

# The Effect of Gender and Social Class in Second Language Writing Style: Theoretical Review

Nazzem Mohammad Abdullah Attiyat  
Salt College for Human Sciences, AL- Balqa Applied University, Salt, Jordan  
Department of English Language and Literature

## Abstract

This article aims to illustrate the effect of Gender and social class on second language writing style through reviewing related articles and studies. As well, it reviews different points of view for researchers who conducted similar studies. Analytically, the result of the current study reveals that writing style can be determined according to different variables that play a critical role forming the ideas and notions of writers. Gender and social class play an effective role in deterring writing style. The researcher recommends that learners must be taught to think in a critical and creative way while writing as well instructors have to add that a caring writer uses the critical thinking throughout the process of writing.

**Keywords:** Gender, Social class, Writing style, Second language

## 1. Introduction:

For many years, linguists have been working hard to find out and explicit the possible differences that affect linguistic style. Many researchers found out that gender, social class, and age are the main factors that affect that in specific their writing style (Francis, et al, 2001). There have been some arguments about some constant differences that occur in speech, despite the fact that conducting studies on the differences in using a language between males and females, rich and poor have been criticized during the last years.

Writing is a social activity that writers use to express themselves in appropriate discourses through paraphrasing other writers' thoughts and linguistic terms. In this aspect, identities of writers play crucial role in that context; writers place themselves in social identities that are accessible for the discourse society participants this due to the fact that it is socially built. Knowing that gender is a part of the writer identity, then studying the effect of second language writing development on mirroring and building gender identity will probably offer essential visions in the educational context (Weatherall, 2002).

Writing style refers to the way that writer prefers to use in expressing thoughts and ideas and delivers to reader. Others refer it to the way that writing is dressed up or formed for a specific context. Strunk (2000) illustrates that Style of writing is basically the writer choice of words, sentence structure that aims to send specific ideas of thoughts to a specific category of readers. Accordingly, good writers have to arrange and reform their thought and ideas within a sentence that can achieve the greatest effect and influence readers (Strong, 2001). Some argues that style of the writer reflexes personal opinion, but it also shows how to visualize the writer to the public. Thus, writing style affects public opinion politically, socially this based on writer conceptual nature of the work, gender and social class (Francis et al, 2001).

Social classification including; gender, social class affects the language used by people (Muto-Humphrey, 2005). Gender is considered one of the social and cultural factors formed by learners in language learning process including writing learning. The expression "gender" points out the social and contextual anticipations that are distinguished by society for each of males and females in both cultural and social aspects (Kamiar et al., 2012).

According to Fine (2010), Gender has been known as a variable that is used to split experimental samples into two groups, as the gender deference approach has been taken by the research of the gender influence on second language writing. Maleki & Jewell (2003) have conducted a study to identify the influence of gender on writing style. The results revealed that Girls tend to write more coherent texts comparing to boys from regardless the social class which belongs to. Accordingly, this provides a familiar pattern of female advantage in writing performance in second language as well it shows that the texts they write are more organized and their fluency is demonstrated. Girls faster hand writing is an indicative of an increased automation.

Few researches have conducted on to illustrate the effect of social class on second language writing. (Vandrick, 2010) has identified the effect of social class on writing style, illustrating that to the point of that upper class students have better education that shaped their cognitive skills that affect their writing skills.

Identifying gender as an independent notion has a different perspective from identifying it as a social structure. One of the significant factors that affect the study of writing, gender, and social class is the association between writing in the second language and building an identity. Many researchers have been done on writing in second language regarding the social nature of writing instead of the independent nature. This paper is not an exception; it also attempts to. This study is an attempt to illustrate the effect of Gender and social class on second language writing style through reviewing related articles and studies. As well, it will review different points of

view for researchers who conducted similar studies.

## 2. Significance of the Study

A prominent thing to be considered in this regard is that gender and class issues in research areas of each of second and foreign language tutoring, second language acquisition, language strategies and skills have been dealt with in some of the latest review articles. After going over researches on the language and gender and class issues in second and foreign language acquisition, few studies have identified the effect of gender and social class together on writing style of second language. Some researches argue that students of children who belong to high social class they tend to have more sophisticated writing style which is more elaborated comparing to those who are less or in lower class. One significant contribution of this paper considers how significant the relationship between gender, social class on second language writing style. It tries theoretically to dig deeper into gender and social class differences in second language writing style with regards to method and product. The current study addresses one main question:

1. Does gender and social class affect second language writing style?

## 3. Literature review

### 3.1 *Writing Skills in Second Language*

Language is probably the most dominant tool for us, as it is used to understand people through its different forms of writing, listening etc. Nevertheless, the acquisition of writing skill is not a natural process, as it can be educated and conveyed as a group of practices that is enriched via different sources of knowledge including internet (Kenworthy, 2004). This goes for what Barkaoui (2007) promotes; that writing is not only ability, but it is also a skill that can be taught and learnt. Thus, learners should be trained and experienced in writing skill in order to obtain it. When students learn any skill or ability, they practice it for a number of purposes. However, mastering writing takes time. Instructors who teach writing must have a significant role in offering students more time and chances to practice writing.

Writing is an intellectual process. It is a difficult skill to be proficient in. it goes through a long process of drafting, reviewing, and editing. Both students and instructors should work together to reach to an adequate level of proficiency in writing. It is considered important for students who are expected to graduate to have the ability to write efficiently and proficiently in English language. Hence, Negari (2011), in this regards, advocates that the instructors of writing must pay more attention to the procedure of writing instead of the final product. She also states that teachers should wisely choose the assignments for their students in a way that gives them the opportunity to focus on writing and revision process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2012). This entails assigning students with time to work on a paper, time to work alone or in pairs, time to deal with the text, organization, and then the proof-reading step. This is the thinking process that delivers the findings to others. We believe that writing skill is mastered only if the students are encouraged to write constantly by their teachers (Manyike, 2014).

### 3.2 *Factors Affecting Writing Style*

One of the most challenging skills to be picked up by individuals is writing. Unlike spoken language, writing entails the comprehension and interpretation of what is being read by the readers. Writing is considered more difficult than talking as it is briefer and more complicated (Huang, 2009). Beside and knowledge in skills and conventions of writing writing style can be determined according to different variables that play a critical role forming the ideas and notions of writers, Gender, social class, age and motivation to writing are the most variables that affect writing style (Nik et al, 2010).

This is supported by the fact that a good writer utilizes words to discover and deliver specific findings to the audience taking in consideration their interest to read. Some argue that age affects the skills and perspective that writers have concerning specific topics (Moraes, 2013). These sights about writing are mainly related to experience and meaning's innovation. Yet, age helps writer to write good articles and in being more skillful in writing.

Thus Huang (2008) believes that students should be motivated and provided with opportunities to explore the language and take further risks with the effects of writing. This will involve students with the new language they learn; learning is enhanced and reinforced by the effort they exert in expressing ideas and using their hands and brain. Thinking and writing are closely related which adds more value to writing as a part of any language course (Schler et al, 2005). So, we believe that instructors should be easier in dealing with writing, because teachers can sometimes tell their students that if their writing does not go well, it is not a sin to throw away their whole work and start over. Thus, we consider that by sharing new ideas, both learners and instructors will have more contentment and understanding.

### *3.3 The Effect of Gender on writing style*

Concerning writing style, there is a huge difference concerning both female and male students concerning their use to nouns and the way authored documents used by them (Palander-Collin, 1999). Concerning the language for instance, Females tend to use more pronouns while males tend to use noun specifiers. Females also tend to use linguistic devices that make their writing stronger. Most probably, females tend to use facultative tag questions in addressing their readers this comparing to male writings (Argamon et al, 2006).

Koppel (2001) & Argamon et al. (2006) suggest that differences in both female and male concerning their writing style in formal texts should not be expected. As in formal writing, both of male and female writers prefer not to use international, phonological and conversational signs as the audiences are unseen, and such differences is reduced between female and male writing (Koppel, 2001).

Female writers use pronouns to express the relationship between the author and the reader, whereas males prefer not to use such pronoun to refer to it. Moreover, female writers use personal pronouns and male prefer to use generic pronouns. There is a difference between male and female speech when using the pronoun ‘‘I’’ (Argamon et al, 2006).

Lange (2008) argues that another difference can be found in writing style between female and male is the way they present objectives, people and communities. According to the result, documents that are written by females are full of pronouns, this was related to the previous result that men tend to talk more about objects where as women tend to talk more about relationships (Greene & Rubin, 1992). Female writing is showing more usage of ‘‘involved’’ features, whereas male writing is showing more usage of informational features. There are important differences between male and female of fiction and non-fiction when it comes to writing style in that genre. Men tend to write more Non-fiction which is more predominant or more prevalent in their writing.

### *3.4 Social Class in Second Language Writing Style*

Everyone is born within a certain social and cultural context which includes many factors like family, community, social class, language, and religion which affect ability to write well due to the fact that writing skills of style is not a naturally acquired skill (Myles, 2002). Responses towards such factors vary between one person to another, and they are unpredictable responses. However, people who are raised in the same cultural environment share some similar response patterns this including similar social class (Gao, 2010). The idea that patterns operate without the full awareness of the individuals might become deeply rooted in the human mind. The values of a dominant culture are very significant as these values are thought to be correct, so they are supported by the society or the class they belong to. Subcultures can have their special influences, but moving between social classes can be affected by some circumstances. All of these factors affect individuals thinking process including the way they use to express their ideas and perspective especially their writing that forms special style distinguishes them (Giridharan, 2012).

Language learning is affected by social factors. Studying the social factors can explain the reason behind the differences occur among learners in rate of the second language in both proficiency type like the comparison between speaking ability and writing ability, and in ultimate proficiency (Skeggs, 2005). Despite the negative attitude toward writing for academic purposes hold by learners who learn English as a second language, many of them have a financial and professional commitment to graduate from English-speaking universities; therefore, they work hard to learn and improve their abilities (Gao, 2010).

The social class dimension is considered very important in writing. In fact, writing should be viewed as a picked up response to the discourse conventions within certain communities that belong to specific class, not as an individual-focused and inner-directed social process (Collins, 2006). Individual differences in the performance of second language writing can be explained by the learners’ attitudes, motivations, and goals that is affected by their social class, this can be formed in their writing style and the different aspects they show that in (Shen, 2005).

Writing teachers should know that the effectiveness of their classes is affected by the instrumental motivation of the second language learners. There are many common purposes for using English to write for academic purposes, those who belong to lower class like writing a research paper to be published in an English magazine, or writing a business report for a universal firm. Such learners have no desire to write stories or poetry as they are not of their needs which totally the preference of those who belong to upper class (Giridharan, 2012). They may even consider writing a standard essay as waste of time. Learners will perform their writing carelessly if they consider them worthless tasks. As a result, they probably will not pay attention to the mistakes or the rhetorical accuracy. On the other hand, students who are highly motivated will be glad to deal with any type of writing tasks (Gao, 2010).

## **4. Results**

Based on the previous literature concerning gender and social class and their effect on writing style, As well after the examination of the above issues and concerns regarding that the current study concludes the following results:

- A. Writing a complicated process that requires proficiency and goes through a long process that both of students and instructors should work together to reach to an adequate level of proficiency in writing. As well it is a thinking process that delivers ideas and notions others and it is mastered only if the individuals are encouraged to write constantly.
- B. Many researchers found out that writing style can be determined according to different variables that play a critical role forming the ideas and notions of writers, Gender, social class, age and motivation to writing are the most variables that affect writing style.
- C. Concerning gender or the writer, the study found out that there are many difference can be found in both male and female writers, for instance, Female writing shows more usage of "involved" features, whereas male writing is showing more usage of informational features.
- D. Concerning social class, the current study found out that social class plays a critical role in students writing style, for example those who belong to lower class like writing a research paper to be published in an English magazine. Meanwhile, the desire to write stories or poetry is the preference of those who belong to upper class.

### **5. Discussion:**

It is strongly believed that student must read a lot in order to become a good writer. This is mostly right as reading enables student to gain the proficiency. Speaking, listening, reading and writing are interrelated processes that cannot be separated. Reading and writing are closely related because as readers utilize the knowledge and experience they have to build meanings from what they read; writers build meanings in their writings.

The current study has explored whether developmental individuals attitudes toward writing relates to their actual writing performance factors that is affected by either gender or social class. Hence, such variables are reflecting and affecting their growth as writers. On the other hand, some points are important to be highlighted in this regard due to their importance in developing writing skills. First, Writing teachers and lecturers should play vital roles in preparing individuals and providing them ample time and more opportunities to practice writing. Firstly, writing is a thinking process. It is a skill that is difficult to master. Then, both of students and lecturers should seriously collaborate and cooperate to achieve some kind of satisfactory level of writing proficiency. Lastly, the current study concludes that an essential point that affects writing style is either writer really enjoys writing in English. It is highly recommended that such writers shall be acknowledged to strength and weakness points in writing they have. Thus, might be affected by the variables the current study has addressed.

The major conclusion of the study is that the writing style can be determined according to different variables that play a critical role forming the ideas and notions of writers, Gender, social class, age. In relation to the students' writing skills, Learning and teaching writing in a second language is considered very challenging task, this due to the linguistic, and sociocultural factors that have great role in that.

Learning and teaching writing in a second language are very challenging tasks, not least because of the myriad of affective, linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural factors involved. To put it in another way, the researcher suggests that learners must be taught to think in a critical and creative way while writing. Gender and social class play an affecting role in deterring writing style, but teacher have to add that a caring writer uses the critical thinking throughout the process of writing. They also say that "writing instructions and strategies will not enable you to write appropriately unless you use the critical thinking".

### **6. Limitations and Further Research**

While this study has generally answered the proposed research questions, further research on language skills, writing skills and related variables need to be investigated. On the other hand, generalizability of findings may be constrained by some considerations.

The current research based on related studies and articles that addressed the topic of gender and social class and their effect on second language writing style. For This study, the research has face some difficulties concerning the related literature in Arabian environment, there was lack of researches that address this topic due to that the results of this study can only be applicable on the samples that related literature has dealt with. In addition, this study used analytical method, which can be considered tentative and possibly not applicable to other contexts or study sample with different characteristics. Moreover, since the present study, according to the researcher's best knowledge, is the first written in Arab world that concerns or deals with such a topic, the researcher found some difficulties to relay on article written in Arabic in order to get involve in Arabian environment, according to the researcher's best knowledge, there is certainly a need for more studies that investigate the second language writing style for students in Jordanian universities, this through either focusing on related variables like, social class, gender, age, cultural background, etc. Nevertheless, the results may not be accurate due to the perception of the other researchers which the study relied on.

Findings of such studies would provide very useful insights of English instructors and students

themselves. In addition, such findings would provide an invaluable resource for Arabic teachers of English, Arabic textbook writers, and curriculum designers. This current research has used different data collection methods, such as published articles, books, and published thesis related to the study matter.

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