



Interactional resources in letter writing of elementary young EFL learners: An investigation of the effects of writer's gender and text language

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1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings are social phenomena and like to stay connected with each other through an available means called language. According to Marzban and Noori (2020), writing is a useful skill for students to convey their feelings, ideas thoughts and express their needs. In fact, interaction is the basic factor in learning human language and an important element in human's social life (Ramazani et al, 2018).

There is a large body of research that examined the interactional resources that writers use through a variety of research frameworks. In the same vein, the purpose of the current study is to focus on the effect of the language used in letter writing and the writer's gender on the length of text production and the extent to which the interactional meanings are used in the letter.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants of this study included 60 elementary young learners (30 boys and 30 girls) studying in an English Language Institute with the age range of 12-14. All of them were at the same level of proficiency. They took placement test of English Language Institute and passed three terms in the Institute. All of them were at the elementary level of English proficiency. Pseudonyms were used for all the participants in this study.

Personal letter, as suggested by Lindgren and Stevenson (2013), was selected as suitable task for data collection. The same task was used in both L1 and FL. The Farsi text was written first and after a three-week interval, the English text was written. Both tasks were undertaken in the classroom for 20 minutes and the participants were not allowed to use any resources.

C-unit chosen for data analysis in the current study consists of two parts: Macro

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and Micro analysis. The former focuses on the analysis of the rhetorical content. The latter focuses on the analysis of discourse-semantic expression of C-units.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study has examined whether language and gender influence the expression of interactional meanings in the letters of young Iranian learners through both quantitative and qualitative analysis of data.

Considering the first research question, the findings revealed that both boys' and girls' text production in their L1 was more than their text production in their FL. Similar to other studies on young FL writers (e.g., Lindgren & Muñoz, 2013), it was found that participants wrote significantly shorter texts in FL. Although these young writers can be said to be developing literacy in two languages, not surprisingly, there still appear to be considerable differences in their proficiency in L1 and FL writing. They are more fluent writers in Farsi than in English, and have a better command of the Iranian language system. The findings are also in line with Lindgren and Stevenson (2013) who stated that young writers' text production in their L1 is more than their text production in FL.

Regarding the second research question, the findings showed that girls' text production in L1 and FL is more than boys' text production in L1 and FL. The findings of this study are consistent with some previous studies in the field of discourse analysis and gender differences (e.g., Argamon et al., 2003; Jones & Myhill, 2007; Canaris, 1999). In terms of interactive expressions in language writing, it has been claimed that "women's writing contains more features that indicate conflict, while in men's writing there is a tendency to provide and share more information." It is seen more, as it shows the author as the possessor of knowledge" (Jones, 2012: 168). However, the studies of some other researchers did not report a significant difference between the use of interactive cues by male and female language learners, and the results of the present study are not consistent with them (e.g., Kuhi, Yavari & Azar, 2012; Tajeddin & Alemi, 2012; Aziz, Jin & Nordin, 2016).

The findings of the third and fourth questions showed that there were effects of language and gender on learners. Boys asked more questions at the end of text than girls in both languages. Girls presented their attitudes more strongly than the boys, wrote more evaluative about people in both languages, and used more emotive and affective language (e.g., Argamon et al., 2003; Canaris, 1999; Tajeddin & Alami, 2012).

4. CONCLUSION

This study has focused on the use of interactional resources in writing letters by 60 young EFL learners to a friend in Farsi (L1) and English (FL). The findings obtained showed that both boys' and girls' text production in their L1 was more than their text production in their FL and the girls used more aspects of text production such as number of c-units and characters than the boys. The findings can be used to help the EFL teachers in the sense of finding and distinguishing the differences in the boys' and girls' use of interactional resources to communicate with their audience. Thus, if knowing better, they can monitor their expectations of their language learners' writings and teach them according to their writing preferences.

Besides these results, it should be pointed out that this research had some

limitations, e.g., the use of availability sampling method which has a low generalizability, focusing on one special age and level of English proficiency, focusing on one specific genre, and examining the effects of merely two variables of writers' gender and text language. Future studies are recommended to be conducted using more rigorous and rigorous sampling methods, focus on a wider age range and language proficiency level, consider different genres, and investigate the effects of more variables.

Keywords: Appraisal theory; Gender, Interactional resources; Young elementary learners