

## **Gender Differences among Undergraduate Students in their English Proficiency and Linguistic Challenges**

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### ***Abstract***

The language we use has little bearing on how we perceive the world. It doesn't imply someone is illiterate, foolish, or a lousy writer if they write or speak differently from the official standard form of their language. But it shows how well they understand that specific language. It takes some time to assess someone's linguistic abilities through research into the language difficulties they encounter in a particular language setting. The goal of the current study is to examine the linguistic issues faced by undergraduate students at St. Aloysius Degree College in Bangalore City. There are 100 students in the study, 50 boys and 50 girls, with an average age of 19.17 using the English Proficiency Assessment Scale. The obtained data structure is statistically analysed in SPSS Based on the Mann-Whitney test due to non-normal distributions of data structure and related to the student have shown significant statistical gender difference concerning phonological intonation, degrees of conversation, avoiding mother tongue influences, logical arrangement and story structure, paraphrasing, and Idiomatic use of language in the English proficiency.

### **Keywords:**

Linguistic Issues, English Proficiency, Linguistic Abilities, Intonation, Idiomatic Phrases.

## Introduction

Many linguistic problems affect college students, particularly when it comes to academic writing and communication. The linguistics characteristic features include phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Phonetics is the study of the speech sounds. It includes how speech sounds, or phonemes, are generated, transmitted, and perceived. This encompasses topics like articulatory phonetics, which deals with how sounds are produced, acoustic phonetics, which concerns of transmission of speech sounds as waves, and auditory phonetics, that is the concern of the perception of speech sounds. Phonology describes as the systematic arrangement of speech sounds in particular languages is the subject of phonology. It examines how phonemes, phonological rules, syllable structure, and intonation patterns all work together to create a language sound system. Morphology reveals the development and structure of words and investigates the internal organization of words, including morphemes—the smallest units of meaning—and the principles governing their fusion. Morphology also deals with word generation like inflected, derived and compounding words through the morphological processing such as derivation, inflexion, and compounding. The study of syntax focuses on how words are sequenced to form meaningful phrases, clauses and sentences as well as the principles guiding sentence construction. It focuses on the links between various aspects within a sentence as well as sentence kinds, word structure, word order, phrase structure, clause structure and sentence structure, rules of phonology, syllable organisation, and intonation patterns. The study of meanings based on context and functions is known as semantics. It investigates how speakers understand particular meaning of words, phrases, and sentences expressed in particular context. It covers ideas like pragmatics (how context affects meaning), compositional semantics (meaning of phrases and sentences), and lexical semantics (meaning of individual words).

In another approach, the terms "receptive" and "expressive" are frequently used in linguistics to refer to various facets of language proficiency. Receptive language is the capacity as well as capability of a person to absorb and understand language when it is provided to them. It entails understanding spoken or written language by hearing, reading, and comprehension. Understanding of vocabulary, structure, function, sentence patterns, and overall meaning and others are trying to convey requires receptive language abilities. Conversely, expressive language refers to one's capability for producing words, selection of words while communicating with others. It entails verbal or written expression of feelings, thoughts, and concepts.

### **Literature Review**

Use of vocabulary, sentence construction, grammatical correctness, and sound articulation are all examples of expressive language abilities. Writing and speaking effectively depend on having a strong vocabulary. Some students may struggle to articulate their thoughts or believe their vocabulary is too little. This problem can be solved by improving vocabulary through reading, word lists, and linguistic activities. It is very clear that professional communication depends on using proper grammar and sentence construction. The right use of verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, phrase fragments, and run-on sentences may pose difficulties for students. Grammar abilities can be enhanced by doing activities, proofreading, and asking teachers for feedback.

Academic writing frequently calls for a particular tone and use of different styles of language. The use of proper citations, refraining from using colloquial language, and keeping an objective voice are some professional writing rules that students could find the difficulties (Sawir, 2019). This ability can be developed by being familiar with academic writing manuals, taking writing workshops, and getting support from writing centres (Hyland, 2007). For some students, organising ideas and writing essays or research papers can be difficult (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). They could have trouble sustaining a logical flow of ideas, making transitions among various patterns of sentences in paragraphs, or putting together an argument that makes sense. Organisational abilities can be improved by outlining, planning, and practising the art of structuring writing. International students or non-native English speakers confront significant linguistic obstacles when learning a second language (Reves&Medgyes, 1994). Their oral communication abilities may be impacted by their articulation of speech sounds with proper accent, and fluency (Galante & Thomson, 2016). The learning of a second language can be assisted by putting an emphasis on language practice, participating in conversational groups, and utilising language learning materials (Walqui, 2006).

Students who are learning English as a second language (ESL) sometimes have trouble memorising and spelling new words, understanding the meanings of unfamiliar phrases, pronouncing of unfamiliar words, and using of unfamiliar words effectively (Afzal, 2019). The students struggled to write in English due to a lack of vocabulary, poor spelling, and interference from their first language, and poor comprehension of grammatical structure, according to a recent study, Girls also performed worse than boys when writing in English (Farooq et al., 2020). The study finds that undergraduate ESL learners' writing suffers from a lack of linguistic abilities, such as a lack of command over grammar, including a lack of

knowledge on morphological, syntactical and semantic aspects, writing anxiety, a lack of ideas, reliance on their home language, and poorly ordered structure (Fareed et al., 2016). Non-native speakers struggle with speaking, writing, reading, and listening skills, according to research conducted among postgraduate ESL students at Russell Group University (Hennebry et al., 2012). More terms referring to social and psychological processes were utilised by women. Men spoke more about impersonal subjects and object features (Newman et al., 2008). Students of either gender may experience language biases and preconceptions based on their gender (Wells, 2008). Male students may be expected to be forceful or domineering in their conversation, for instance, whereas females may be expected to be nurturing or kind. Such prejudices have an effect on how people communicate and express themselves (Canary & Hause, 1993).

### Research Design

The current study is a non-experimental, descriptive study with an exploratory nature that aims to explore linguistic challenges experienced by undergraduate students. The English Proficiency Assessment Scale (EPAS), created by Saranya and Adam (2023), is only used for undergraduate students at St. Aloysius Degree College in Bangalore City, where there are 100 students, 50 boys and 50 girls, ranging in age from 17 to 28 with a mean age of 19.17. The EPAS consists of 29 items and offered information on the four communication skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing as well as English proficiency. Speaking and writing abilities are expressive parts of communication, whereas listening and reading skills are receptive parts.

**Figure 1.** *illustrated frequencies of observation with respect to age and gender.*

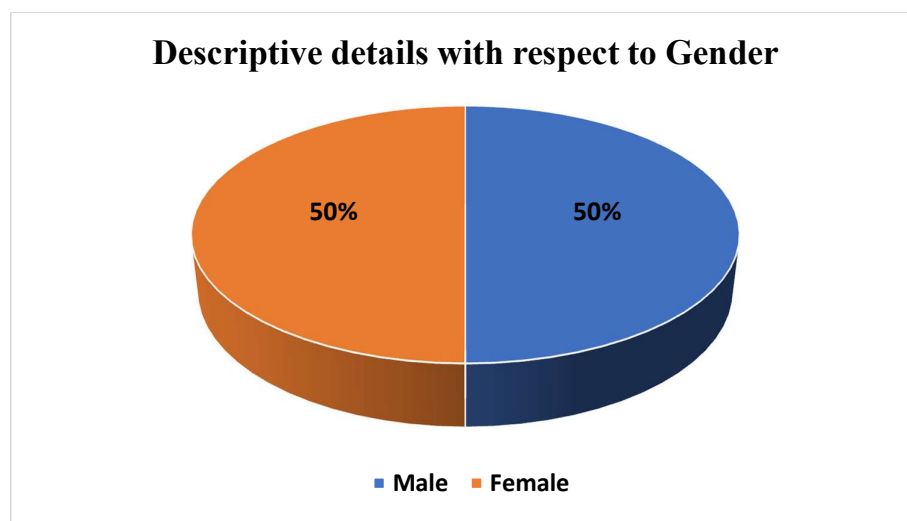


Figure 1 represented the frequencies of observation with respect to age and gender. Researchers selected equal observations of both male and female students in the study. The EPAS tools include linguistic components such as phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. The phonological dimensions such as audition, pronunciation, spelling, and intonation and the morphological dimensions like passive vocabulary, guessing unfamiliar words and active vocabulary have been demonstrated in the tools. Coherence, verb tense, passive voice, usage of articles and prepositions, and grammatical cohesiveness are the syntactical elements of the tools. Coherence, parsing, lexical cohesion, logical arrangement, conversion, paraphrasing, and idiomatic language use are among the semantics components of the tools. In addition to looking at receptive, expressive, and general elements of English proficiency, the researcher also looked at these structures in the datasets that were gathered. According to Saranya & Adam (2023), the EPAS has a Cronbach alpha reliability of .960. The data set was acquired utilising the aforementioned methods in a classroom setting across particular time periods, and it was then transferred to an Excel sheet for additional data analysis. The collected data structures were worked out to define this study's descriptive and inferential aspects using SPSS latest version.

**Table 1.** *Linguistic issues faced with respect to linguistic dimensions.*

Linguistic Dimensions	Items in EPAS	Issues Faced
Phonological Issues	5, 6, 9 and 28	Audition, Pronunciation, and Spelling
Morphological Issues	7, 8, 11, 23,	Active vocabulary, Passive vocabulary, Guessing, Avoiding Mother tongue
Syntactic Issues	12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 22	Verb Tense, Voice, Articles use, Preposition use, irregular verbs use, Grammatical cohesion, Conversion
Semantic Issues	10, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26	Punctuation, Coherence, Lexical cohesion, Macrostructures, logical arrangement, Paraphrasing, Parsing, idiomatic use,

## Results and Interpretations

The aimed objectives of the present study are to explore linguistic issues faced by undergraduate students with respect to their gender difference. The data structures are analysed using SPSS after coding in Excel Sheath. The patterns of data distribution are the non-normal patterns with .241 skewness and .478 kurtosis with a mean score of 194.1, and a standard deviation of 39.65. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Shapiro-Wilk test of normality have shown the statistical significance of .017 with .099 statistics and .001 with .95

statistics respectively. Thus, the inferential statistical analysis is carried out by non-parametric tests like the Mann-Whitney test for gender differences.

**Table 2,***Gender difference in English proficiency difficulties using the Mann-Whitney test.*

	Mean	S.D	Mean Rank		Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Sig.
			Male	Female				
Listening skill	7.32	1.83	54.00	47.00	1069.5	2554.5	-1.039	0.299
Speaking skill	6.51	1.98	49.17	51.83	1133	2618	-0.583	0.56
Reading skill	7.96	1.63	47.89	53.11	1119	2154	-0.689	0.491
Writing skill	7.84	1.91	48.67	52.33	1093	2578	-0.872	0.383

Table 2 represented the gender difference in English proficiency difficulties using the Mann-Whitney test, which showed there is no statistical mean difference among male and female students. Male students have shown increased proficiency issues, especially in listening skills than female students. While female students have shown increased issues and difficulties in other dimensions of communication as speaking skills, reading skills, and writing skills than male students in this study population. Both of them have scored comparatively less mean with respect to speaking skills than all other dimensions within English proficiency in communication.

**Table3,***Gender difference in phonological issues using the Mann-Whitney test.*

	Mean	S.D	Mean Rank		Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Sig.
			Male	Female				
Audiation	6.98	1.62	52.75	48.25	1126	2611	-0.638	0.524
Pronunciation	6.98	1.62	52.75	48.25	1126	2611	-0.638	0.524
Spelling	7.53	1.67	51.87	49.13	1167	2202	-0.344	0.731
Intonation	<b>6.50</b>	<b>2.22</b>	<b>54.22</b>	<b>46.78</b>	<b>838</b>	<b>2323</b>	<b>-2.681</b>	<b>0.007</b>
Phonology	27.33	5.34	55.87	45.13	1035.5	2520.5	-1.265	0.206

Table 3 represented the gender difference in phonological issues using the Mann-Whitney test, which showed there is no statistical mean difference among male and female students in all dimensions within phonology except intonation which has statistical significance at the level of .007 with Mann-Whitney U 838, Wilcoxon W 2323 and Z -2.681 whereas male students have shown significantly increased intonation issues than female students with mean rank 54.22 in male and 46.78 in female students. While all other dimensions in phonological issues female students have shown decreased issues and difficulties than male students in this study population. Both male and female students have scored comparatively high mean in spelling than all other dimensions within phonological difficulties in English proficiency.

<b>Table 4, Gender difference in morphological issues using the Mann-Whitney test.</b>								
	Mean	S.D	Male	Female	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Sig.
Active Vocabulary	6.58	1.56	53.97	47.03	1101	2586	-0.815	0.415
Passive vocabulary	6.48	1.88	53.51	47.49	1095.5	2580.5	-0.852	0.394
Guessing unknown words or phrases	6.87	1.89	58.80	42.20	1048.5	2533.5	-1.191	0.234
Avoiding mother language interferences	<b>6.02</b>	<b>2.92</b>	<b>57.56</b>	<b>43.44</b>	<b>873.5</b>	<b>2358.5</b>	<b>-2.416</b>	<b>0.016</b>
Morphology	25.95	6.11	57.16	43.84	999.5	2484.5	-1.517	0.129

Table 4 represented the gender difference in morphological issues using the Mann-Whitney test, which showed there is no statistical mean difference between male and female students in all dimensions within morphological issues except avoiding mother language interferences which have statistical significance at the level of .016 with Mann-Whitney U 873.5, Wilcoxon W 2358.5 and Z -2.416 whereas male students have shown significantly increased avoiding mother language interferences issues than females with mean rank 57.56 among males and 43.44 among female students. While all other dimensions in morphological issues females have shown decreased issues and difficulties than males in this study population. Both male and female students have scored comparatively less mean in mother language interferences issues than all other dimensions within morphological difficulties in English proficiency.

<b>Table 5, Gender difference in syntax issues using the Mann-Whitney test.</b>								
	Mean	S.D	Male	Female	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Sig.

					U			
Verb Tense	7.37	1.87	56.83	44.17	1119	2154	-0.687	0.492
Passive voice	6.63	2.00	52.53	48.47	1032.5	2517.5	-1.3	0.194
Use of articles	7.34	1.94	52.96	48.04	1086.5	2571.5	-0.918	0.359
Use of Prepositions	6.90	1.81	51.35	49.65	1205.5	2690.5	-0.068	0.946
Use of irregular verbs	5.82	1.87	50.53	50.47	1158	2643	-0.407	0.684
Grammatical cohesion	6.09	2.45	49.92	51.08	1104	2589	-0.79	0.43
Conversion	6.20	2.89	<b>56.05</b>	44.95	978.5	2463.5	-1.676	<b>0.094</b>
Syntax	46.35	10.9	52.70	48.30	1088.5	2573.5	-0.89	0.374

Table 5 represented the gender difference in syntax issues using the Mann-Whitney test, which showed there is no statistical mean difference among male and female students in all dimensions within morphological issues except knowledge on the degree of conversion which have statistical significance at the level of .094 with Mann-Whitney U 978.5, Wilcoxon W 2463.5 and Z -1.676 where males have shown significantly increased issues than females with mean rank 56.05 in men and 44.95 in female students. While all other dimensions in syntax issues females have shown insignificant decreased issues and difficulties than males except grammatical cohesion in this study population. Both male and female students have scored comparatively less mean in issues concerning to use of irregular cohesion than all other dimensions within syntax difficulties in English proficiency.

**Table6, Gender difference in semantic issues using the Mann-Whitney test.**

	Mean	S.D	Male	Female	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Sig.
Punctuation	6.57	2.04	50.81	50.19	1166.5	2651.5	-0.346	0.73
Coherence	6.41	2.11	53.41	47.59	1186.5	2671.5	-0.203	0.839
Lexical cohesion	6.16	2.22	51.38	49.62	1025	2510	-1.353	0.176
Macrostructures	6.49	2.05	54.30	46.70	986.5	2471.5	-1.627	0.104
logical arrangement and story structure	<b>6.80</b>	<b>2.17</b>	<b>57.23</b>	<b>43.77</b>	<b>950.5</b>	<b>2435.5</b>	<b>-1.881</b>	<b>0.05</b>
Paraphrasing	<b>6.22</b>	<b>2.31</b>	<b>56.92</b>	<b>44.08</b>	<b>908</b>	<b>2393</b>	<b>-2.18</b>	<b>0.029</b>
Parsing	6.34	2.27	52.53	48.47	1108	2593	-0.762	0.446



Idiomatic use of language	6.15	2.31	55.18	45.82	934.5	2419.5	-1.991	0.046
Semantics	51.14	13.3	53.44	47.56	987.5	2472.5	-1.6	0.11

Table 6 represented the gender difference in semantic issues using the Mann-Whitney test, which showed there is no statistical mean difference among male and female students in all dimensions within morphological issues except logical arrangement and story structure, paraphrasing and idiomatic use of language with statistical significance at the level of .05, .029, .046 respectively. The linguistic issue concerning the logical arrangement and story structure has gender differences greater mean rank of 57.23 in males than 43.77 among females with Mann-Whitney U 950.5, Wilcoxon W 2435.5 and Z -1.881, the issue concerning the paraphrasing has gender differences greater mean rank of 56.92 among males than 44.08 among females with Mann-Whitney U 908, Wilcoxon W 2393 and Z -2.18, and the issue concerning the Idiomatic use of language has gender differences greater mean rank of 55.18 among males than 45.82 among females with Mann-Whitney U 934.5, Wilcoxon W 2419.5 and Z -1.991. While comparing all other dimensions in semantic issues, female students have shown insignificant decreased issues and difficulties than males in English proficiency.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The EPAS tool's evaluations on English language competency and linguistic issues have shown clear-cut notions about the measurements of the linguistic challenges in a logical way. The gender differences in linguistic challenges and English language proficiency among undergraduate students at Bangalore City's St. Aloysius Degree College using the EPAS tool have shown various degrees of challenges concerning all the linguistic parameters. These findings are backed by a number of related studies conducted based on previous studies as the corpus and declarative Intonation Phrases with respect to a variety of social, interactional and pragmatic factors have markedly shown significant differences across genders (Levon, 2016), there was sentence-level intonation based on gender and ethnicity (Morgan, 1997). The present study also showed statistical significance in gender-based difference on the intonation issue concerning English proficiency at the level of .007 with Mann-Whitney U 838, Wilcoxon W 2323 and Z -2.681 where Male students have shown significantly increased intonation issues than females with mean rank 54.22 among males and 46.78 among female students. Further, there were linguistic challenges in avoiding mother language interferences

and have shown statistical significance gender differences at the level of .016 with Mann-Whitney U 873.5, Wilcoxon W 2358.5 and Z -2.416 where male students have shown significantly increased avoiding mother language interferences issues than females with mean rank 57.56 among males and 43.44 among females. This result was supported in line with previous studies as a significant relationship between the males and females in the perception of the use of mother tongue interference in the teaching and learning of science subjects (Oladoran & Oludipe, 2023), cross-language connections at various levels of phonological structure in second-language acquisition have shown a pervasive impact from first-language representations (Chang, 2012).

The present study has shown gender differences in the knowledge of the degree of conversion with statistical significance at the level of .094 with Mann-Whitney U 978.5, Wilcoxon W 2463.5 and Z -1.676 where male students have shown significantly increased issues than females with mean rank 56.05 among males and 44.95 among females as seen from previous studies the role of gender and educational level in metacognitive awareness and self-regulation among students' translations have shown statistical significance (Hashempour et al., 2015), there was a relationship between gender and theoretical knowledge of translation and practical skills among Iranian translator (Lotfi Kashmar et al., 2013). The linguistic issue concerning the logical arrangement and story structure has gender differences greater mean rank of 57.23 in males than 43.77 among females with Mann-Whitney U 950.5, Wilcoxon W 2435.5 and Z -1.881 and it is supported in line with past studies as rhetorical instruction not showing difference within cultures while the expressive function of writing had significant difference (Liebman, 1992). The linguistic issue concerning paraphrasing and the Idiomatic use of language have gender differences greater mean rank of 56.92 in males than 44.08 among females with Mann-Whitney U 908, Wilcoxon W 2393 and Z -2.18, and a greater mean rank of 55.18 among males than 45.82 among females with Mann-Whitney U 934.5, Wilcoxon W 2419.5 and Z -1.991 respectively. The most important linguistic challenges and difficulties faced by students and the coping strategies in translating idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions have been reported (Ali & Sayyiyed Al- Rushaidi, 2017). Another study revealed that younger children were literally oriented, while older children were more idiomatically oriented and it has shown gender differences (Levorato & Cacciari, 1995).

In conclusion, linguistic challenges faced by students show gender differences concerning phonological intonation, degrees of conversation, avoiding mother tongue influences, logical arrangement and story structure, paraphrasing, and Idiomatic use of

language. These research contributions offer dependable information about the significance of offering language instruction, particularly to the student populations concerning to English language proficiency.

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