DIFFERENCES IN MEN'S AND WOMEN'S ESL ACADEMIC WRITING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

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Abstract

This study examines men's and women's ESL academic writing in their written assignments at the University of Melbourne. Three sets of men's and women's academic writing were analyzed for several common features of academic writing including syntactic complexity, means of integrating cited information, and methods of presenting arguments. The findings showed significant differences between the men's and women's texts in those three aspects. The structure of the women's texts tended to be more complex than the men's. The women also used more paraphrases to integrate cited information, and presented better organized arguments. Those characteristics of the women's texts presumably would be advantages for their success in academic writing, and indicate a higher level of proficiency in ESL academic writing.

1. Introduction

In many fields of language learning research, increasing attention has been given in recent years to sex differences as an important variable. The results of the studies vary across many aspects of language. However, summarizing several studies of gender differences in second and foreign language education, Sunderland (2000) discovered only a few studies conducted on literacy. This could be explained by the fact that speaking skill is commonly used as the measure of language ability. However, this should not be a justification for neglecting the importance of writing skills.

The contribution of writing skills in higher education is indisputable. Lilis (2001) stresses the importance of student writing in higher education. Student writing is at the centre of teaching and learning in Higher Education in the UK, being seen as the way in which students consolidate their understanding of subject areas, as well as the means by which tutors come to learn about the extent and nature of individual students' understanding. Writing is a key assessment tool, with students passing

on failing courses according to the ways in which they respond to, and engage in academic writing tasks.

In Australia, where the education system is very similar to the UK's, writing skills are an important part of determining success in higher education. This skill is practically required in completing some assignments, which are a part of final assessment. Several forms of assignments involving writing skills include essays, research reports, literature reviews, research proposals and summaries. Such skills are regarded as very important for international students, who mostly come from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Therefore, a study of language learning on gender differences related to writing academic skills of ESL and EFL learners would be interesting because it would involve multiple aspects: academic settings, non-native speakers, and difference of cultures. This thesis will report a small study conducted at the University of Melbourne that investigated the issue of gender and academic writing. This study does not aim to produce another kind of gender stereotyping, but rather to provide input to the process of teaching academic writing for ESL or EFL learners. Such a stereotyping of 'women are good at X' or 'Men are bad at Y' not only denies the huge range in abilities among women, and among men, and the extent to which women's and men's abilities overlap, but also denies the existence of gendering and gendered social practices, and the possibilities for change (Sunderland, 2000). Human gender characteristics are not just given, but rather socially constructed. Institutions and practices can be described as gendering. Gendering shapes gender roles: what men and women, boys and girls do, occupationally and socially. Based on this concept, human gender characteristics of a particular sex could possibly be modified. If women are socially constructed to be good second language learners, particularly as academic writers, then those skills may be acquired by men, if the language learning and second language teaching can be adjusted for male academic writers.

1.1. Review of the literature on gender and writing

Studies on gender and writing are fewer than those on gender and speaking. However, investigations of differences between males' and females' writing have been done in different situations or settings. Some research focused on L1, and some on L2. The age of the participants of each study varies from children to adults. The types of writing that were analyzed were occasionally different from one study to another. The following sections contain summaries of research on gender differences in writing English as either first or second language.

Gender differences in EL1 writing

Research on gender differences in EL1 writing have mostly been conducted among children. Punter and Burchell's study (1996) on the GCSE English language exam in the UK primary school discovered that girls scored better in writing imaginatively,

reflectively, and empathetically while boys scored better in writing argumentatively and factually. These findings indicate that topic choices play a role in the differences between male and female writing.

However, for the Colorado English test, Brovsky (1999) reported that forty-two percent of Colorado fourth-grade girls were proficient or better in general writing, compared with 28 percent for boys. It was assumed that girls wrote more outside of school—in diaries, letters, and creative stories—giving them a chance to hone their language skills. They also tended to spend free time talking to or doing things with their parents, while boys were more likely to fill time in front of a computer screen.

Regarding the methods of writing, Kanaris (1999) revealed that there were significant differences between 8-10 years old boys and girls in the ways in which they used written language to construct meaning. She found that the patterns of use of pronouns, adjectives and verbs revealed a world where children were actively constructing themselves as gendered individuals, particularly in terms of how they construct agency. These results indicated that the subtle and complex linguistic choices made by children, and the very act of writing, not only revealed but also actively constructed deeply embedded gendered characteristic and behaviors.

The differences between girls and boys in EL1 writing support the ideas of Joan Swann (1992) and Romatowski & Trepanier-Street (1987), who argue that the difference between girls and boys

lies in the perceptions and preferences of girls and boys about writing. Girls tend to have positive feelings about writing while boys are negative. More boys than girls say they prefer factual writing; girls prefer imaginative writing. Girls' writings are confessional and reflective, dealing with people and emissions, using more private forms while boys' like facts and actions, and more public forms.

A research project on adult writing conducted by Meinhof (1997), who studied men's and women's narratives from 3 different social groups (professionals, academics, and university students), found that male and female students wrote similar kind of texts. However, amongst the academics, the narrative writing of academic women differed markedly from that of academic men, though as a whole, the academic group differed from the students. The women's texts were strongly self-reflexive and evaluative, while the men's were more egocentric. However, this is a very small study.

Gender differences in ESL writing

Studies on gender differences in ESL writing are extremely rare. In her summary of language and gender in second and foreign language education, Sunderland (2000) only cited one research project on gender in ESL writing, which was conducted by L.A. Morris.

Morris (1998) studied gender differences in ESL writing at a junior college in Quebec, Canada, and revealed that the women ESL writers tended to outperform the men because their essays

"showed much higher level of adherence to guidelines than the men's, and the evaluation grid richly rewarded this adherence". However, it was found that women's and men's text to be comparable quality as regards accuracy and readability. Despite her claim that she considered the social context in her study, Morris merely informed about the classroom setting without including information about the social and cultural background of the participants. Such information is regarded as an important factor since gender identity is complex and not separated from other identities.

Morris did not investigate the differences between men's and women's academic writing through the common features of academic writing that may not be found in any other types of writing. The common characteristics of academic writing may include syntactic complexity, means of integrating cited information, presenting thesis statement, and organizing arguments. Therefore, this study examines these four features of academic student writing that may give an indication of differences between the two gender groups.

1.2. Research questions

The present study is designed to answer the following questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between male and female ESL student academic writing in terms of syntactic complexity?
2. How do the two gender groups integrate cited information in their writing?

3. How do the two gender groups present their arguments?

2. Settings

2. 1. The class

The academic subjects Advanced ESL 1 and 2, and Introduction to Built Environment Study were the research sites. Those subjects are offered to ESL and EFL students to improve the students' academic writing skills. The students were undergoing their bachelor degrees in various fields of study. They were already accepted in the University with an overall band score of 6.5 or more in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) including the completion of the Academic Reading and Academic Writing modules. They had achieved a minimum score of 6.0 in the Academic Writing module as a requirement of admission to the University. Alternatively, some had achieved a score of 577 or more in the American Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), including a score of 4.5 in the Test of Written English or a score of 233 in the computer-based TOEFL, including an Essay Rating Score of 4.5. (http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/ad missions/guide/english_ug_reqs.html).

Students who enrolled in either AESL 1 (175 120) or Introduction to Built Environment Studies (175 123) had been placed there because their placement scores on writing were 5 or less on the Diagnostic English Language Assessment (DELA). Students in AESL 2 (175 121) were scored 6 or above on writing in the DELA Test. It can be

concluded that the proficiency of the males and the females among their classes were similar.

2.2. Participants

Data were collected for this study from 50 students of the three ESL classes. Participating students included 19 males and 31 females. Although the number of female students is higher than their male counterpart, a *chi-square* test indicates that this difference is not statistically significant ($X^2 = 2.88$, df = 1, p = 0.09/> 0.05) (see appendix B). The subjects are international students from 9 nationalities, speaking 8 different

first languages. Table 1 shows the distribution of the students.

As can be seen from table 2, numbers of students are unevenly distributed across their nationalities and their first language. The majority of the students come from the People's Republic of China and Malaysia, and spoke Chinese as their first language. This proves that their nationality does not reflect their first language. The students' first language can be taken into account to assess whether this could be a factor in any observed differences in the writings of the two gender groups.

Table 1: The distributions of men and women in the classes

sex	class			Total
	Advanced ESL 1	Advanced ESL 2	Introduction to Built Environmental Studies	
Male	3	10	6	19
	1 commerce, 1 science, 1 law	5 arts, 2 commerce, 1 science, 2 food science	all architecture	
Female	15	11	5	31
	8 arts, 1 engineering, 2 science, 3 music, 1 media & communication	5 food science, 1 science, 2 music, 3 media & communication	all architecture	
Total	18	21	11	50

Table 2: The background of participants

Nationality		First language	
China	17	Chinese (10 males, 7 females)	17
Hong Kong	4	Chinese (2 males, 2 females)	4
Indonesia	5	Indonesian (1 male, 3 females)	4
		Chinese (female)	1
Israel	1	Hebrew (male)	1
Japan	4	Japanese (all females)	4
Malaysia	14	Malay (male)	1
		Chinese (1 male, 12 females)	13
Oman	1	Arabic (male)	1
Sweden	2	Swedish (1 male, 1 female)	2
Thailand	2	Thai (all males)	2

2.3. The tasks

The major academic writing assignments vary across the ESL classes. In Advanced ESL 1 and 2 the students write an essay as their major assignments, while Introduction to Built Environment Studies (IBES) requires the students to write a report as the major assignment. The students of AESL1 are asked to choose one of 6 topics provided by the teacher, and are expected to use four sources (books or journals) as references in writing their essays. The teacher suggested the students should consider the sources recommended for each topic. Information about assessment criteria was also provided. Examples of the tasks and marking criteria are presented in appendix A.

Although AESL2 students could choose the topics for their essays, they were advised to pick up a topic related to their field of study. Moreover, they should consult and use at least 8 references. In addition, the teacher informed them about assessment criteria that include content, organization, writing style, and accuracy (see appendix A).

In IBES writing a report is a part of a research project that comprises a group oral presentation and individual report. For the individual report the students are required to provide a comprehensive background context for their allocated site, before addressing a number of the issues in depth. The students should choose one of the issues provided by the teacher.

All students of the three different classes were asked to submit the draft of the assignment in the 10th week of the semester and then submit the revision in the next three weeks. In this study, I analyzed the drafts of the students' assignment, which had not been given any feedback or comments by their teachers yet.

2.4. Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria of all three subjects include content, organization, writing style and accuracy, and academic conventions. The assessment criteria of AESL 1 and 2 are almost the same; one of the differences deals with the writing style and accuracy—AESL 1 does not involve statement of "written substantially in your words". The assessment criteria of IBES emphasize the clarity of the description of the object, but the rest of the criteria are the same as those of the other subjects.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative analysis of the texts focused on t-units, to show text complexity, and the means of integrating sources materials. The features of syntactic complexity and means of integrating information were quantified to answer the research questions 1 and 2. The qualitative analysis focused on how arguments are presented, and whether there are any differences between male and female students in this area (to

answer research question 3). The resulting portraits were used as a basis for comparison of men's and women's writing.

3.2. Procedure of data collection

Both oral and written explanations (plain language statement) about this study were provided to the students, either in the lecture or tutorial sessions. If students agreed to be participants in this research, they were then asked to sign the consent forms and to fill in the demographic data sheet. The data form consists of several questions dealing with the personal identity of the students such as gender, country of origin, first language, and their academic major (see appendix C). They were aware that being participants meant that they would allow me to access their major written assignment; thus they would let me photocopy the final draft of their assignment before being evaluated by their teachers. The written assignments were photocopied and returned immediately to the lecturer.

4. Analysis of student's written text

4.1. Quantitative

There are three features of academic writing that were examined in the analysis of the students' writing. The first deals with syntactic complexity. To measure this feature, the number of T-units and clauses of each text are quantified, and the ratio between them is counted. Another common feature of academic writing is integrating facts, ideas, concepts and theories from other sources by means of quotations, paraphrases, and summaries. It is important to examine the ability to integrate information from previous researchers in relevant areas of study because it would, among other things, determine the success of academic writing. For these two features a quantitative approach was applied to discover the differences between males and females.

4.1.1. Coding

4.1.1.1. Syntactic complexity

All written assignments were divided into T-units. Hunt (1970 p.189) defines T-units as "the shortest units into which a piece of discourse can be cut without leaving any sentence fragments as residue". The result is that independent clauses and any related subordinate clauses, whether they are punctuated as separate sentences or not, are treated as single units, whereas conjoined main clauses are separated. In this research, each assignment was coded for number of T-units per written work, words per T-unit, and clauses per written work, and male and female student means were figured.

4.1.1.2. Integrating cited information

To examine the methods of integrating cited information into the texts, instances were identified by syntactic markers, because confirming the samples from 50 written assignments with the original sources was too time consuming. Each of the samples was categorized as one of the following types: direct quotation, paraphrase, or synthesis.

4.1.2. Statistical procedure

The number of T-units, clauses, and the ratio of T-units to clauses from each sample were counted to show the syntactic complexity. Similarly, the number of direct quotations, paraphrases, and synthesis from each sample were calculated to find out the frequency of use of means of integrating sources into their texts. These data were entered for calculation through the statistical program (SPSS). The statistical descriptions of each measure are then presented to determine the appropriate means of statistical procedure. Hatch and Lazaraton (1991) suggest that one of the conditions to opt for an appropriate statistical procedure is to check whether the data has a normal distribution. To compare two independent samples, for instance, two possible statistical means can be applied, i.e. independent t-test for normal distribution or parametric data or Man Whitney U for non-parametric. The normal distribution has three important characteristics, i.e. the mean, the median and the mode are the same or similar; the distribution is bell-shaped and asymmetric; it has no zero score.

Since there was no hypothesis for all questions as the basis of this study, the direction is regarded as two tailed.

Furthermore, to determine the significance of the data analysis for this study, an alpha level was set at 0.05. This means that the results would be accepted as significant if $p<0.05$. In other words the result would be statistically significant if its possibility of occurrence by chance alone was less than or equal to five times out of 100 (Brown, 1999).

4.2. Qualitative

The qualitative analysis focused on the ways that the men and the women presented their arguments. Specifically, the methods of presenting thesis statements and organizing arguments that are the common features in argumentative essays were the center of attention.

5. Results

Appendix B, item 1 shows complexity and integrating cited information for each student.

5.1. Syntactic complexity

Table 3 shows the number of T-units and clauses in the texts written by males and females in each class.

Table 3: The number of T-units and clauses

	Male				Female			
	AESL1 (n=3)	*AESL2 (n=10)*	*IBES (n=6)*	*Mean*	*AESL1 (n=15)*	*AESL2 (n=11)*	*IBES (n=5)*	*Mean*
T-units	201	775	183	61.00	1115	823	167	67.90
clauses	288	1084	267	86.26	1854	1437	305	116.00
T-units/clauses	0.69	0.71	0.68	0.71	0.60	0.57	054	0.59

As can be seen from table 3, the female students produced a greater number of both T-units and clauses. In the female texts, the number of clauses is almost double the number of T-units, but in the males' texts clauses are only 70% more than the T-units. This means that the structures of female text were more complex than that of the male counterparts. Since the samples of syntactic complexity show a normal distribution, a two-tailed independent t-test was applied to detect any statistically significant differences in any of the data. It was found that there was a significant difference in the ratio of t-units to clauses, t = 3.417, p<0.005 (see appendix B). The result of the analysis indicates that there is a significant difference in the way these male and female students structured their sentences in their written assignments, with the females showing a higher ratio of clauses to T-units.

5.2. Integrating cited information

The means of integrating sources used by the students were totaled as shown in table 4.

Table 4 shows that men applied more direct quotations than women, but they used less paraphrasing than women. Synthesizing was very rare, only 2 syntheses were produced by women and 1 by men, therefore the mean of this category is not taken into account. Both genders show a preference for paraphrasing to direct quotation and synthesizing.

The statistical description informs that the samples are non-parametric, and do not fulfill the conditions of normal distribution because the mean, the median, and the mode are significantly different; besides, they have zero value (see appendix B). A Man Whitney U was conducted to examine the difference between men and women in the use of each category (direct quotation and paraphrase). It was found that there was a significant difference for paraphrasing U= 166.5, p = 0.01 or < 005, but there is no significant difference on the use of direct quotations U= 208.5, p=0.076 or > 0.05 (see appendix B). In other words, the women in this study used more paraphrasing to integrate the information background than the men did, but the two gender groups employed similar number of direct quotations.

Table 4: The number of means of integrating information

	Male			Female		
	AESL1 (n=3)	*AESL2 (n=10)*	*IBES (n=6)*	*AESL1 (n=15)*	*AESL2 (n=11)*	*IBES (n=5)*
direct quotations	6	49	3	21	21	2
paraphrases	13	92	8	167	149	19
synthesis	0	1	0	2	0	0

5.3. Presenting the thesis statement

Thesis statements usually appear at the beginning of argumentative essays, or in the part of the introduction in which identification of the problem is presented. To analysis the thesis statements, I examined the introduction of the best 14 AESL 2 argumentative essays. Below, I present the first paragraph of the introductions written by 7 males and 7 females in their AESL 2 essays. In each of these paragraphs the generic structure of the introduction is identified: background, purpose, method. The thesis statements of each text are printed in bold to ease the identification. The modality of the thesis statement is also indicated by underlines.

Presentation of thesis statement

As shown in the analysis of the 14 corpuses, all of the 7 women stated the thesis statement explicitly by using an expression such as *I argue,* or *the essay will argue,* except for F33 and F38. On the other hand, the 7 men's entire essays did not demonstrate such a feature, except for M20 and M25. M21 did not even present any thesis statements in his essay.

Modality in the thesis statement

What is very striking about all of the texts is how they present a claim, a challengeable assertion that constitutes an argument. In the use of modality, generally the two groups of gender presented the thesis statement in different ways. These 7 women generally tended to prefer employing modality, such as *should,* in their statements. On the contrary, the 7 men had a tendency to express their claims without using modal *should* that was usually used by their female counterparts (except for sample of F34).

5.4. Organizing arguments

For the sake of brevity, the texts written by 6 of the best 14 students were analyzed to see how the arguments were organized. It was noted that each of the students chose a topic that was related to their field of study, except for F34 (a student of music) who wrote about therapeutic cloning (a scientific issue). The parts of the texts were identified into four categories: thesis statement, argument, evidence (the facts that support thesis statement), objection, and rebuttal. Each of the six texts (including the thesis statements and the body texts) was reproduced in turn, and followed by the analysis.

As can be seen from table 5, the ways to organize arguments vary among the men. They did not present their arguments in a regular order. The arguments were not always provided with evidence, and not all objections were followed by rebuttal. M25 even presented 2 unclear contents of paragraph although they may be indicated as evidence. On the other hand, the women tended to organize the arguments in a similar way. They demonstrated a better organization of arguments—they seemed to present their arguments in a regular order. All arguments presented by the women were supported by evidence, and the objections were followed by rebuttal.

Table 5: Summary of order of argumentative moves

male		female	
participant	**order of argumentative moves**	**participant**	**order of argumentative moves**
M19	- thesis statement - argument 1 - evidence - argument 2 - evidence - objection 1 - objection 2 - objection 3 - argument 3 - evidence - rebuttal to objection 2 - rebuttal to objection 1 - evidence - (restated) thesis statement	F33	- thesis statement - objection 1 - objection 2 - rebuttal to objection 1 - objection 2 (repeated) - rebuttal to objection 2 - thesis statement (answer)
M20	- thesis statement - objection 1 - evidence - evidence - argument 1 - objection 2 - rebuttal to objection 2 - evidence - argument 2 - objection 3 - rebuttal to objection 3 - argument 3 - argument 4 - (restated) thesis statement	F34	- thesis statement - evidence - evidence - argument - objection 1 - rebuttal to objection 1 - objection 2 - rebuttal to objection 2 - (restated) thesis statement
M25	- thesis statement - (evidence?) - (evidence?) - evidence - argument 1 - argument 2 - evidence - objection 1 - (possible argument 3) - (restated) thesis statement	F35	- thesis statement - argument 1 - evidence - objection 1 - rebuttal to objection 1 - (restated) argument 1 - argument 2 - evidence - objection 2 - rebuttal to objection 2 - argument 3 - evidence - objection 3 - rebuttal to objection 3 - (restated) argument 3 - (restated) thesis statement

6. Discussion

6.1. syntactic complexity

Conducting a quantitative method requires a measurable coding that would yield a reliable result. In this research, the T-unit approach is applied to measure the syntactic complexity of the samples. Despite numerous criticism addresses to this approach in writing research because it limits discourse to a series of structural unit, this concept was still adopted as a reliable syntactic measure. For example, Polio (1997) applied a T-unit approach to measure the grammatical accuracy in her second language writing research.

A syntactic analysis of the writing samples by the 19 males and 31 females reveals that there is a significant difference between the males and females in this study. The statistical calculation shows that the ratio of T-units to clauses of the women's writing is generally lower than that of the men's. This implies that the number of clauses, either dependent or independent, produced by these women exceeds the number of clauses used by the men. Since the number of dependent clause in T-unit indicates the syntactic complexity of a text, it can be concluded that the structures of these women's writings are more complex than those of the men.

A complex structure is regarded as a feature of academic writing. This is a part of the genre of academic writing. The women's writing will probably gain an advantage in demonstrating this feature. They would have the benefit for fulfilling one of the criteria of assessment, i.e. written in academic style. Moreover, syntactic complexity may indicate writing development of ESL learners. The more complex the structures of a text may probably show higher proficiency of the writers.

However, the method of counting T-unit should be reconsidered. Since the counting involves citations that have been paraphrased, this method might contribute to the number of clauses that produced in women's writing. Therefore, the syntactic complexity does not merely derive from their own words rather than the result of modifying others' words.

6.2 Integrating cited information

Regarding the use of means of integrating facts and ideas, it is clear that the two groups of gender mostly use the same strategy to integrate cited information in their writings, using more paraphrasing than direct quotations and synthesizing. However, the ratio of direct quotations to paraphrasing shows there is a significant difference—these women students use more paraphrasing to integrate the background sources than men do.

Although the degree of integration of information from the background reading text should not be confused with the quality of the integration, the selections of the means of integrating information may reflect the effort of the writers. A direct quotation involves exact wording from the background text, and does not require any modification of the original text. Using direct quotations in a text may be because the quotation is

so excellent that it cannot be replaced or presented in any other ways, or the citers find it is difficult to comprehend the source. Regardless of quality, to employ direct quotations require the least effort. Different from direct quotation, paraphrasing and synthesizing imply the citers' comprehension of the source, so that they are confident to reproduce the original sources in their own words. Synthesizing demands the greatest effort because it requires understanding and comparing more than one source, and then summarizing them in a very brief statement.

Regardless of accuracy of their paraphrases, we may conclude that these women were more confident to reproduce the original background information in their own words by employing paraphrasing. This strategy may probably support their success for fulfilling one of the assessment criteria for writing style and accuracy, in which citing sources substantially in their own words is one of the points (see Appendix A, AESL 2 Assessment Criteria). Since the use of syntheses in the male and female students' writings was very limited, implications are not discussed. Once again, the women in this study showed higher frequencies in fulfilling a desirable feature of academic writing in second language.

6.3 Presenting the thesis statements

The qualitative comparison of essays showed that male and female use of arguments was different. Out of the best 14 in AESL 2, the 7 women stated the thesis statement clearly but most of the men did not. It showed by the use of

explicit expression to argue. Most of the men did not use explicit statement to argue, but most of the women used it.

Besides, the analysis reveals a particularly noticeable feature in the thesis statements of women's texts. The selected samples show that they (6 of 7 female students) mostly use modal 'should' to express their arguments. In those contexts, the word 'should' is a modal auxiliaries used to express requirement. Specifically, Lock (1996) identifies this modal as a mid requirement that can be glossed as advice. It can be a suggestion, recommendation or caution. Such modal implies that the writers try to soften arguments. Instead of saying 'Euthanasia must not be legalized', for example, the writers prefer to say 'Euthanasia should not be legalized'. In this case modal should is a form of hedges. The use of hedges in presenting an argument is recommended in academic writing (Johns, 1997).

Again, the women's essays tend to more meet the expectation of academic writing. Although there is no specific instruction in the assignment sheet to write the thesis statement in a particular way, the use of hedges in their claims of arguments would demonstrate their awareness of genre of academic writing.

6.4 Organizing Arguments

Regarding the methods of organizing arguments the analysis of the 6 best of the 14 AESL 2 students shows that the women demonstrated better-organized arguments than the men. Although F34 put the evidence before

the argument and F33 did not propose any argument (she just rebutted the presented objections), the women generally organized their components of argument after thesis statement in a consistent order that formed a particular pattern, (argument) – (evidence) – objection – rebuttal, and ended them by restating the thesis statement in the conclusion. Such an argument organizing may ease the readers to comprehend the whole idea of their arguments. Consequently, it would support to their success in writing an argumentative essay. Meanwhile, the ways of presenting arguments varied among the men, but did not show any regular orders. As a result, the flows of arguments are rather difficult to follow.

However, it was found there was no pattern that indicated a relation between the students' country of origins, first languages, and fields of study and the quality of organizing arguments. It means that the quality of the students' argumentative essay could not be determined by the three factors.

All of these findings may give a little evidence that the ESL women learners demonstrated better academic writing skills, or had higher levels of English proficiency, than the men. Morris (1998) showed that the women students' essays in her study demonstrated much higher level of adherence to guidelines than the men's. This may indicate that gender plays a role in the way that learners approach the task of second language acquisition, which in turn is hypothesized to relate to female superiority in classroom language learning.

Further research using different research methods need to be conducted to achieve more reliable results. For example, syntactic complexity is not only measured with the ratio of T-units to clauses, but also considered the length of phrases. To examine the preference of using particular means of integrating cited information, research can be designed in such a way that the resources or information backgrounds are under control; so, the citations can be confirmed with the resources. To see the degree of differences in presenting arguments, quantitative research should be done.

7. Conclusion

This study has provided some evidence for sex differences in academic writing of ESL classrooms at the University of Melbourne. The differences between male and female writing are found in syntactic complexity, means of integrating cited information, the way of presenting the thesis statement and organizing arguments. It was found that these women writers would have some advantages in demonstrating more complex structure, using more paraphrasing than direct quotations to integrate sources, presenting the thesis statement with hedging, and organizing better developed arguments. Those features would give beneficial contribution for their success in academic writing. We have no idea why these males did less well than the females. However, the differences do not necessarily discourage ESL male learners to acquire higher proficiency in

academic writing, but rather become valuable input to the process of learning and teaching of academic writing in higher education.

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