

GENDER IDENTITY OF MALE AND FEMALE INDONESIAN EFL COLLEGE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ESSAYS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CDA)

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Abstract: This study attempted to investigate gender identities within junior college students' academic essays at one of the universities in Ciamis. In order to seek and identify subjects' identity in gendered discourses containing multiple meanings, a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework of Fairclough (1989, 2001, 2010) was employed. To determine the sample, four junior college students' essays from different sexes were purposively selected by considering such typical characteristics as: 1) written by the college students who had passed advanced writing course (Writing V); 2) the best written product as recommended by the writing lecturer; and 3) original in terms of the students' own ideas. Transitivity analysis of Hallidayan SFL was also employed in the study. The findings showed that all the written products of both male and female writers indicate masculinity. The indication tends to happen since both male and female subjects likely change their identity depending on the situations such as habitual life, type of discourse, environment, and culture shaping and being shaped by. The present study offers benefits to the pedagogy of teaching writing in terms of teachers' awareness of students' needs and interests.

Keywords: *Gender identity, academic essays, CDA, and transitivity analysis*

Introduction

The large amount of gender and language research has been on the summit of attention these days. It actually demonstrates the differences between male and female in the use of language (Oliver, 2002; Cameron, 2003a, 2003b cited in Birjandi & Tabatabaei, 2010, p. 35). Apparently, most gender studies usually employed CDA as the framework for CDA fundamentally concerns with analysing covert as well as overt structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control (such as institutional, political, gender, and media discourses) as manifested in language (Wodak, 2001, p. 2). Besides, they also involved Hallidayan SFL within their CDA.

However, those studies focused on needs analysis in textbooks, advertisements, and political discourses which are obviously dissimilar to this study. Afterwards, mostly they did not discover gender identities. Therefore, the present study attempted to discover the reflected gender identities behind the texts by engaging CDA in the context of four junior university students' academic essays.

It is expected that this study can carry some important implications for the teaching of linguistics, especially functional grammar and the study of social changes, dominations, and also social relations. This study can be applied in the linguistics subject matter and also it can sustain the teaching material for functional grammar which is taught in almost every university.

Besides, it is hoped that SFL in this analysis can be beneficial for the teachers who applied Genre Based Approach (henceforth called GBA) since SFL itself "which proposes the correctedness of text and context through the theory of register (Field/Tenor/Mode) and genre" underpin the application of GBA (Emilia, 2005, p. 71). Accordingly, this study is hoped to improve teachers' understanding concerning SFL as the fundamental part of an effective GBA to reading and writing.

Review of Related Literature

Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze the language of the society

Critical Discourse Analysis or can also be abbreviated as CDA employed as the approach of critical social research which aims at getting "better understanding of how societies work and produce both beneficial and detrimental effects, and of how the detrimental effects can be mitigated if not eliminated" (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 202-205). Since it deals with social research existing social stratification, CDA fundamentally concerned with analysing covert as well as overt structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control (such as institutional, political, gender, and media discourses) as manifested in language of society (Wodak, 2001, p. 2).

CDA must be conducted through the systematic steps comprising description, interpretation, and explanation steps (Fairclough, 1989, p. 26; 2010, p. 132). The first step, description, is the step to describe the selected formal features in the text. Second, interpretation is the process of which connecting how the participants interpret the social context through their text and also how the analysts elucidate the interpretation

process of the participants and connect it with the reality or social context (Fairclough, 1989, p. 141; Fairclough, 2010, p. 132). The last step of CDA, explanation, represents the relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes (Fairclough, 2010, p. 132).

Engaging SFL to CDA to reveal gender identity

In order to find the deep meaning within the language, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is usually considered to be the main foundation of CDA since through SFL three metafunction of language, ideational, interpersonal, and textual meaning can be revealed (Martin & White, 2005, p. 7; Matthiessen, Teruya, & Lam, 2010, p. 76). Those three metafunction of language have a role “to enact our relationships, to represent our experience, and to organize discourse as meaningful text” (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 4, 7).

This study only involved transitivity system since through it, different gender identities can occur (Poynton, 1985, p. 72). The ideational meaning can be revealed by three elements of transitivity: participant, process, and circumstance. Participants let us know the role of male and female in the clauses. Furthermore, concerning process, Egins (2004, pp. 213-214) mentions six main types of process functions, they are *material, mental, verbal, behavioural, existential, and relational processes*. Poynton (1985, p. 72) pointed out that material (doing) is usually acted by men, yet, mental and relational (thinking or feeling) process types usually involve the role of women.

Actually, not all research discovered that male always represented as masculine and female as feminine. Sahragard and Davatgarzadeh (2010) found that female dominate males in all of the participants’ roles. It is in contrast to the popular stereotypical notion of gender ideology which always believes that female is a powerless human being especially in language system. They concluded that in their research “women were portrayed as more powerful as intellectual social actors” (Sahragard & Davatgarzadeh, 2010, p. 86).

Considering what was found in the literature and some researcher’s findings, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the differences and the similarities between male and female students’ grammatical choices constructed within their academic essay?
2. What are reflected gender identities behind the text?

The answers of the first research question led the answers of the second research questions since the different grammatical choices can indicate the gender identities behind the texts.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach as it involved the collection and qualitative analysis of data within CDA framework. CDA was thought to be the most appropriate framework in this study since Jones and Myhill (2007, p. 476) recommended that discourse analysis is generally a better way of understanding gender and the differences.

In the process of doing CDA, four students’ academic essays (2 males’ and 2 females’) were analyzed. Those essays were purposively chosen based on the lecturer of writing V subject who had considered those essays as the four bests after scoring them from the basis of the ESL Composition Profile criteria from Jacobs, et al. (1981) cited in Bacha (2001, p. 373). The junior college students’ academic essays were chosen because the junior English students at this university had got writing V in which that time they learned how to make an academic essay, even an article journal. Furthermore, Hyland (2004, p.5) mentioned that academic writers do not simply produce texts that plausibly represent an external reality, but use language to acknowledge, construct and negotiate social relations”. Thus, it had been believed that there would be some ideologies hidden behind the texts which were needed to be analyzed.

Actually, those four academic essays were analyzed through three steps of CDA based on Fairclough’s (1989, 2010) framework. Those three steps or levels of CDA are description, interpretation, and explanation (Fairclough, 1989, p. 26; 2010, p. 132). In the first step, coding and describing, all of the meanings of the texts on the surface of them were decoded. The process of decoding and describing the texts was involving Hallidayan SFL framework, transitivity system. Furthermore, in the last step of description, the inclusion and exclusion theory were applied to choose the appropriate data. The inclusion was involved when the social elements of the clauses were part of the text (Fairclough, 2003, p. 135). However, the clauses are considered excluded when they are deemed irrelevant to the reader or analyst (Karimaghei & Kasmani, 2013, p. 30) or are not part of the text (Fairclough, 2003, p. 136). The inclusion and exclusion in this analysis were based on the gendered participants. When there was no single gender participant, the clause was excluded.

Then, the second step, interpretation, examined the relationship between the discursive processes (with seeing the text as the product of a process of a production, and as a resource in the process of interpretation) and the text (Fairclough, 1989, p. 26; Fairclough, 2010, p. 132). Actually, in this step, the analyses of the step one were interpreted. Then, the results of the analysis of male and female texts were compared.

Finally, through the last step the researcher explained the properties of the text “as a form of social action” (Adendorff, 2004, p. 205). Exactly, the researcher explained the representations of the transitivity appeared in the text to the gender identities.

Findings and Discussion

All of the data in this study were analyzed qualitatively by employing three steps of CDA: description, interpretation, and explanation with a tool from Hallidayan SFL namely transitivity system.

Transitivity analysis

Transitivity analysis of the four college students’ academic essays was worth to investigate the ideational meaning. Table 1 shows the differences and the similarities between male and female essays in the representation of the participants emerged in the whole processes.

Table 1 Transitivity analysis

Process types	Participant roles	Female essays		Male essays	
		Female rep.	Male rep.	Female rep.	Male rep.
Material	Actor	54	55	54	62
	Goal	8	8	6	6
	Range	4	4	1	1
	Receiver	-	-	1	1
Existential	Existent	1	1	2	3
Behavioural	Behaver	1	1	2	3
	Phenomenon	-	-	-	-
Causative	Agent	-	-	1	1
	Actor	-	-	1	3
Mental	Senser	7	7	18	22
	Phenomenon	1	1	2	2
Relational I	Carrier	9	9	11	15
	Attribute	1	1	2	2
	Possessor	8	8	7	7
	Possessed	2	2	-	-
Relational II	Token	2	2	1	1
	Value	-	-	1	1
	Possessor	1	1	-	-
	Possessed	-	-	-	-
Verbal	Sayer	1	3	8	8
	Receiver	-	-	1	1
	Agent	-	-	1	1

Table 1 above reveals the frequencies of male and female representation as the participants within the processes. The finding shows that there were some participants in the same processes represented equally to both male and female and there were also more participants in the processes that represent the role of male and female in the different numbers of frequency.

In the transitivity analysis, it can be seen that female writers tended to involve male and female in their texts equally, except for the Actors in the Material processes, and Sayers in the Verbal processes. In the Material and Verbal processes, the role of male dominated female as the participants. However, the male writers liked to make the role of male dominated female in their writing except for the Goal and the Receiver in the Material processes, Agent in the Causative, Phenomenon in the Mental process, Attribute and Possessor, in the Relational I process, Token and Value in the Relational II processes, and also Receiver and Agent in the Verbal processes.

Gender identities behind students’ essays

The results of transitivity analysis lead to the assumption that all of the texts were deemed to be masculine. It was found that male participants dominated the role of female in the whole processes. The domination of male in the whole clauses within the essays was affected by the ideology of the writers who still believe the traditional ideology about gender that discriminate the role of female (Gunnarsson, 1997, p. 219). The supports male and female writers to the domination of male roles in the whole processes indicated their masculinity since the change of gender affected by the habitual life, discourse, environment, and culture.

In addition, there was also found that male dominated female in the whole processes included Mental, Relational that related to female (Poynton, 1985, p.72). Nevertheless, female also involved in the Material process that related to male (Poynton, 1985, p.72). The roles of female as Actor also dominated the other roles of females. These results did not indicate male as feminine since male also outnumbered the whole processes by the roles of them as the Actors. Male participants written in four essays were identified as inconsistent since they appeared as the dominator in the Material process, but, on the other side they also dominated the women as the Sensors and Carriers. However, the role of female could be indicated as masculine since the number of their appearance as the Actors was not too significantly far from the number of male roles; however, the number of their role as the Sensors and Carriers were quite far from the role of males.

Likewise, the finding also showed that both male and female had their bravery to criticize the government, the teacher, and the society to take an action to mend the education condition in Indonesia which is getting worse and worse. Actually, their bravery indicated the masculinity of those sexes since the ideology of men and women from Shitemi (2009, p.5) showed that “men are brave while women are timid”. Lastly, through the transitivity analysis there were also found the pronoun ‘we’ in the whole essays of male and female students and also the pronoun ‘I’ and ‘you’ in one of the male essay. The use of them indicated the femininity of the writers. Argamon, Koppel, Fine, and Shimoni (2006, p. 331) found in their research that female writers particularly use first person singular and second person pronouns to relate them with the readers, while males tend to not to refer to it.

Discussion

It was already assumed that the results in this study indicated that male and female were recognized as masculine. The results were in harmony with the research from Sahragard and Davatgarzadeh (2010). In spite of the fact that female didn’t dominate Material, Mental, and Relational processes like in their study, the results of female still can be portrayed as powerful and intellectual social actors indicated by their roles in the masculine process such as Material process. However, the masculinity of male did not in line with that research. The study of Sahragard and Davatgarzadeh (2010) found that males were weaker than females.

Moreover, this research result concerning the domination of male in the whole processes was in harmony with Gharbavi and Mousavi (2012) and also Karimaghei and Kasmani (2013) studies. Despite the study from Karimaghei and Kasmani (2013) discovered that both males and females were mostly activated in relation to Material processes, Male roles still outnumbered the female roles. They concluded in their study that in Iran, the writers were still holding the conventional gender ideologies that underestimate the role of females.

Anyway, the results of this study that indicated the domination of male in the whole processes of four students’ academic essays were formed by the motivation and ideology of the writers (Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012, p. 89). The ideology of the writers was believed to be influenced by the books they read. English students who wrote these essays must be reading tons of foreign works. It was like what Sahragard and Davatgarzadeh (2010, p. 87) said, innocently reading the foreign works can build the students’ ideology little by little. It was still unknown whether the foreign works they read contained gender asymmetry or not. Thus, it was suggested that the next researcher can investigate this issue.

Nevertheless, this study unpredictably had unique results concerning the masculinity of all writers. The masculinity of all was affected by the equality of male and female treatment in Indonesia, especially in educational matter. This statement is supported by OECD (2011, p. 25) which asserted that “Indonesia has the most balanced distribution of female and male graduates across the subject areas with a slightly higher proportion of females graduating in all disciplines”. It can be meant that the result of this analysis that indicated the masculinity of all writers was the result of the gender equality in Indonesia.

As an addition, male and female writers dared to criticize the government since they were all qualified academic writers in which Hyland (2004, p. 5) asserts that as well as producing texts, good academic writers also tried to claim solidarity with the readers. With regard to this study, those four academic writers tried to involve in the problems of education faced by Indonesian and tried to help solving the problems by criticizing the government.

The last thing worthy discussed was also the lack of gendered specific pronoun such as ‘she’ or ‘he’ written in the essays. The lack of gendered participants made mostly half of the clauses in the essays excluded. This thing occurred because the writing style of the writers was infected by Indonesian grammatical structure which use gender-neutral terms such as ‘dia’ for *she* and *he* (ACARA, 2013, p. 79). Indonesian grammatical structure, especially in the term of pronoun, is commonly more concerned with the position of the family rather than gender, for example *kakak-adik* or *brother-sister* in English (ACARA, 2013, p. 24).

Conclusion and Suggestion

The opinion that stated gender language study is on the summit of attention these days led the writer to seek more about gender identities within four junior college students’ academic essays. To identify subjects’

gender identity, Fairclough's CDA with the involvement of Hallidayan SFL were involved. The results showed that all of the writers with different sexes included male and female participants involved in their essays were recognized as masculine since most of the results showed that both male and female in the analysis were masculine. Even though there was also found the femininity of both sexes, that result did not dominate the masculinity results. It does not matter whether the results of the analysis were normally found by the researcher or not since both male and female are able to change their identity depends on the situation affected by the habitual life, discourse, environment, and culture (Butler, 1990 in Caldas-Coulthard & van Leeuwen, 2002, p. 97; Alcoff, 1988, p. 431 cited in McDowell, 1999, p. 24).

In seeking the answer, one obvious limitation is inherent to the Critical Discourse Analysis itself. It is a very complex approach of language research which can only be realized through conducting various tools. The limitation of this study is the fact that this study only involved one SFL tool without confirming to the writers about the further explanation of their ideas within the texts written. Consequently, there are some things concerning the writers' ideas which are questionable. Further instruments such as interview or questionnaire are needed to be involved to clarify the research results.

Besides, this study has a limit on the sample taken. Thus, gender asymmetry which became the current issue nowadays could not really be granted as a barometer. The further research can investigate gender asymmetry within students' academic essays more deeply with the richer number of sample and data.

Additionally, it is also recommended the next researchers who are concerned with such a kind of study are more experts in generalizing and updating this research. It is also really expected that someday there will be researchers who investigate gender matters through CDA more broadly with different kinds of discourses, for example students' literary works, textbooks, or even syllabuses and assessment instruments, since this type of study is still rarely found in Indonesia. However, whatever the samples and the instruments will be used, hopefully, they can arouse more convincing results or phenomena and also give more direct implication to the development of education, especially English teaching and learning practices.

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