

Original Research

Gender-Based Differences in EFL Writing: Linguistic Features in Indonesian High School Students' Narratives

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**Abstract**

This study uniquely investigates gender-based differences in the linguistic features of narrative texts within the under-researched context of Indonesian high school students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Focusing specifically on narrative writing, this research provides novel insights into how gender influences written expression. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, narrative texts were collected from 20 students (10 male and 10 female) enrolled in a tutoring and English course institution in Indonesia. The texts were analyzed to identify lexicogrammatical features, as outlined by Knapp (2005), with particular attention to the use of action and mental verbs. The findings revealed that male students predominantly used action verbs to describe challenging activities and responsibility, such as "fought against big waves," highlighting assertiveness and leadership traits. In contrast, female students employed more mental verbs, such as "felt happy and proud," emphasizing emotions and personal experiences, which reflected a more introspective and relational writing style. These findings highlight the alignment of gender-based differences with social norms and cultural expectations. The study suggests that using gender-sensitive methodologies in EFL teaching enhances inclusivity by addressing students' diverse communication needs. This research makes a valuable contribution by proposing practical, gender-responsive strategies for language education.

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1. Introduction

Understanding gender-based differences in linguistic features is essential for developing effective pedagogical strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Research in this area is critical, as it highlights how gender influences language use, which can help educators create more inclusive and effective learning environments. However, gender differences in written texts, especially in narrative writing, have been underexplored in EFL research, particularly in Southeast Asia. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing how gender influences the linguistic features of narrative texts written by Indonesian high school students. Gender and language have been long-standing subjects of inquiry in sociolinguistics, with Deborah Tannen's Difference Theory offering a significant theoretical framework. Tannen (1990, 2003) posits that men and women communicate differently due to distinct socialization processes, with men using language to assert dominance and women to build relationships. This theory, supported by studies like those of Holmes (2008) and Coates (1998), underscores how language use is closely tied to gender. While these differences have been well-documented in spoken communication, this study applies Tannen's theory to written texts, expanding the understanding of gendered language in EFL contexts.

Previous research (Hyland, 2003; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) has largely focused on general linguistic features in EFL writing, but it has often overlooked the influence of gender. Studies have shown that men tend to use more action-oriented language, while women frequently express emotions and maintain interpersonal relationships (Lakoff, 1975; Romaine, 1994). However, most of this research has focused on spoken language, leaving a gap in understanding how these gender differences manifest in written narratives. This study addresses this gap by focusing on gender-based linguistic patterns in narrative texts, particularly examining lexicogrammatical features such as action verbs, mental verbs, adjectives, and conjunctions (Knapp & Watkins, 2005).

In educational contexts, research has consistently shown that gendered language patterns are evident not only in speech but also in writing. Lakoff (1975) argued that women's language tends to be more tentative and emotionally expressive, while men's language is more direct and authoritative. This observation has been supported by various studies that highlight the prevalence of tentative language features among women, such as hedges and tag questions, which are often perceived as markers of insecurity and powerlessness (Svendsen, 2019). For instance, Leaper & Ayres (2007) conducted a meta-analytic review that confirmed these tendencies, indicating that women are more likely to use affiliative speech, characterized by emotional expressiveness and connection-building, compared to men who typically employ more assertive language (Leaper & Ayres, 2007). Similarly, Coates (1998) found that women often use language to create connections, whereas men use it to assert independence.

Furthermore, research by Eagly & Karau (2002) on role congruity theory suggests that societal expectations regarding gender roles significantly influence language use, leading to behaviors that align with these roles through expectancy confirmation processes (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These patterns have been observed in various Western and non-Western contexts, indicating a broader applicability of these findings. For example, Tanaka (2024) examined gender differences in language acquisition patterns among adolescents in Japan, revealing that cultural and socioeconomic factors play a crucial role in shaping these differences (Tanaka, 2024). This aligns with Holmes' (2008) assertion that gendered language patterns are not confined to specific cultural contexts but are influenced by a myriad of social factors. Moreover, research by Palomares and Lee (2009) highlights that men and women may adapt their language use based on the topic of discussion, with men exhibiting more tentative language when discussing traditionally feminine topics, thereby challenging the notion of fixed gendered language patterns (Palomares & Lee, 2009). This study contributes to this body of research by analyzing gendered linguistic features in narrative texts written by Indonesian students, providing new insights into the intersection of gender, language, and education in a non-Western EFL setting.

Gender socialization plays a crucial role in shaping language use. From an early age, individuals are socialized to conform to gender norms, with boys encouraged to use assertive, action-oriented language and girls taught to prioritize emotional expression and relational harmony (Holmes, 2008; Hofstede, 2001). These socialization processes inevitably influence how students approach narrative writing in an EFL context, shaping their linguistic choices according to deeply ingrained cultural norms.

In multilingual and multicultural societies like Indonesia, cultural norms heavily influence communication styles. Holmes (2008) and Hofstede (2001) emphasize that these norms affect gendered language use, making Indonesia an important context for studying gender differences in EFL writing. Previous studies (Saragih, 2017) have shown that linguistic features such as verb choice, modality, and repetition are often gendered, with men using more assertive, action-oriented language and women opting for reflective, emotion-laden expressions. This study builds on these findings by applying them to narrative texts written in an Indonesian EFL setting, contributing to a growing body of literature on gender and language use in non-Western educational settings.

While much research has focused on spoken language and gender, few studies have explored how gendered linguistic patterns manifest in written narratives within EFL classrooms, particularly in Indonesia. Moreover, most studies on gender and language have been conducted in Western contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how these dynamics operate in Southeast Asia, where cultural norms differ significantly. This study addresses this gap by focusing on Indonesian high school students, offering a fresh perspective on gender and language in a region underrepresented in existing literature.

Further, this research draws on a qualitative content analysis of narrative texts from 20 Indonesian high school students (10 male and 10 female). Focusing on narrative writing is particularly significant, as narratives offer rich opportunities for personal expression and storytelling, providing a more nuanced view of gendered language use. Knapp and Watkins (2005) highlight that lexicogrammatical features in narratives, such as action and mental verbs, reveal the writer's worldview and communicative goals. Action verbs are typically associated with assertiveness and leadership, while mental verbs convey introspection and emotion (Tannen, 1990; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on gender-based differences in the linguistic features of narrative texts within an Indonesian EFL context. Unlike previous research that has primarily concentrated on spoken language, this study provides new insights into how gender influences written expression. By analyzing distinct lexicogrammatical features, such as action verbs, mental verbs, adjectives, and temporal conjunctions, this research reveals gendered linguistic patterns that have not been extensively explored. Furthermore, the study's emphasis on narrative writing, a genre less frequently examined in EFL contexts, contributes uniquely to both gender studies and language education. This research also has practical implications for EFL teaching, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive approaches to accommodate the diverse communication styles of male and female students.

2. Literature Review

Despite the substantial body of research on gender and language, there remains a significant gap in studies that focus on written narratives within the EFL classroom, particularly in Southeast Asia. While much of the existing literature has explored gendered linguistic patterns in spoken language, fewer studies have examined how these patterns manifest in written texts, especially in non-Western educational contexts. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the gender-based differences in lexicogrammatical features in narrative texts written by Indonesian high school students. By focusing on an under-researched context, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how gender and sociocultural norms shape language use in EFL writing.

2.1 Gender Differences in Linguistic Features

Research into gender-based language differences has long been a significant area of sociolinguistics, beginning with foundational studies such as Lakoff (1975), which demonstrated that men and women employ different linguistic strategies based on social expectations. Men's language has often been described as more assertive and direct, with a greater emphasis on action verbs and external events (Lakoff, 1975; Coates, 1998). In contrast, women's language is typically more tentative and emotionally expressive, often involving the use of mental verbs that highlight feelings and introspective thoughts (Holmes, 2008; Romaine, 1994).

Deborah Tannen's *Difference Theory* (1990) provides a crucial framework for understanding these differences. Tannen argues that men and women are socialized into distinct communication styles, with men using language to assert dominance and independence, while women use language to build connections and foster relationships. This theory has been applied to various contexts, including spoken and written language, though much of the research has traditionally focused on spoken discourse (Cameron, 2005). More recently, studies have sought to extend this framework to written texts, such as narratives, where gendered linguistic patterns remain underexplored (Holmes, 2008).

2.2. Lexicogrammatical Features in Narrative Writing

Lexicogrammatical features refer to the relationship between vocabulary and grammar, shaping how meaning is conveyed in both spoken and written texts. In the context of narrative writing, these features play a critical role in how writers express their experiences and intentions. Knapp and Watkins (2005) emphasize that narrative texts are particularly revealing, as they allow for the exploration of personal expression through the use of action verbs, mental verbs, adjectives, and temporal conjunctions.

Several studies have identified significant gender-based differences in the use of lexicogrammatical features in narratives. Men tend to use more action verbs, reflecting their focus on dynamic activities and external challenges, which aligns with their broader communication style of assertiveness and control (Hyland, 2003; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Women, on the other hand, are more likely to use mental verbs, focusing on internal states and emotions, which reflects a relational and introspective communication

style (Holmes, 2008). These gendered patterns in lexicogrammatical usage are not only evident in spoken language but also in written narratives, particularly when examining how students express themselves in educational contexts (Coates, 1998; Romaine, 1994).

Previous research has demonstrated that men and women also differ in their use of adjectives and conjunctions in narrative writing. Men are more likely to use descriptive adjectives that emphasize physical attributes and actions, while women tend to use adjectives that convey emotional states or relational qualities (Lakoff, 1975). In addition, women are more likely to use temporal conjunctions and repetition as cohesive devices, linking ideas in a way that reflects relational and narrative continuity (Saragih, 2017).

2.3. Sociocultural Influences on Gendered Writing in EFL Contexts

While gendered linguistic differences are well documented in Western contexts, less attention has been given to how these differences manifest in non-Western EFL settings, such as Indonesia. Sociocultural norms play a significant role in shaping how men and women use language, particularly in multilingual and multicultural societies like Indonesia (Hofstede, 2001). In such contexts, traditional gender roles are often reinforced through language use, with boys being encouraged to adopt more assertive, action-oriented communication styles, while girls are taught to prioritize emotional expression and relational harmony (Holmes, 2008).

Recent studies have explored how sociocultural factors, such as educational practices and media representations, influence gendered language use in EFL contexts. For instance, Gygax (2019) examined the influence of grammatical gender on language use, revealing how linguistic choices often reinforce gender stereotypes. Similarly, Montero (2021) found that language learning strategies differ by gender, with women more likely to adopt collaborative approaches, while men favor more competitive, action-oriented strategies. These findings highlight the importance of considering sociocultural influences when analyzing gendered language patterns in EFL writing.

In the Indonesian context, studies such as those by Paramita (2019) have shown that students' linguistic choices are influenced by cultural expectations around gender. These studies suggest that men are more likely to use assertive and direct language in their writing, while women tend to use more reflective and relational language. The current study seeks to build on these findings by analyzing how gender and cultural norms intersect to shape the lexicogrammatical choices of Indonesian high school students in their EFL narratives.

3. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to explore gender-based differences in the linguistic features of narrative texts written by Indonesian high school students in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The methodology focuses on purposive sampling, data collection through written narratives, and qualitative content analysis (QCA) to provide detailed insights into how gender influences lexicogrammatical features in writing. The methodological approach is designed to ensure the rigor, reliability, and validity of the research process.

Qualitative research methods were chosen for this study due to their suitability in exploring complex linguistic patterns and social phenomena. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), qualitative research aims to understand phenomena through words and descriptions rather than numerical data. This approach allows for a more in-depth analysis of gendered language use in narrative texts, which is crucial for identifying subtle linguistic differences based on gender.

The study employs purposive sampling, a non-random sampling technique that allows researchers to select participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the research questions (Creswell, 1994). In this case, 20 students (10 male and 10 female) from a Tutoring and English Course Institution in Indonesia were selected. The purposive sampling technique was chosen to ensure that the sample represented a balance of gender, providing a clear comparison of linguistic features in male and female writing.

The sample size of 20 students was justified based on the scope and aims of the research, which required detailed analysis of individual narrative texts. Given the qualitative nature of the study, the goal was not generalizability but rather to obtain a deep understanding of gendered linguistic patterns. This approach aligns with prior qualitative studies, which emphasize the importance of detailed case studies over large-scale quantitative data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

3.1 Data Collection

3.1.1 Written Narratives

The primary data for this study were the narrative texts written by the 20 students. Each student was asked to write a narrative on the topic “Unforgettable Memories.” This topic was chosen deliberately to encourage personal expression and storytelling, allowing for a wide range of linguistic features to be analyzed. Narratives are particularly valuable in linguistic studies as they provide insight into how individuals structure their thoughts and experiences through language (Knapp & Watkins, 2005).

The students were given a set timeframe and a controlled environment in which to write their narratives. This ensured that all students completed the task under similar conditions, reducing the potential for external variables to influence the writing process. The narratives were collected at the end of the session and served as the primary data source for the content analysis.

3.1.2 Semi-Structured Observations and Interviews

In addition to the written narratives, semi-structured observations and interviews were conducted to provide contextual insights into the students’ linguistic choices. These methods allowed the researcher to observe how students discussed and planned their narratives, paying attention to any gendered language patterns that emerged during the pre-writing phase. The interviews included open-ended questions such as “How do you approach writing a story?” and “What aspects of the story are most important to you?”

3.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), a systematic method of categorizing and interpreting textual data (Krippendorff, 1980). This method was chosen due to its ability to reveal patterns in linguistic features that reflect broader social and cultural phenomena, such as gendered language use. The analysis focused on identifying key lexicogrammatical features in the narrative texts, including action verbs, mental verbs, adjectives, temporal conjunctions, repetition, and modality.

Each feature was assigned a specific code:

- Action Verbs (AV): Verbs indicating physical activity or assertiveness.
- Mental Verbs (MV): Verbs expressing thoughts or emotions.
- Adjectives (Adj): Words that describe qualities or states.
- Temporal Conjunctions (TC): Words that link events in time (e.g., “until,” “while”).
- Repetition (Rep): The repeated use of words or phrases for emphasis.
- Modality (Mod): Expressions of possibility, necessity, or uncertainty.

The coding process was iterative and involved multiple rounds of coding to ensure consistency and reliability. The researcher also employed a test-retest method and peer debriefing to validate the coding scheme and ensure that the findings were reliable and replicable (Miles et al., 2014). Additionally, the coding categories were derived from both the literature and the data, allowing for an emergent coding process that captured the complexity of gendered linguistic features in the students’ narratives.

To enhance the reliability and validity of the analysis, several strategies were employed. First, the use of multiple data sources (written texts, observations, and interviews) provided a triangulated view of the students’ linguistic choices. Second, peer review and inter-coder reliability checks were conducted to ensure that the coding categories were applied consistently across all narratives. Finally, the researcher maintained detailed records of the coding process, allowing for transparency and replicability in future studies.

While the study provides valuable insights into gendered language use in EFL narrative writing, there are some limitations to consider. The sample size of 20 students, while sufficient for qualitative analysis, limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research with larger and more diverse samples could provide a broader understanding of gender differences in written language. Additionally, the study’s focus on a single educational institution may limit its applicability to other contexts. Despite these limitations, the study offers a significant contribution to the understanding of gender-based linguistic patterns in EFL writing.

In summary, the methodological approach employed in this study ensures a rigorous and thorough analysis of gendered linguistic features in narrative texts. The use of qualitative content analysis, combined with purposive sampling and multiple data collection methods, provides a comprehensive understanding of how gender influences language use in an EFL context. By outlining the specific coding categories and analysis procedures, this study offers a clear and replicable methodology for future research in this field.

4. Results

This section presents the findings of the study, focusing on gender-based differences in the linguistic features of narrative texts written by Indonesian high school students. Key features analyzed include action verbs, mental verbs, adjectives, temporal conjunctions, and repetition. These findings are presented in line with the study's research questions and are accompanied by statistical summaries, tables, and detailed interpretations of the data. The results are also contextualized within gender socialization norms and their implications for EFL teaching.

4.1. Gender-Based Differences in Linguistic Features

Table 1 provides a comprehensive summary of the differences in linguistic feature usage between male and female students. The table highlights key areas such as action verbs, mental verbs, adjectives, temporal conjunctions, repetition, and modality.

Table 1: Summary of Gender-Based Linguistic Features in Narrative Texts

Linguistic Feature	Male Students (%)	Female Students (%)
Action Verbs (AV)	15.1	7.0
Mental Verbs (MV)	2.2	4.3
Temporal Conjunctions (TC)	21	26
Repetition (Rep)	24	82
Adjectives (Adj)	49	66
Modality (Mod)	4	6

The data in Table 1 reveals distinct gender-based preferences in linguistic features. Male students demonstrated a clear tendency to use action verbs (15.1%) at twice the rate of female students (7.0%), suggesting a focus on dynamic, external activities and assertiveness. This contrasts with the female students' higher usage of mental verbs (4.3%) compared to male students (2.2%), reflecting a focus on emotions and introspective thought processes.

The adjectives and repetition columns further highlight how female students place greater emphasis on descriptive and relational language. Female students' use of adjectives (66%) was notably higher than that of male students (49%), supporting the notion that their narratives tend to involve more detailed and emotionally rich descriptions. Moreover, the significant difference in repetition (82% for females, 24% for males) points to a narrative style in female writing that focuses on reinforcing key emotional experiences and relational dynamics.

The higher frequency of temporal conjunctions in female writing (26% compared to 21% for males) suggests that female students' narratives are more likely to emphasize the flow and continuity of events, contributing to a more cohesive and reflective writing style. The relatively balanced use of modality across genders (4% for males, 6% for females) indicates that both male and female students employed some degree of hedging or expressing uncertainty, though this was not a significant focus in their writing.

These findings are consistent with prior research (Holmes, 2008; Tannen, 1990) on gendered linguistic patterns, which suggests that men tend to focus on assertive, external actions while women emphasize emotional and relational aspects of communication. However, the distinct emphasis on repetition and

temporal conjunctions in female writing adds new insights into how gendered communication styles manifest in narrative form, particularly in the Indonesian EFL context.

4. 2. Analysis of Action and Mental Verbs

a. Action Verbs: Masculinity and External Focus

Male students' narratives showed a strong preference for action verbs, which are often associated with physical activity and assertiveness. This linguistic choice aligns with traditional masculine traits such as leadership, control, and dominance. The use of action verbs in male narratives served to emphasize their proactive role in overcoming challenges or managing situations. For example:

- "We fought the big waves" (Student 1)
- "I jumped into the river to help him" (Student 3)
- "We repelled the robbers to protect our family" (Student 5)

In these examples, the action verbs "fought," "jumped," and "repelled" reflect a focus on physicality and external problem-solving. These verbs construct the male narrators as heroes or leaders who take decisive action in the face of danger or adversity. This external focus in male writing aligns with Tannen's (1990) theory, which suggests that men tend to use language to assert control and demonstrate competence in the external world.

The use of action verbs in male narratives may also reflect the cultural norms in Indonesia, where traditional gender roles encourage men to display physical strength and decisiveness. In this context, the male students' reliance on action verbs can be seen as reinforcing societal expectations that equate masculinity with physical bravery and problem-solving.

b. Mental Verbs: Femininity and Emotional Expression

In contrast, female students made greater use of mental verbs, which express thoughts, emotions, and internal states. Examples from female narratives include:

- "I felt nervous but proud" (Student 2)
- "We trusted our father during the storm" (Student 9)
- "I couldn't believe my painting won the prize" (Student 7)

The mental verbs "felt," "trusted," and "believe" are used by female students to convey emotional depth and personal reflection. These verbs emphasize the internal, subjective experience of the narrator, rather than external actions or events. For instance, the sentence "I felt nervous but proud" (Student 2) demonstrates a dual emotional response to an event, showcasing the complexity of female emotional expression in narrative form.

Female students' preference for mental verbs supports prior research that suggests women are more likely to focus on relational and introspective communication (Holmes, 2008; Coates, 1998). In the Indonesian cultural context, this tendency toward emotional expression may be further reinforced by societal expectations that women should be nurturing, emotionally sensitive, and relationally focused. The higher frequency of mental verbs in female narratives can thus be interpreted as reflecting both cultural and gendered expectations about how women should communicate and express their experiences.

4.3. Use of Adjectives and Temporal Conjunctions

a. Adjectives: Descriptive Depth in Female Narratives

The results indicate that female students used adjectives more frequently than male students, with 66% of female narratives containing descriptive language compared to 49% in male narratives. This suggests that female students were more focused on adding emotional and descriptive layers to their storytelling, as demonstrated by sentences like:

- "The beautiful view made me feel at peace" (Student 8)
- "The day was unforgettable and full of joy" (Student 6)

These adjectives (“beautiful,” “unforgettable,” “full of joy”) are not merely descriptive of the physical world but are imbued with emotional and relational meaning. The use of such adjectives reflects a narrative style that prioritizes emotional connection and reflection on personal experiences. This aligns with Holmes’ (2008) findings that female language often incorporates more descriptive and evaluative terms, focusing on feelings and relationships.

In contrast, the adjectives used by male students were more likely to describe physical attributes or reinforce the action-driven nature of their stories, such as “The tall mountains stood before us” (Student 3). This reinforces the external focus in male writing, where adjectives are employed to enhance the description of physical settings rather than emotional landscapes.

b. Temporal Conjunctions and Repetition: Building Narrative Continuity

The higher use of temporal conjunctions in female students’ writing (26% compared to 21% for males) highlights their focus on narrative continuity and cohesion. Temporal conjunctions such as “until,” “while,” and “even though” were frequently employed to structure the narrative and link events in a coherent sequence. For example:

- “We told stories until late at night” (Student 10)
- “Even though we were scared, we kept going” (Student 9)

This frequent use of temporal conjunctions suggests that female students were more focused on the flow of events and how one action or experience related to another. This narrative strategy contributes to a sense of relational and temporal continuity, reflecting a communication style that values connection and coherence, as identified by Coates (1998).

Repetition was also significantly more common in female students’ narratives (82% compared to 24% for males), further emphasizing their focus on key emotional experiences and relational dynamics. For instance, Student 7 repeatedly used the phrase “beautiful view” to highlight the emotional impact of the setting, reinforcing the importance of the natural environment in her narrative. Repetition serves not only as a rhetorical device but also as a means of creating emphasis and emotional resonance.

In contrast, male students employed repetition far less frequently, and when they did, it was often in the context of action sequences, such as “We ran and then hid behind the trees” (Student 4). This highlights the difference in narrative focus between genders: while male students emphasize action and movement, female students prioritize emotional expression and narrative flow.

4.4. Cultural and Social Implications of Gendered Writing

The linguistic differences observed in male and female students’ narratives can be traced back to cultural and gender socialization. In Indonesia, traditional gender roles strongly influence how men and women are expected to communicate. Male students’ preference for action verbs and physical descriptions aligns with societal norms that emphasize masculinity as involving physical strength, leadership, and control over the environment. Female students’ focus on mental verbs, adjectives, and repetition reflects societal expectations that women should be emotionally sensitive, relational, and introspective.

These gendered linguistic patterns suggest that the way students construct their narratives is not merely a matter of personal preference but is deeply influenced by the cultural values and gender norms they have internalized. This is consistent with prior research on gendered communication, which suggests that men and women are socialized to use language in ways that reflect their culturally assigned roles (Tannen, 1990; Hofstede, 2001).

4.5. Implications for EFL Teaching and Gender-Sensitive Pedagogy

The findings of this study have important implications for EFL teaching, particularly in the context of developing gender-sensitive pedagogical approaches. Teachers need to recognize that male and female students may approach writing tasks differently, with male students favoring action-oriented narratives and female students focusing more on relational and emotional aspects of storytelling.

By offering a variety of writing tasks that cater to both action-based and introspective writing styles, educators can help students develop a more balanced and versatile set of linguistic skills. Moreover,

encouraging students to explore different linguistic features, such as using more mental verbs or action verbs depending on the task, can foster greater linguistic flexibility and creativity.

Teachers should also be mindful of how cultural norms and gender socialization influence students' writing. Educators can encourage students to critically reflect on how their gender and cultural background shape their linguistic choices, promoting a more self-aware and inclusive approach to language use. This can lead to more equitable and gender-sensitive teaching practices in the EFL classroom, ensuring that both male and female students are supported in developing their writing skills.

The results of this study demonstrate significant gender-based differences in the linguistic features of narrative texts written by Indonesian high school students. Male students favored action verbs, reflecting a focus on external actions and assertiveness, while female students used more mental verbs, adjectives, and repetition, emphasizing emotional expression and relational continuity. These findings highlight the influence of cultural gender norms on language use and suggest important implications for EFL teaching. Future research could explore how these gendered linguistic patterns evolve in different educational contexts and over time.

5. Discussion

This study explores the gender-based differences in the linguistic features of narrative texts written by Indonesian high school students in an EFL context. The findings reveal significant variations in the use of action and mental verbs, adjectives, repetition, and conjunctions between male and female students. These results align with sociolinguistic theories, particularly Deborah Tannen's *Difference Theory* (1990), which posits that men and women communicate differently due to distinct socialization processes. In this section, we discuss how the findings respond to the research questions, relate to existing literature, and offer practical and theoretical implications for EFL teaching and gender-sensitive pedagogy.

5.1. Gender-Based Linguistic Differences

5.1.1 Action Verbs and Masculinity

One of the key findings in this study is the predominant use of action verbs by male students. The analysis shows that male students employed action verbs at a rate of 15.1%, compared to 7.0% by female students. These results reflect broader sociolinguistic findings, where men's communication tends to focus on actions, external events, and physical activities (Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1990). For example, male students in this study frequently used verbs such as "fought," "jumped," and "repelled," which suggest a narrative style that emphasizes dominance, bravery, and physicality. This aligns with the notion that language use is not merely a reflection of individual choice but is also shaped by societal norms and expectations regarding gender roles.

Furthermore, the preference for action verbs among male students can be understood through the lens of gendered communication styles, where men are often socialized to adopt a more assertive and competitive linguistic approach. Tannen (1990) posits that men use language to assert control and independence, a perspective supported by research indicating that action-oriented language is frequently associated with masculine traits such as leadership and assertiveness. This is particularly evident in various cultures, where boys are encouraged to engage in physical, assertive activities, reinforcing the connection between language use and cultural gender norms.

Moreover, the findings of this study resonate with the broader discourse on gender-fair language and its implications for societal perceptions of gender roles. Research indicates that the use of gender-fair language can influence individuals' perceptions of occupations and social roles, challenging traditional stereotypes associated with masculinity. The male students' preference for action verbs in this study not only reflects their linguistic choices but also underscores the importance of addressing how language perpetuates and reinforces gender norms within educational contexts. Thus, the linguistic choices made by male students are deeply intertwined with cultural expectations and societal structures, highlighting the need for a critical examination of language use in relation to gender identity and expression.

5.1.2 Mental Verbs and Femininity

In contrast, female students demonstrated a higher frequency of mental verbs, using them at a rate of 4.3%, compared to 2.2% among male students. This finding aligns with previous studies that suggest women tend to use language to express emotions, thoughts, and relational experiences (Holmes, 2008; Romaine, 1994). Female students in this study employed mental verbs such as "felt," "trusted," and "believe" to

convey introspective and emotional experiences. This is consistent with findings by [Lakoff \(1975\)](#) and [Tannen \(1990\)](#), who argued that women's communication often focuses on maintaining relationships and expressing personal feelings. The greater use of mental verbs by female students highlights the introspective and relational nature of their writing, which can be linked to gender socialization processes that prioritize emotional expression for women ([Holmes, 2008](#)).

Research indicates that from a young age, girls are often socialized to value emotional awareness and interpersonal relationships, leading to a linguistic style that emphasizes these aspects ([Maltz & Borker, 1982](#)). This socialization process may contribute to the tendency of female students to engage in more reflective and personal narrative styles, as they navigate their emotional landscapes through language. Moreover, this result supports [Coates' \(1998\)](#) assertion that women's language tends to focus on relational and emotional aspects, making female communication more personal and reflective. The use of mental verbs can be seen as a linguistic manifestation of the broader cultural expectations placed upon women to be nurturing and emotionally expressive. This aligns with the findings of [Gilligan \(1982\)](#), who posited that women often adopt an "ethics of care" perspective, prioritizing relationships and emotional connections in their communication.

Therefore, the higher frequency of mental verbs among female students indicates that their narrative style is more inwardly focused, emphasizing personal emotions and experiences. This trend not only reflects individual linguistic choices but also underscores the influence of societal norms and gender roles on language use. As such, the findings of this study contribute to the ongoing discourse on gendered communication, highlighting the importance of understanding how language serves as a vehicle for expressing and reinforcing gender identities.

5.2. Lexicogrammatical Features: Repetition and Adjectives

5.2.1 Repetition as a Gendered Narrative Device

Repetition emerged as a significant narrative feature, with female students utilizing it at a notably higher rate (82%) compared to their male counterparts (24%). This disparity highlights how repetition in female narratives often serves to underscore key emotional experiences or relational dynamics. Such findings are consistent with previous research indicating that women frequently employ linguistic strategies that emphasize relational cohesion and emotional resonance ([Fivush & Grysman, 2021](#); [Andrews et al., 2015](#)). For instance, a female student's repeated invocation of the phrase "beautiful view" not only accentuates the emotional weight of the setting but also reflects a broader tendency among women to weave emotional depth into their storytelling ([Andrews et al., 2015](#)). This aligns with the assertion that female narratives are typically more elaborated and focused on social connections, which are integral to their identity construction ([McLean & Syed, 2015](#)).

Conversely, male students exhibited a markedly lower frequency of repetition, and when it was employed, it was predominantly within the context of action sequences rather than emotional experiences. Phrases like "We ran and then hid" exemplify this action-oriented focus, suggesting that repetition in male narratives is more aligned with advancing plot and action rather than reinforcing emotional content ([Zaman & Fivush, 2011](#)). This pattern reflects broader gendered communication styles, where men often gravitate towards assertive, action-driven narratives, while women emphasize relational continuity and emotional engagement ([Fivush & Grysman, 2021](#)). The distinct functions of repetition across genders not only illuminate the narrative strategies employed by each group but also resonate with established theories of gender differences in communication, which posit that women are more likely to express emotions and relational dynamics through their narratives ([Fivush & Grysman, 2021](#); [Andrews et al., 2015](#)).

Moreover, the implications of these findings extend beyond individual narratives to encompass societal narratives surrounding gender. As articulated by [McLean and Syed., 2015](#) the interplay between personal narratives and broader societal narratives shapes identity development, particularly in the context of gender ([McLean & Syed, 2015](#)). The tendency for women to utilize repetition as a means of emotional expression can be seen as a reflection of societal expectations that valorize relationality in female identity, while the action-oriented repetition in male narratives aligns with societal norms that prioritize assertiveness and agency ([Fivush & Grysman, 2021](#)). This gendered narrative dynamic underscores the importance of understanding how narrative styles not only reflect individual experiences but also reinforce and perpetuate broader cultural narratives regarding gender roles and identities ([Fivush & Grysman, 2021](#); [McLean & Syed, 2015](#)). In conclusion, the pronounced differences in the use of repetition between female and male students illuminate the gendered nature of narrative construction. Female narratives, rich in emotional and relational

content, contrast sharply with the more action-focused male narratives. This divergence not only reflects individual storytelling preferences but also resonates with broader societal narratives that shape and define gendered communication styles.

5.2.2 Adjectives: Emotional and Descriptive Depth

The analysis revealed that female students employed a significantly higher frequency of adjectives compared to male students (66% versus 49%), underscoring their inclination towards descriptive and emotionally rich language. This trend is indicative of a broader pattern in which women's communication often incorporates more evaluative language to articulate feelings and interpersonal relationships (Bohanek & Fivush, 2010). The adjectives utilized by female students frequently encompassed relational and emotional qualities, such as "unforgettable," "beautiful," and "joyful," which serve to enhance the emotional depth of their narratives. This finding aligns with Holmes' (2008) assertion that women tend to engage in more expressive language, thereby enriching their storytelling with emotional nuances and relational context.

In contrast, male students predominantly used adjectives to describe physical attributes, which reinforces the external, action-focused nature of their narratives. For instance, adjectives such as "fast" or "strong" were more common in male narratives, reflecting a tendency to prioritize physicality and action over emotional depth. This distinction in adjective usage suggests that while female narratives are characterized by emotional layering, male narratives tend to focus on external descriptions that support their action-oriented storytelling style (Ali & Krish, 2016). Such patterns resonate with Lakoff's (1975) observations regarding gendered language use, where women are noted for their preference for descriptive language that conveys feelings and interpersonal nuances.

Moreover, the higher frequency of adjectives among female students not only reflects their narrative style but also indicates a deeper engagement with the events and characters within their stories. Research by Bohanek and Fivush (2010) supports this notion, suggesting that females are more inclined to share and articulate emotional experiences throughout their lives, a tendency that is consistent across different stages of development (Bohanek & Fivush, 2010). This emotional engagement is crucial for constructing narratives that resonate with readers on a personal level, thereby fostering a sense of connection and empathy. On the other hand, the adjective usage among male students, which tends to be more focused on physical descriptions, may reflect societal norms that valorize assertiveness and action over emotional expression. This aligns with findings from Bohanek and Fivush (2010), which indicate that male authors in various contexts often prioritize informational content over emotional depth, further reinforcing the notion that male narratives are typically less emotionally charged (Bohanek & Fivush, 2010). Consequently, the gendered differences in adjective usage not only highlight individual narrative styles but also reflect broader societal expectations regarding gender roles in communication.

In summary, the pronounced differences in adjective usage between female and male students reveal significant insights into their narrative styles. Female students' narratives are enriched with emotional and relational depth, while male students' narratives emphasize physicality and action. These distinctions not only reflect individual preferences in storytelling but also resonate with established theories of gendered communication, illustrating how societal norms shape the ways in which men and women express themselves through language.

5.3. Temporal Conjunctions and Modality

5.3.1 Temporal Conjunctions: Narrative Structure and Flow

The analysis of temporal conjunctions revealed that female students employed these linguistic devices at a higher rate than male students (26% versus 21%), indicating a greater emphasis on the continuity and flow of their narratives. Temporal conjunctions, such as "until," "while," and "before," were frequently utilized by female students to link events and create a cohesive narrative structure. This finding aligns with prior research by Saragih (2017), which posits that women often prioritize relational and temporal continuity in their communication, thereby enhancing the overall coherence of their narratives. The use of such conjunctions allows female students to weave together various elements of their stories, creating a more interconnected and fluid narrative experience for the reader. For example, a female student might construct a narrative that includes phrases like "While we were walking to the park, I felt a sense of joy," which not only indicates the sequence of events but also highlights the emotional context surrounding those events.

This approach reflects a narrative style that values the relational dynamics and emotional experiences intertwined with the progression of time. Such a focus on continuity is essential for fostering a deeper understanding of the characters' experiences and the significance of the events being recounted.

In contrast, male students' use of temporal conjunctions was often more closely tied to the sequence of physical actions. Phrases such as "We ran, then we hid behind the trees" exemplify this trend, indicating that while both genders utilize temporal conjunctions to structure their narratives, male students tend to focus more on the sequencing of actions rather than the relational or emotional flow of events. This observation suggests that male narratives may prioritize a more linear and action-oriented storytelling approach, which is consistent with broader patterns of gendered communication styles. The distinction in the use of temporal conjunctions between female and male students not only reflects individual narrative preferences but also resonates with established theories regarding gender differences in communication. Research has shown that women are generally more inclined to create narratives that emphasize relationality and emotional depth, while men often adopt a more straightforward, action-driven narrative style. This divergence in narrative structure underscores the importance of understanding how gender influences the ways in which individuals construct and convey their stories.

Moreover, the implications of these findings extend to the broader context of narrative theory, where the use of temporal conjunctions plays a critical role in shaping the reader's experience and understanding of the narrative. As highlighted by [Labov and Waletzky \(1967\)](#), the structure of a narrative is crucial for conveying meaning and engaging the audience, and the effective use of temporal conjunctions can significantly enhance this process. By linking events and establishing a clear temporal flow, female students' narratives may foster a greater sense of empathy and connection with the reader, while male students' narratives may prioritize clarity and action over emotional engagement.

In conclusion, the differences in the use of temporal conjunctions between female and male students reveal significant insights into their narrative structures and styles. Female students' emphasis on continuity and relational dynamics contrasts with male students' focus on action sequencing, reflecting broader patterns of gendered communication. These distinctions not only enhance our understanding of individual narrative preferences but also underscore the influence of societal norms on storytelling practices.

5.3.2 Modality: Expressing Uncertainty and Possibility

The analysis of modality usage revealed a relatively balanced distribution between genders, with female students employing modality at a rate of 6% compared to 4% for male students. Despite this modest difference, the use of modality remains a crucial linguistic feature for understanding gendered communication styles. Female students' slightly higher use of modal verbs, such as "could," "might," and "may," reflects a tendency to express uncertainty or possibility. This observation is consistent with prior findings that indicate women often utilize more tentative language in their communication ([Ryu & Sikorski, 2019](#); [Utami, 2022](#)). Such a pattern supports the idea that female students are more likely to hedge their statements, a linguistic behavior interpreted as a reflection of societal expectations for women to adopt a more cautious and less assertive tone in their language ([Thongtong, 2022](#); [Bustan & Alakrash, 2020](#)).

The presence of modality in female narratives can be seen as a strategy for fostering inclusivity and encouraging dialogue. By using modal verbs, female students may create space for alternative perspectives and possibilities, which aligns with the notion that women's communication often emphasizes relational dynamics and collaborative discourse ([Sansfaçon, 2023](#)). For instance, a female student might say, "We could consider different options," which not only expresses uncertainty but also invites others to participate in the decision-making process. This approach contrasts with the more definitive language often employed by male students, who may prioritize assertiveness and clarity over the expression of uncertainty.

In contrast, male students' use of modality was less frequent and often focused on expressing certainty or directness in their narratives. This aligns with research indicating that male speech is generally characterized by a preference for logical, concise communication that prioritizes important topics ([Utami, 2022](#)). For example, a male student might state, "We will go to the park," which conveys a clear intention without the hedging that characterizes many female statements. This difference in modality usage reflects broader societal norms that encourage men to adopt a more assertive communication style, reinforcing traditional gender roles in discourse ([McDowell, 2015](#)).

Furthermore, the implications of modality extend beyond individual narratives to encompass the broader context of gendered communication. The tendency for women to use more hedging language has been interpreted as a means of navigating social dynamics and maintaining relational harmony (Bustan & Alakrash, 2020). As noted by Lakoff (1975), the use of hedges in female speech can denote reluctance or uncertainty, which may serve to mitigate potential conflict in conversations (Boccaccini, 2002). This linguistic strategy can be particularly important in contexts where power dynamics are at play, as women may feel compelled to soften their statements to avoid appearing overly aggressive or confrontational. In summary, the differences in modality usage between female and male students highlight significant insights into their communication styles. Female students' greater reliance on modal verbs to express uncertainty and possibility reflects a narrative approach that values relational dynamics and inclusivity, while male students' more assertive use of modality emphasizes clarity and decisiveness. These distinctions not only enhance our understanding of individual narrative preferences but also underscore the influence of societal norms on gendered communication practices.

5.4. Practical Implications for EFL Teaching

The findings of this study carry significant pedagogical implications for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. The distinct linguistic patterns observed between male and female students suggest that teachers should adopt more gender-sensitive teaching methods to accommodate these differences. For instance, writing tasks could be designed to encourage both action-oriented and introspective narrative styles, allowing students to develop a more balanced set of linguistic skills. This approach is supported by research indicating that gender differences in language use can impact learning outcomes, and thus, tailoring instruction to these differences can enhance student engagement and comprehension Bećirović (2017).

In particular, educators could create opportunities for male students to engage more with relational and emotional language, encouraging them to explore mental verbs and adjectives in their writing. This could involve specific exercises that prompt male students to articulate their feelings and relationships, thereby fostering emotional intelligence and empathy (Yang, 2011). Likewise, female students could be prompted to experiment with more action-driven language, helping them to build assertiveness and control in their narratives. Such practices not only enhance linguistic proficiency but also prepare students for diverse social and professional contexts where varied communication styles are valued (Wang, 2014). Additionally, gender awareness training for EFL teachers could be beneficial in helping educators recognize and address gender biases in language use. This training could include workshops focused on identifying gendered language patterns in students' writing and developing strategies for promoting more inclusive and balanced communication (Salimi, 2023). For instance, teachers could be trained to critically evaluate the materials they use, ensuring that they do not perpetuate stereotypes or biases that could disadvantage one gender over another (Pawelczyk & Pakuła, 2015). This is particularly relevant given the findings that textbooks often reflect and reinforce societal norms regarding gender roles (Foroutan, 2012).

Moreover, the selection of teaching materials should be carefully considered to ensure they promote gender equity. Textbooks and other educational resources should be scrutinized for their representation of gender, as biased materials can influence students' perceptions and attitudes towards gender roles (Guo & Wang, 2023). By incorporating texts that present diverse and equitable representations of gender, educators can help foster a more inclusive learning environment that encourages all students to engage with the material meaningfully. Furthermore, integrating discussions around gender and identity into the curriculum can provide students with a platform to explore these themes critically. This could involve analyzing narratives from various cultural contexts, including folktales and contemporary literature, to highlight how gender is constructed and represented in different societies (Masykuroh, 2020). Such discussions not only enrich students' understanding of language but also promote critical thinking and awareness of social issues related to gender and identity (Barozzi & Cecilia, 2020).

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the importance of adopting gender-sensitive pedagogical approaches in EFL education. By recognizing and addressing the distinct linguistic patterns and communication styles of male and female students, educators can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment. This not only enhances students' linguistic skills but also prepares them to navigate the complexities of communication in diverse social and professional contexts.

5.5. Theoretical Implications and Future Research

This study also contributes to broader theoretical discussions on gender and language. The findings support Tannen's (1990) Difference Theory and extend its application to written narratives in an EFL context, demonstrating that gendered linguistic patterns persist across both spoken and written forms of communication. Moreover, this study highlights the importance of considering cultural factors when analyzing gendered communication, as the students' linguistic choices were deeply influenced by Indonesian gender norms and societal expectations.

Future research could build on these findings by exploring how globalization and social media are influencing shifts in gender norms and language use among younger generations. As cultural boundaries become increasingly fluid, it is essential to understand how new modes of communication are reshaping traditional gender roles in language. Longitudinal studies could also be conducted to investigate how gendered linguistic patterns evolve over time in EFL settings, providing a more dynamic understanding of how language and gender intersect. Lastly, this study reveals significant gender-based differences in the linguistic features of narrative texts written by Indonesian high school students. Male students favored action verbs, reflecting a focus on external activities and assertiveness, while female students used more mental verbs, adjectives, and repetition, emphasizing emotional expression and relational continuity. These findings align with broader sociolinguistic theories and provide valuable insights for EFL educators, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive teaching approaches. By fostering greater awareness of gendered communication styles, educators can help students develop more inclusive and flexible linguistic skills, promoting greater equality and understanding in the classroom.

6. Conclusion

This study explored gender-based differences in the linguistic features of narrative texts written by Indonesian high school students in an EFL context, revealing distinct patterns in the use of action verbs, mental verbs, adjectives, repetition, and temporal conjunctions. Male students predominantly employed action verbs, emphasizing physical activities and assertiveness, while female students used more mental verbs, reflecting introspection and emotional expression. Female students also demonstrated a stronger reliance on adjectives and repetition, which added emotional depth and relational continuity to their narratives, whereas male students focused on external events and physical descriptions. These findings align with Deborah Tannen's Difference Theory (1990), suggesting that gendered linguistic patterns are influenced by cultural and social norms. The practical implications for EFL teaching are significant, as gender-sensitive pedagogical approaches should be adopted to address the distinct communication styles of male and female students. Teachers can design writing tasks that balance both action-oriented and introspective elements, fostering linguistic flexibility and inclusivity in the classroom. However, the study's limitations include a small sample size and the focus on a single educational institution, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Future research should explore gendered linguistic patterns across different genres and cultural contexts, as well as examine how these patterns evolve over time. Despite these limitations, the study contributes to the understanding of gendered language use in EFL writing, emphasizing the need for more inclusive and equitable teaching strategies that accommodate diverse linguistic expressions shaped by gender norms.

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