may tend to adopt the use of what has come to be known as 'epicene pronouns'. These pronouns are singular personal pronouns which do not specify gender or they are pronouns that refer to both sexes.

Little research has addressed the topic of the use of epicene pronouns (and even nouns) in the academic writing of EFL students, in general, and Algerian EFL students, in particular. Corpus based research is highly required to examine and identify the exclusive use of masculine generic pronoun. This, I believe, will be the first step to better understand the academic writing practices of Algerian EFL students in the genre of research proposals. Experiments that involve teaching intervention in the subject of grammar or the subject of writing are also highly recommended since they will provide better insights about Algerian EFL students' change in academic writing practices vis-à-vis the use of inclusive language.

The present study is based a small, but representative, scale corpus analysis. Future research should be based on a large scale analysis in

order to reach more interesting and informative research results and conclusions related mainly to the academic writing of students and the teaching practices of teachers of writing in relation gender-fair language use.

CONCLUSION

The present research is a contribution to current research about gendered language use. The study is a contribution to research about gendered language in the writings of the genre of research proposals by Algerian EFL students. The study calls for further critical and corpus based research to be conducted in this interesting area of academic writing research. Besides the genre of research proposal writing, other types of academic genres can also be examined and analyzed in terms of gender language use. Moreover, future research about the statements of gender inclusive language use, practices of institutions and teaching practices of staff should also be investigated to understand the overall nature of the gender exclusive or gender inclusive language issue in EFL educational contexts.

Teaching can be a major source for the promotion or the elimination of gendered language practices in academic writing. If teachers of English grammar and teachers of English writing, in particular, do not focus on the phenomenon of gendered language and gender inclusive language through the use of grammatical aspects, like in the use of personal pronouns, then, Algerian EFL students will continue to use gendered pronouns, and even nouns, in their writing.

Since the Arabic language belongs to the typology of gendered languages, and since it is the first language of Algerian students, I believe that this can also be an influential factor in Algerian EFL students' tendency to exclusively, or significantly, use the masculine generic pronoun 'he'. If this is the case, then, even contrastive research should be conducted on both Arabic and English to understand how language pronouns are used in both languages. This can provide informative insights and may contribute in understanding language behaviour and help in changing the academic writing practices of Algerian EFL students.

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