

54-An analysis of the relationship between gender and the use of English personal pronouns by ESL and EFL learners

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to examine the relationship between gender and personal pronoun usage from a sociolinguistic perspective. The study was conducted in an educational setting with Turkish learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) enrolled in the first year of an undergraduate teacher training program at a government university in Izmir, Turkey and learners of English as a second language (ESL) attending an Immersion Program at a government university in New York, U.S. Data were collected via essays, which were analyzed for any significant differences among personal pronoun usage by both groups and between males and females in their use of the pronouns. Data were also examined to find out whether the use of pronouns carried any social meanings. The results of the paired-samples t-tests showed that the ESL learners as a whole as well as the male and female ESL learners used 'I' at a significantly higher rate than the other pronouns. No significant differences were observed between males and females in both groups regarding the use of personal pronouns. The results are discussed in accordance with the social motivations for the use of certain pronouns and recommendations are provided with respect to the teaching of personal pronouns in writing classrooms.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, gender, personal pronouns, English as a foreign language, English as a second language

Cinsiyet ve İngilizceyi ikinci ve yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrenciler tarafından İngilizce kişi zamirlerinin kullanımı arasındaki ilişkinin bir analizi

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı cinsiyet ve kişi zamirleri arasındaki ilişkiyi toplum dilbilimsel açıdan incelemektir. Çalışma, Türkiye'nin İzmir şehrinde bulunan bir devlet üniversitesinin öğretmenlik bölümünün birinci sınıfında öğrenim görmekte olan İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrenciler ve ayrıca Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin New York şehrinde bulunan bir devlet üniversitesinin hazırlık programında İngilizceyi ikinci dil olarak öğrenen öğrencilerin olduğu eğitimsel bir ortamda yapılmıştır. Veri, kişi zamiri kullanımı açısından iki grup arasındaki farkı ve kadınlar ve erkekler arasında anlamlı farklılıkların olup olmadığını analiz etmek için öğrenci kompozisyonlarından elde edilmiştir. Ayrıca, veri zamirlerin sosyal anlamlar taşıyıp taşımadığını anlamak için de incelenmiştir. Bağımlı Örneklem T-testinin sonuçları İngilizceyi ikinci dil olarak öğrenen ve ayrıca kadın ve erkek öğrencilerin 'ben' kişi zamirini diğer zamirlerden anlamlı olarak daha fazla kullandığını göstermiştir. Fakat her iki grupta bulunan kadınlar ve erkekler arasında kişi zamiri kullanımı açısından anlamlı bir fark görülmemiştir. Sonuçlar, kişi zamirlerinin

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kullanılmasına yönelik sosyal motivasyonlar açısından tartışılmış ve yazma derslerinde kişi zamirlerinin öğretilmesine yönelik tavsiyelerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Toplum dilbilim, cinsiyet, kişi zamirleri, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce, ikinci dil olarak İngilizce

1. Introduction

The relationship between gender and language, which has always been an important component and also one of the most investigated areas in sociolinguistic research, has been approached from different perspectives over the past decades. Whereas studies before the 1980s “treated sex as a binary category and as a static identity of speakers that could be correlated with speech patterns” (Higgins, 2010, p.371), in the postmodern approaches, gender was seen as ‘a complex system of social relations and discursive practices, differentially constructed in local contexts (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004, p. 504). For example, Lakoff (1975) observed that women used more tag questions, intensifiers, empty adjectives, correct grammar, polite language, and hedges more than men, confirming much of Jespersen’s observations reported in 1922. Tannen (1990), on the other hand, took a cross-cultural approach to examine the interactions between men and women. Observing a variety of different interactions such as complementing, giving advice, and gossiping, she concluded that while women gave more importance to issues such as connection and intimacy, men focused on status and independence. These differences, according to Tannen (1990), were caused by the different cultures in which men and women grow up. Tannen (1990) called these different varieties spoken by men and women *genderlects*.

The claims and stereotypes proposed by the earlier studies were criticized by scholars (e.g. Goodwin 1990; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992) due to the fact that earlier studies “take men and women to be their analytic categories without questioning when gender is relevant and without questioning how gender interacts with other aspects of social identity in shaping interactional style” (Freeman & McElhinny, 1996, p. 242). In addition, earlier investigations into men’s and women’s speeches did not involve interactions in specific contexts and activities. As Goodwin (1990) stated, For example, based on the results of a study involving African-American children, Goodwin reported that girls and boys behaved similar to each other even if they were engaged in different activities.

In studying the relationship between gender and language, certain genres were also found to influence the linguistic behaviors of males and females, that is, the linguistic behaviors of men and women varied depending on the genre. As Higgins (2010) claimed “in performing their gendered selves, individuals make choices as to how to style themselves.... these choices are not isolated from societal expectations, cultural models and ideologies about gender” (p. 374). The use of personal pronouns was found to be different across different genders and genres. For instance, in political speeches, whereas men were more likely to use the pronoun, ‘I’, than the women counterparts to show dominance, women used ‘we’ (inclusive) more than men to show their willingness to collaborate with their audience and form identity (Andersson 2012; Goodwin 1980; Kaml 2000; Lerner 2009). Regarding written language, which is the focus of the present study, whereas females were more inclined to use ‘you’ more than the males (Argamon, Koppel, Fine, & Shimoni 2003; Ishikawa, 2015), both males and females used ‘I’ at the same rate (Macintyre, 2017).

In this regard, the aim of the present study is to explore the relationship between gender and English personal pronoun usage in academic essays written by Turkish learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) and learners of English as a second language (ESL), which is an under-researched area in educational contexts. Despite a considerable amount of work on the relationship between gender and language, attention to the personal pronoun usage by males and females in Turkish and American educational settings has not been a primary area for researchers. Given this fact, the study aims to expand this line of research and the current understanding of how English personal pronouns are used by male and female EFL learners in Turkey and ESL learners in the U.S. The following section will provide a review of the literature about the topic followed by the research questions. The methodology section will discuss the participants, setting, instruments and data collection. The results will be provided and discussed along with the implications of the study in EFL and ESL settings. The study will be concluded with a summary and discussion of the limitations.

2. Literature review

Previous research suggested that there is a strong relationship between gender and the use of personal pronouns, which can vary between genres. An example of a genre in which personal pronouns can be used differently by males and females is political or congressional speeches. Empirical research studies have increasingly focused on how male and female politicians used personal pronouns in their speeches. For example, Ye (2010) conducted an interpersonal metafunction analysis of the victory speech that the U.S. former president Barack Obama gave his supporters in 2008. Ye evaluated his speech regarding mood, modality and the use of pronouns. According to the results, Obama used three subject personal pronouns more than the others: 'You' (13 % of the time), 'I' (19 %), and 'we', 'us', 'our' (75 %). He used 'I' to express his gratitude, 'you' to form a close relationship with his supporters, 'we' (inclusive) to express that he and his supporters share a common purpose, and 'we' (exclusive) to refer to himself and his government. Later work carried out by Dahnilyah (2017) gave similar results. Adopting a Critical Discourse Analysis approach, Dahnilyah examined the political speeches that Barack Obama gave in 2010, 2011, and 2014. The author was particularly interested in the frequency of use of the personal pronouns and the meanings attached to them. The transcripts of the speeches were collected from online media and were subject to qualitative content analysis. The results showed that Obama was very careful in choosing which personal pronouns to use, as he seemed to be aware of the effect of the pronouns on communicating the right messages. The pronouns, 'I' and 'my' as well as 'we' and 'our' were the most frequently used pronouns in his speeches. He used 'I' and 'my' to express his opinions and achievements as well as show responsibility and commitment. He used 'we', 'our', and 'us' to form unity among people. In the U.S., Hillary Rodham Clinton's linguistic style has also attracted the attention of several scholars over the years. For example, Jones (2016) conducted a quantitative study to analyze the linguistic features that Hillary Clinton used in interviews and candidate debates between 1992 and 2013. The linguistic features included pronouns along with articles, prepositions, verbs, auxiliary verbs, and words related to emotion and anger in a total of 567 texts. According to the findings, the more Clinton was involved in politics, the more her language became masculine. As for the personal pronouns, whereas Clinton, used 'I', 'you', 'she', and 'it' in the early years, she used 'we' and 'our' after 2009 with the purpose of identifying herself with the group she represented.

In an attempt to find out how African politicians manipulated language to persuade the audience, Al-Faki (2014) analyzed political speeches compiled from books, journals, and the Internet. His investigation into the use of pronouns in political speeches revealed that the politicians used the

pronoun, ‘I’ to refer to themselves as an individual; ‘you’ as a generic pronoun; ‘we (inclusive)’ to express collectivity and solidarity; and finally, ‘they’ to separate themselves from others. Lenard (2016) compared male and female politicians in their use of personal pronouns that occurred in the 113th U.S. Congress speeches. The author analyzed a total of 3,655 speeches (672 made by women and 2,983 by men) to determine the usage rate of the personal pronouns used by males and females and the reasons underlying the use of certain pronouns. The results showed that the males and females used personal pronouns at a similar rate. The only result that was significant between the two gender groups was the use of “you”. The male politicians used ‘you’ more than the females. The author also pointed out to the role of context and added that the women adjusted their speech to appear more masculine due to the fact that they are underrepresented in politics.

The relationship between gender and the use of personal pronouns has also received considerable attention in writing. Studies produced mixed results. In a large-scale study, Argamon, Koppel, Fine, and Shimon (2003) analyzed gender differences in the use of lexical and syntactic features in fiction and non-fiction writings in a variety of different genres in the British National Corpus. The authors used 604 documents, which were equally distributed across gender. The corpus included a variety of genres such as natural science, social science, arts, applied science, leisure and so on. The results showed significant differences between the males and females with respect to the use of pronouns. The females used the pronoun, ‘I’, and ‘you’ more than the males, which, according to the authors, showed females’ desire to connect with their readers. In addition, the females used third person singular personal pronouns, ‘he’ and ‘she’ to state the gender of the person explicitly, whereas the males used more generic pronouns than females. The authors attributed these results to the fact that women have a tendency to use a personalized style. These findings were partially supported in a recent study by Ahmad and Mehmood (2015) who analyzed a total of 240 columns (120 were written by males and 120 by females) written in four English newspapers published in Pakistan. Along with several other linguistic categories such as nouns, adjectives, and verbs, the authors examined the use of all personal pronouns used in the columns and the reasons for using them. Based on the analyses, the authors reported that, except for the pronoun, ‘she’, the male writers used all pronouns more than the females. In addition, the pronouns, ‘we’, ‘our’ and ‘it’ were used for persuasion, whereas ‘we’ and ‘you’ were used for “reducing the distance between writer and masses” (p. 12).

A number of studies conducted in ESL and EFL contexts gave similar results. The personal pronouns, ‘I’, ‘you’, and ‘we’ were found to be the most frequently used pronouns in academic essays. For example, Ishikawa (2015) investigated gender differences in the use of vocabulary items that occurred in academic essays written by 100 college students who were native speakers of English. There were 56 males and 44 females whose ages ranged from 19 to 29. The results showed that the female students used the pronouns, ‘you’, ‘your’, and ‘our’ more than the males. Compared to males, the females also used more phrases related to psychological processes, such as ‘I think’. In a longitudinal study, Macintyre (2017) investigated the use of personal pronouns occurring in the argumentative essays of 17 Japanese EFL learners. Adopting a qualitative method, the author observed the learners’ development in the use of personal pronouns over 14 weeks. Data were collected via interviews and argumentative essays written by the learners. The learners wrote essays for each of the following topics: having part-time jobs, illegal drugs, and individualism. The results showed that the first singular pronoun ‘I’ was the most frequently used pronoun by males and females. This result, according to the author may have been influenced by the topics that the learners were supposed to write about. Some topics required the learners to give examples from their own lives, which may have led the learners to use ‘I’ more than other pronouns.

Investigations into the usage of personal pronouns by ESL and EFL learners, in particular, signified the role of culture in academic writing. As Hyland (2002) pointed out “culture shapes our communicative practices in significant ways, influencing our preferences for structuring information, the relationships we establish with our readers, and how far we want to personally appear in our texts” (p. 1110). This has important consequences for second or foreign language learners as “cultural norms are an additional complicating factor pressuring learners to abandon their familiar everyday conventions” as they get accustomed to the culture of the target language as they get accustomed to the culture of the target language (Hyland, 2002, p. 1110). For example, Hyland (2002) examined the relationship between writer identity and the use of first person pronouns such as ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘we’, and ‘us’, and determiners such as ‘my’ and ‘our’ in the reports of 64 ESL undergraduate students in their final year of college in Hong Kong. The reports were obtained from students majoring in a variety of different areas such as biology, social sciences, business studies, economics, mechanical engineering, public administration, and so on. The author then compared the reports to journal articles. Data also involved interviews with students and their supervisors. The results demonstrated that the students preferred not to use the first person pronoun and its authoritative function, and did not want to take responsibility for their opinions. This result, according to Hyland, may have been influenced by the amount of academic knowledge that the students possessed. Hyland stated that the usage of ‘I’ increases as students become more knowledgeable in their fields, which enables them to express their opinions in an authoritative manner. The perception of authority in different cultures may have also contributed to the avoidance of ‘I’ by the students. After all, cultural factors also played an important role in a recent quantitative study conducted by Alward (2019). Alward examined the use of the first person pronouns, ‘I’ and ‘we’ in the argumentative paragraphs of 80 Yemeni EFL learners who were in their third year of undergraduate studies at a college in Yemen. The learners were categorized into three proficiency groups: low-proficiency, intermediate, and high proficiency. The results showed that the EFL learners used the first person pronouns at a higher rate than any other pronoun, with low and intermediate-level learners using them at a higher rate than advanced-level learners. The author attributed the use of ‘we’, in particular, to the collectivist culture that the learners were exposed to in Yemen.

With the above-mentioned findings reported in the previous studies, it is logical to expect that similar results may be obtained from the present study. Yet, at present, there is a lack of research investigating the use of English personal pronouns by male and female EFL and ESL learners. Therefore, with these potentials in mind, this study aims to expand an understanding of how gender differences are reflected in the use of personal pronouns in writing. The following questions will be addressed in the study:

1. Is there a significant difference among personal pronoun rates for ESL and EFL learners?
2. Is there a significant difference between the males and females in both ESL and EFL groups regarding the use of personal pronouns?
3. What are the social reasons underlying the use of personal pronouns by both ESL and EFL learners and by males and females in both groups?

3. Method

3.1. Participants, setting and data collection

The present study received the approval of the Research Ethics Committee at Izmir Democracy University in Turkey and the Institutional Review Board at the City University of New York, U.S. Two groups of learners participated in the study: EFL and ESL learners. The EFL participants were Turkish learners enrolled in the teacher-training program of a government university located in the West part of Turkey. The teacher education program is a four-year program in which students are trained to be English language teachers. At the time of the study, the learners were in their first year of college, taking advanced level English language courses in reading, writing, and speaking. The learners enter the program having received a certain score in the nation-wide university entrance exam, which measures mostly the English grammatical knowledge of learners who want to pursue a degree in translation, linguistics, English language teaching, and American and English literature. A total of 40 participants of whom 20 were males and the other 20 were females participated in the study. The learners were ranged in age from 18-20 and had similar socioeconomic status. The students were asked to write an academic essay about whether or not college education is useful for people. They were required to write at least 250 words in 90 minutes. They wrote their essays in a class session in the Spring semester of 2020. The ESL learners were enrolled in the Immersion Program of one of the biggest universities in the state of New York. The learners who attended the program had already been accepted to college but were required to take extra courses to improve their English language skills. The learners received five hours of instruction in the English language every day. The participants were at an advanced level. Like the EFL group, there was a total of 40 students who were equally distributed by their sex. They were between the ages of 17-55 and had similar socio-economic background. Almost all of the students were from Central or South America. The learners in this group wrote an essay about how the way people dress affects their feelings.

4. Data analysis and results

The present study focused on three personal pronouns, 'I', 'you' and 'we' due to the fact that they were the most investigated pronouns in earlier studies because of the social meanings attached to them. The three personal pronouns and the contexts in which they were used were extracted from the essays. To answer the first research question, which explored the rate of use of personal pronouns by EFL and ESL learners, descriptive statistics was used to calculate the mean scores and standard deviations.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics: Mean scores and standard deviations of personal pronouns for all EFL learners

| Personal Pronouns | M | SD | N |
|-------------------|------|------|----|
| You | 4.03 | 6.19 | 40 |
| We | 3.15 | 3.15 | 40 |
| I | 2.08 | 1.73 | 40 |

The results, which can be seen in Table 1, showed that EFL learners used the second personal pronoun, 'you' at a higher rate than the first person plural pronoun, 'we', and the first person singular pronoun, 'I'. Descriptive statistics was also performed for all ESL learners. As Table 2 shows, 'I' was used at the highest rate, followed by 'we' and 'you'.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics: Mean scores and standard deviations of personal pronouns for all ESL learners

| Personal Pronouns | M | SD | N |
|-------------------|------|------|----|
| I | 3.75 | 2.84 | 40 |
| We | 1.50 | 2.98 | 40 |
| You | 1.03 | 1.90 | 40 |

In order to determine whether there were significant differences among personal pronoun usage rates for all EFL and ESL learners, paired-samples t-tests were conducted for each group. No significant differences were observed for the EFL learners. When the ESL group was considered, the mean score of 'I' (M=3.75, SD=2.84) significantly differed from 'you' (M=1.03, SD=1.90) and 'we' (M=2.00, SD=2.98); $t(39)=5.12, p=.000$. The second research question was concerned with whether there was a significant difference between males and females with respect to the use of personal pronouns. The results of independent-samples t-tests for EFL learners are shown in the table below.

Table 3. Independent-samples t-tests: Differences between males and females in the use of personal pronouns (EFL learners)

| Personal Pronouns | Groups | M | SD | N |
|-------------------|---------|------|------|----|
| I | Females | 2.10 | 1.77 | 20 |
| | Males | 2.05 | 1.73 | 20 |
| You | Females | 5.85 | 8.10 | 20 |
| | Males | 2.20 | 2.46 | 20 |
| We | Females | 4.50 | 6.65 | 20 |
| | Males | 1.80 | 2.16 | 20 |

According to the results, the females used all the personal pronouns at a higher rate than the males. However, there were no significant differences between the females (M=2.10, SD=1.77) and males (M=2.05, SD=1.73); $t(38)=.090, p=.092$, in terms of the use of 'I'; no significant differences between the females (M=5.85, SD=8.10) and males (M=2.20, SD=2.26); $t(38)=1.92, p=.062$, in terms of the use of 'you'; and no significant differences between the females (M=4.50, SD=6.65) and males (M=1.80, SD=2.16); $t(38)=1.72, p=.093$, in terms of the use of 'we'. A paired-samples t-test was performed to determine whether there were significant differences among the personal pronouns usage rates for females and males. The results were not significant. An independent-samples t-test was also conducted for ESL learners. The table below shows the results.

Table 4. Independent-samples t-tests: Differences between males and females in the use of personal pronouns (ESL learners)

| Personal Pronouns | Groups | M | SD | N |
|-------------------|---------|------|------|----|
| I | Females | 3.80 | 2.66 | 20 |
| | Males | 3.70 | 3.08 | 20 |
| You | Females | 1.35 | 1.89 | 20 |
| | Males | .70 | 1.89 | 20 |
| We | Females | 2.20 | 3.30 | 20 |
| | Males | 1.80 | 2.70 | 20 |

As the above table shows, similar to the female EFL learners, the female ESL learners used the three personal pronouns at a higher rate than the males. However, no significant differences were found

between the males and females regarding the use of all personal pronouns. However, further results based on a paired-samples t-test showed that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of 'I' (M=3.80, SD=2.66) and 'you' (M=1.35, SD=1.89); $t(19)= 3.33, p=.003$ for the females. For the males, there was a significant difference between the mean scores of 'I' (M=3.70, SD=3.08) and 'you' (M=.70, SD=1.89); $t(19)= 3.82, p=.001$, as well as a significant difference between the scores of 'I' (M=3.70, SD=3.08) and 'we' (M=1.80, SD=2.70); $t(19)= 2.22, p=.039$.

Below are sample paragraphs taken from the EFL and ESL learners' essays. As can be seen in the following example, the female EFL learner used 'you' with the purpose of involving the audience in the subject matter and lessening the distance between herself and the audience.

"To begin with, all of the universities have a lot of advantages. For example, there are a lot of programs presenting of a university such as Erasmus and Farabi. Thanks to these programs, **you** can go to the abroad and **you** can study there. On the other hand, **you** develop your self-esteem there because **you** are alone and **you** have to everything on your own. Also, **you** make a lot of friends and **you** always can go to there whenever **you** want. If **you** want to have a good job, then **you** should graduate from a university and **you** should have a good CV. In this point, university **you** studied in is much more important. While **you** are attending university, **you** should benefit from all its opportunities. For example, **you** can attend to courses different from your department. So, **you** graduate from two different department" (Female #1, EFL).

The following examples present the use of 'I' among EFL and ESL learners. ESL learners used it mostly to talk about their own experiences whereas the EFL learners used it to state their opinions.

"When **I** was in Ecuador, **I** was working in Zara, and our uniform was a grey suit, which was kind of elegant. **I** noticed that a lot of people were watching while **I** was walking to work. **I** felt the respect that they were giving at the moment in which **I** had the suit on" (Male # 20, ESL).

"**I totally disagree**. There are three main reasons why **I don't agree** with the idea of people who had studied in university have more success than those who hadn't...Considering what these two people achieved, **I strongly think that** whether someone studies in a college or does not determine their success or failures in their lives...**I am of the opinion that** everyone has the right to choose their future" (Female # 16, EFL).

"Before **you** go to college, **you** should choose a profession but **you** must choose it wisely because in my thoughts if **you** do your dream job, **you'll** be happy and successful. I think if someone did not go to college he/she would not be comfortable or lead a successful life even though he is well-paid. College prepares **you** to your profession. If **you** are a ELT student college prepares **you** to be a teacher and its difficulties" (Male #26, EFL).

With respect to the use of 'we', the learners used it to identify themselves with all the students they were referring to.

"The more **we** are educated, the more information is learned about everything. Moreover, when **we** go to college, **we** start to live alone. Thanks to living alone, **we** learn to stand our own legs. **We** have to take responsibilities while studying. For example, if **we** live in a dormitory, **we** should try to get on well with the others, or if **we** live in a house **we** should learn spending our money properly. These all things give us a life lesson. In conclusion, college education has a really important role in our lives. If

we get college education, **we** can ruin our lives successfully” (Female #14, EFL).

“However, if **we** don’t find a job **we** want, it can have many advantages over our life. For example, the way **we** speak to people, the way **we** listen to people, confidence **we** have and so on can change thanks to college education. If **we** look at people having college education they have more successful life than people who have not any college education. The reason of this situation is difference of their knowledge. If **we** have college education, **we** can learn many things” (Male #32, EFL).

5. Discussion

The present study aimed to address three research questions. The first and second research questions will be discussed along with the third question. The first question explored whether there was a significant difference among personal pronoun rates for EFL and ESL learners as well as for male and female learners in both groups. According to the results, the ESL learners as a whole used ‘I’ at a significantly higher rate than the other pronouns. Similar results were also obtained for the male and female ESL learners. While the males used ‘I’ significantly higher than ‘you’ and ‘we’, the difference was only significant between ‘I’ and ‘you’ for the females. One explanation for the significant and frequent use of ‘I’ is that the U.S. culture is individualistic (Hofstede, 1979) and therefore, in such cultures, when people refer to themselves, they prefer to use ‘I’ more than ‘we’. Note that the ESL learners in the study were mostly from Central and South America, which means that they were raised in a collectivist culture. However, that they lived and studied in the U.S. and interacted with native speakers of English on a daily basis may have influenced the way they used personal pronouns. Another explanation has to do with the amount of personal information that the ESL learners shared in their essays. In the present study, the analysis of the essays revealed that the ESL learners, through using ‘I’, gave more information about their private lives than EFL learners, which partially supports an earlier study conducted by Schwartz (2009) who investigated the extent to which collectivism among Latinos had an effect on their self-disclosure in their relationships. The author reported that Latinos self-disclosed themselves to their friends and acquaintances to a high extent.

Although the results showed no significant differences for the EFL learners and thus should be interpreted with caution, the differences in the mean scores of personal pronouns are still worth mentioning. According to the results, the most frequently used pronoun for the EFL learners was the second person singular ‘you’ followed by ‘we’ and ‘I’. The frequent usage of ‘you’, which is used to lessen the distance between the reader and the writer or the speaker and the listener, was also found in the previous studies that analyzed political speeches (Al-Faki, 2014). Further, the result regarding the first person plural ‘we’ is not surprising given the fact that Turkish people are considered as collectivistic compared to the those in western countries (Hofstede, 1979). This may have had an effect on the frequent use of ‘we’ in the essays. This result received support from a recent study conducted by Alward (2019) who attributed the frequent use of ‘we’ in the essays of Yemeni EFL learners to the collectivist culture in Yemen. As for the frequencies with which each gender group used the pronouns, the female EFL learners used ‘you’ at the highest rate, followed by ‘we’ and ‘I’, whereas males also used ‘you’ but followed by ‘I’ and ‘we’. In addition, although there was a very small difference between the female and male EFL learners with respect to the use of ‘I’, the difference was wider for the use of ‘you’ and ‘we’. Once again, the female EFL learners may have been more likely than males to be close to their audience and identify themselves with all the other students that they represented. The fact that the females used ‘you’ and ‘we’ at a higher rate than males is in line with the results of Argamon et. al. (2003), Ishikawa (2015), and Jones (2015). Regarding the second research question, in both the ESL

and EFL groups, the males and females did not differ significantly from one another regarding the use of personal pronouns. However, when the mean scores were considered, the females used all the personal pronouns at a higher rate than the males in both groups.

The present study has pedagogical implications for teaching writing. One issue that has been neglected in ESL and EFL classrooms is differences between males and females in their use of personal pronouns. Writing courses are usually carried out with a focus on grammar as well as paragraph and essay development, as the ultimate goal of writing lessons is to have students write a well-developed essay with grammatical sentences. How males and females express their opinions and identities via the use of personal pronouns is not given much attention to. One reason for this is that teachers do not receive much instruction about this topic in teacher training programs. For example, in Turkey, English language learning is based on grammar and thus the only concern of teachers in government schools is whether their students can construct grammatical sentences. This being the case, teachers should acknowledge the fact that depending on the genre, gender differences can be manifest in students' writing. Being sensitive to this issue can enable teachers to better respond to students' written work.

What is also important is to have ESL and EFL students understand that personal pronouns can have different functions based on the genres that they engage in. These functions should be taught to students through explicit teaching. Recall that in the present study, the EFL participants were selected among first year undergraduate students who were planning to be English language teachers in three years. Even though these students had taken writing courses and were exposed to many academic texts before the study, as the results showed, they did not master the use of personal pronouns in that e.g. they seemed to overuse the pronoun 'you'. As Hyland (2002b) recommends, students can examine sample essays written by experts in their field and determine the function of each pronoun. This would enable students to use pronouns appropriately when constructing their essays. Furthermore, it is important to raise students' awareness regarding the differences between the students' culture and the culture of the target language as culture plays an important role in the use of personal pronouns. For instance, instructors can remind students that they should not overuse the first person plural 'we' if they are raised in and living in a collectivist culture.

6. Conclusion

The present study investigated how male and female EFL and ESL learners expressed themselves using the personal pronouns, 'I', 'you' and 'we' when writing an argumentative essay. The results showed that the female learners in both groups used all pronouns at a higher rate than the males. Further, the most frequently used pronoun for EFL learners was 'you'. The same pattern of usage existed in male and female EFL learners' essays in that the learners used 'you' at the highest rate indicating that the EFL learners were more likely to involve the audience in their discussions. On the other hand, ESL learners as a whole as well as both the males and females, used 'I' at a significantly higher rate than the other pronouns, which suggested that by using 'I' to refer to themselves, the ESL learners tried to fit in the culture in which they were living in. Based on the results, the study draws attention to the necessity of teaching the functions of personal pronouns explicitly and raising students' awareness of the cultural factors that may play a role in the use of personal pronouns.

The study is not without its limitations. The first one is concerned with the fact that the EFL participants were prospective English language teachers with high metalinguistic knowledge and

therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other EFL populations. Conducting a further study with secondary or high school EFL learners would provide more insight into the use of personal pronouns by Turkish learners of EFL. A future study can also be carried out with more participants, as it was not possible to reach a sufficient number of both EFL and ESL male and female participants.

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