

# The Influence of Addressee Gender on Spoken Fluency among EFL Learners

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## Abstract

This research investigates the impact of addressee gender on the spoken fluency of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The study examines how interactions in same-gender and mixed-gender contexts affect three key aspects of fluency: Automaticity, lexical density, and lexical diversity. A sample of 10 intermediate-level Pashto-speaking students (5 males and 5 females) was selected for the study. Data was collected through audio recordings of spoken corpora in four different contexts: female-female, female vs. mixed gender, male-male, and male vs. mixed gender interactions. The findings reveal significant differences in fluency based on the gender composition of the interaction. Female participants demonstrated higher automaticity and lexical density in same-gender interactions, while male participants exhibited greater fluency, lexical density, and diversity in mixed-gender contexts. These results suggest that the gender of the addressee influences not only the speed and content richness of speech but also the variety of vocabulary used. The study underscores the importance of considering gender dynamics in EFL teaching and offers recommendations for educators to enhance fluency through gender-aware pedagogical strategies. Further research is suggested to explore the impact of addressee gender on other language skills and in various communication settings.

## 1. Introduction

Examining the role of gender in speaking among EFL learners is significant because it can benefit students, teachers, and other researchers. For students, understanding the impact of addressee gender on speaking interactions can help them to communicate more effectively (Dinsa et al, 2022). For example, knowing how to address and engage with males and females in English can increase their confidence and improve their speaking skills. Speaking is the process of conveying information or expressing one's thoughts and feelings in spoken language (Bahri, 2017). Speaking is a generative trade to correspond effectual in any language, notably when spokesman is not using their fundamental language. People can express their thoughts, feelings and opinions through language. For this purpose, they need to develop their speaking skill. Without speaking skill, non-native

speakers of English cannot communicate effectively with the people of other countries who speak different languages (Ehsan 2019). Speaking skill is affected by various factors such as gender, age, addressee etc. Gender plays an important role in speaking. Gender influences language use, and one notable difference is that women tend to be politer in their communication style compared to men. Erdana (2019) says that when women talking to same gender they use politeness strategies but in similar situation men do not show this tendency. Communication styles can be different depending on situation when speaking in front of men versus women or within mixed gender environment. A research found that men are use more complex language and longer sentences when speaking to same gender than when speaking to opposite gender (Leaper, 2007).

Recipient or addressee design is a process by which a speaker adapts their language and communication strategy or style based on the characteristics of the person they are addressing (Hassan, 2023). In recipient design speakers tailor their language and communication style according to the recipient's social status, gender, and context etc. Addressee design involves the adaptation of language to fulfill the addressee needs and expectation. The speaker considers the addressee point of view and knowledge to tailor a message that is clear and more effective. Speakers may adopt various aspects of language such as lexical choice, syntax, and content according to the addressee characteristics (Kian, 2017).

Fluency is the aspect of language in which a speaker, speaks smoothly, accurately and flows with ease. The term smooth and easy flow here means the "state where the speaker speaks at constant speech rate and makes no longer pauses" (Mai, 2015). To define fluency, some researchers notes certain component of speech such as consultation or sound per minute and the elongation or amounts of break (Martin, 2009). There are some aspects of speaking which shows the speaking fluency of a person such as articulation rate (syllables per second), speech rate (Words per minute/WPM) and filled pauses (number of filled pauses per minute) etc. A higher speech rate and fewer filled pauses indicates greater fluency.

There are two important aspects of language use which are Lexical density and lexical diversity that show how individuals can communicate effectively in both speaking and writing? Lexical density is the proportion of content words such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in text. on the other hand, Lexical diversity, refers to the varieties of words (unique words) used in text. These concepts, is also called lexical richness by Mulac (2006), are measured statistically to evaluate the lexical richness of a piece of writing. According to Johansson (2008), lexical diversity measures the number of different words (unique words) used in a text, while lexical density accounts for the proportion of lexical items such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and some adverbs in the text. Thus, whether in speaking or writing, analyzing lexical density and diversity provides valuable insights on the complexity and variety of language use (Maryam, 2018).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 What is Code-switching?

Declamation is considered the most crucial aptitude in this globalization era. Speaking is a generative art to connect effectual in any other language, curiously when people talks in any other language instead of his / her native language. Speaking is one of the most important part in language learning process (Namaziandost, 2019). Speaking skill play dominant role in communication, people try to learn these skills in order to communicate well with the entire community all the around the world (Prayuda, 2021). Resarcherds have investigated the relationships between second language learners' anxiety, self- confidence and speaking performance. Their study involved 132 Korean college students enrolled in English conversation classes. The results showed that learners' anxiety level was negatively related to their oral performance. Students speaking performance can be impacted by various factors, including performance conditions. According to language researchers, it encompass time pressure, planning, standard of performance, and amount of support, all of which can influence speaking performance. Additionally, affective factors, such as motivation, confidence, and anxiety plays a crucial role in language learning success or failure, with research confirming their significance in second language acquisition (Rao, 2019).

Speaking in foreign language is a complex cognitive and linguistic process that has been extensively investigated in the field of additional language attainment and language duality. Research has shown that speaking in a foreign language can impose significant cognitive demands, including attentional control, working memory, and linguistic processing (Roger & Norlund, 2008). The emotional and social aspects of foreign language use can also impact speaking performance, with factors such as anxiety, motivation, and identity influencing language production. Speaking in a foreign language has been considered the most challenging and complex of the four language skills, because speaking process is occurring in real time, dynamic interrelation between speaker and hearer should arise under time constraints. Then in this process, the speaker has to make decision about why how and when to communicate in accordance with the hearer's cultural and social context (Robert & Zimmerman, 2017). According to experts fluency is the quality or conduction of being fluent. It indicates since students understand each other in speaking it means they have been fluent. Fluency is the ability to produce and

communicate smoothly with following the rules of language. It is the ability to link units of speech together with facility and without strain or inappropriate (Suwartiningsih, 2023).

To assign rhetoric so and so expert, focal only on some attributes of speech such as words or sound per minute and the stretch or number of breaks. Syamsul, (2017) altercate that velocity and abeyance are necessary aspect in coherence. Accuracy is one of the important aspect of the speaking skill. Accuracy is the ability to form correct grammatical sentences. For accuracy is how well the target language is produced according to the rule system of the target language. In simple terms, accuracy means producing the foreign language correctly with its grammatical structures (Nezzar, 2022). Male tend to use more complex language to male but use more assertive language and fell hesitant when speaking to female and focus on maintaining independence and communicate factual information when speaking in mixed gender situation. Females tend to use more collaborative and supportive communication style when interacting with males. Females tend to use more affiliative speech. Researchers examined language fluency among EFL student in Egypt. The study found that female student displayed comparable fluency levels to male students in classroom interaction. Females in a mixed gender situation feel more anxiety and self-doubt, leading to decreased in fluency. Females feel hesitant to speak up and to participate (Wahyuningsih, 2018).

Gender of the interlocutor (addressee) plays important role in speaking. A research conducted on public speaking in university of Karachi shows that female student has relatively more fear of public speaking than male (Arsyad, 2020). Speakers tend to adjust their language use based on the gender of their interlocutor, with politer language used with female interlocutors and more direct language with male interlocutors. Female tend to be subjective, use more feelings, field dependent, right and left brain balanced, and cooperative. On the other hand, males tend to be objective, use more thinking, field independent, left brain dominant and competitive (Yolanda, 2019).

### 3. Statement of Problem

Besides speakers' competence, foreign language speaking depends on the role of the addressee's gender. The need appears to analyze speaking performance in foreign language with regard to different setting or contexts pertaining to the addressees' gender: same, opposite and mixed gender settings. The present study examines EFL students' speaking fluency in these three different contexts such as automaticity, lexical density, and lexical diversity.

### 4. Research Objectives

1. To find out the impact of addressee's gender on EFL speakers' speech.
2. To compare EFL speakers' performance among same, opposite and mixed gender contexts.

### 5. Methodology

This study approaches the collection and analysis of data through exploratory research design. For this purpose, the study inesvtiagtes students' persepectives about the influence of addressee gender on EFL learner's spoken fluency. This research has two independent variables which is gender of speaker and gender of addressee, while the dependent variable is speaking skill, which is evaluated through fluency.

### 6. Population and Sample

The population in this study constitute all the BS EFL students whose L1 (native language) is Pashto and are enrolled in the Department of English of public sector universities in Malakand division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Pashto language is spoken by more than 90 % of the people of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. The medium of instruction in the school and college is either Urdu or English, Urdu is the national language of Pakistan while English is the official language of the country.

The sample size of this study includes 10 students in which 5 are males and 5 are females. These students were selected based on convenient sampling technique. Only those students are selected who were willing to participate in the study.

### 7. Data Collection

The primary data is collected from audio recording spoken corpora of respondents during a speaking task of 60 minutes (01 hour) duration, which is conducted in four phases such as male to male vs mixed gender situation and female to female vs mixed gender situation.

### 8. Data Analysis

The data analysis procedure involves the comparison of spoken corpora on the basis of gender to identify any significant differences in speaking skill between male and female participants. This comparison is done using

quantitative measures such as fluency, which is calculated and analyzed statistically to determine any significant differences with regard to addressee's gender.

## 9. Findings

On the whole, primary data were divided into 4 data sets. They included: female-female speech, female-mixed gender speech, male-male speech and male-mixed gender speech. In these four data sets there are 3 audio recordings of female-female speech and 2 of female-mixed gender speech consist of 18 and 12 minutes respectively. Male-male speech consists of 3 audio recordings (18 minutes) and male-mixed speech consist of 2 audio recordings (12 minutes). In each set of speech recording, the selected three aspects of fluency automaticity, lexical density and lexical diversity were examined comparatively.

**Table 1** Results of Fluency Components in Female-Female Speech

Aspect	Score
1 Automaticity	79.6%
2 Lexical Density	46%
3 Lexical Diversity	33%

The first data set was taken that comprised of speech of female speaker to female addressee. There were 3 female respondents who spoke to their female counterparts. The total number of their speech recording was 18 minutes. The first aspect of their speech concerning fluency was automaticity that was analyzed. The researchers used WPM (Word Per-Minute) formula for calculating automaticity. The total spoken corpora consist of 1434 words. With relative to the time duration of their speech, the overall WPM was calculated as 79.6. The second aspect of fluency was lexical density that was analyzed using TTR formula. In analyzing this, the total number of lexical words were divided on the total number of all words. The lexical words comprised 672 in the total speech of the 03 female participants. It was divided on the total number of words 1434. Thus, the lexical density appeared as 46% in their speech. The third element of fluency taken in this study was lexical diversity. It was measured by another formula different from TTR. In analyzing fluency, all the entries of a same word were counted as single entry. Thus, the total number of all entries were counted. The total spoken corpora consist of 1434 words, of which 480 are unique words. To measure the lexical diversity, the unique words were divided by the total number of words and then multiplied by 100. In this case, the lexical diversity is 33%.

**Table 2** Results of Fluency Components in Female vs. Mixed-Gender Speech

Aspect	Score
1 Automaticity	71%
2 Lexical Density	40%
3 Lexical Diversity	37%

The second data set was taken that comprised of speech of female speaker in mixed gender situation. There were 02 female respondents who spoke in mixed gender situation. The total number of their speech recording was 12 minutes. The first aspect of their speech concerning fluency was automaticity that was analyzed. The total spoken corpora consist of 852 words that were spoken in the duration of 12 minutes, resulting in speaking rate of 71 words per minute (WPM). The second aspect of fluency was lexical density that was analyzed. In the spoken corpora, the total number of words were 852, and the number of content words were 342, resulting in a lexical density of 40%. The third element of fluency taken in this study was lexical diversity. In analyzing fluency, all the entries of a same word were counted as single entry. Total words count of 852 in which 320 are distinct words, the lexical diversity as a result of 37%.

**Table 3** Results of Fluency Components in Male-Male Speech

Aspect	Score
1 Automaticity	63%
2 Lexical Density	43%
3 Lexical Diversity	39%

The third data set was taken that was comprised of speech of male speaker to their male addressee. There were 03 male respondents who spoke to their male counterparts. The total number of their speech recording was 18 minutes. The first aspect of their speech concerning fluency that was analyzed. The Words Per Minute (WPM) in the spoken corpora resulted in a WPM of 63. The second aspect of fluency was lexical density that was analyzed using TTR formula. Total words count of 1140 in which 498 were content words, the lexical density resulting 43%. The third element of fluency taken in this study was lexical diversity. In analyzing fluency, all the entries of a same word were counted as single entry. Lexical diversity in the spoken corpora was calculated by assessing the ratio of unique words to the total number of words. 1140 were total words and 452 were varied words, the lexical diversity was 39%.

**Table 4** Results of Fluency Components in Male vs Mixed Gender Speech

	Aspect	Score
1	Automaticity	85%
2	Lexical Density	49%
3	Lexical Diversity	50%

The fourth data set was taken that comprised of speech of male speaker in mixed gender situation. There were 2 male respondents who spoke in mixed gender situation. The total number of their speech recording was 12 minutes. The first aspect of their speech concerning fluency was automaticity that was analyzed. The Words Per Minute (WPM) in the spoken corpora was resulted in a WPM of 85. The second aspect of fluency was lexical density that was analyzed. Total words in the spoken corpora count of 1020 in which 500 were content words, the lexical density was 49%. The third element of fluency taken in this study was lexical diversity. In analyzing fluency, all the entries of a same word were counted as single entry. In the spoken corpora 1020 were total words and 520 were distinct words, the lexical diversity was 50%.

**Table 5** Overall Results of the Comparison of Fluency between Female and Male Participants

	Situation	Aspect	Score
1	Female-Female Speech	Automaticity	79.6%
		Lexical Density	46%
		Lexical Diversity	33%
2	Female-Mixed Gender	Automaticity	71%
		Lexical Density	40%
		Lexical Diversity	37%
3	Male-Male Speech	Automaticity	63%
		Lexical Density	43%
		Lexical Diversity	39%
4	Male-Mixed Gender	Automaticity	85%
		Lexical Density	49%
		Lexical Diversity	50%

## 10. Discussion

The comparison between female-to-female and female-to-mixed speech shows distinct differences in fluency, as reflected in their automaticity, lexical density, and lexical diversity. In the female-to-female scenario, the speech is characterized by a relatively high automaticity, with a rate of 79.6 words per minute (WPM), indicating a faster speech pace compared to the female-to-mixed scenario, where the WPM is 71. This suggests that when women speak to other women, they tend to communicate more quickly. However, when it comes to lexical density, the female-to-female interactions exhibit a higher content richness, with a lexical density of 46%, compared to 40% in female-to-mixed interactions. This indicates that conversations between women contain a higher proportion of content words, suggesting more substantive and information-rich exchanges. In contrast, lexical diversity is

slightly lower in female-to-female speech, at 33%, compared to 37% in female-to-mixed speech. This suggests that in mixed-gender settings, women tend to use a wider variety of words, possibly reflecting a more diverse or nuanced vocabulary when interacting with both genders. The analysis of male-to-male versus male-to-mixed speech reveals notable differences in fluency, as seen in their automaticity, lexical density, and lexical diversity. In male-to-male interactions, the speech is relatively slower, with a Words per Minute (WPM) rate of 63. In contrast, male-to-mixed speech is significantly faster, with a WPM of 85, suggesting that men speak more quickly in a mixed-gender setting. Lexical density, which measures the proportion of content words, is also higher in male-to-mixed interactions at 49%, compared to 43% in male-to-male speech. This suggests that when men speak in a mixed-gender context, their speech tends to be more content-rich and possibly more focused on conveying information. Furthermore, male-to-mixed speech exhibits greater lexical diversity, with 50% of the words being unique, compared to 39% in male-to-male speech. This indicates that in mixed-gender conversations, men use a wider variety of words.

## 11. Conclusion

The study concludes by attesting the hypothesis that gender of addressee has a strong influence on speaker's fluency. The comparison of speech between female-female, female-mixed gender, male-male, and male-mixed gender interactions reveals distinct differences in automaticity, lexical density, and lexical diversity. Women tend to speak faster and with higher content richness with same gender interactions, though they use a slightly narrower range of vocabulary compared to mixed-gender conversations. Conversely men speak more quickly, with greater content richness and lexical diversity in mixed-gender interactions, whereas their speech is slower and less varied in same gender conversations. These findings suggest that gender composition influences the automaticity, density, and diversity of speech. For teachers, it can provide valuable insights, how to design and deliver more effective speaking activities in the classroom that fulfill the needs of both male and female learners. For other researchers, this study can provide new perspectives and insights for future researches. The findings can be beneficial for fields such as psychology and sociology where effective communication is crucial.

## 12. Limitations and Delimitations

The study focuses on speaking skills, excluding other language skills i.e., reading, writing, and listening. Within specification it focuses on the role of addressee's gender not methodology related to speaking or curriculum teaching learning. It focuses on the students at one academic level which is not the representative of EFL learners at other academic levels. The population of the study is limited to a specific number of participants, which may not be representative of all EFL learners. EFL learners at lower or upper levels are not the part of the study, it only focuses on learners at an intermediate level by examining one EFL contexts, and did not consider other contexts.

## 13. Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the researchers offer some recommendations for bringing improvement in the fluency of EFL speech in similar contexts. When teacher teaching speaking skills to EFL students, it is essential to consider the addressee's gender. Teachers should design speaking activities that fulfill the specific needs of male and female students, acknowledging how the gender of the listener can impact spoken fluency. To effectively address these needs, teacher training programs should be developed that focus on the impact of addressee gender on spoken fluency, ensuring that educators are well-equipped to handle this aspect in the classroom. Increasing mixed-gender conversations can also help students develop their speaking skills in diverse contexts, promoting greater fluency. Additionally, it is important for teachers to educate students on how gender can affect communication, encouraging practice with both male and female partners. By making students aware of the differences in communication styles between genders, they can better adapt their speaking strategies according to their audience, leading to more effective and fluent communication.

## 14. Further Research

The present research primarily focused on fluency among EFL learners, but future studies could explore accuracy by analyzing grammatical correctness, error frequency, and the use of complex sentence structures in speech. In addition to gender, another variable to consider is age; future research could investigate how the age of both the speaker and the addressee influences EFL learners' spoken fluency or accuracy. Further, research could examine the impact of addressee gender on other language skills, such as listening, reading, or writing. The influence of addressee gender could also be further explored by comparing interactions with peers versus authority figures, such as teachers. Additionally, future research could examine the perception of addressee gender on EFL learners' spoken fluency in different contexts, such as formal versus informal settings or academic versus social conversations. Finally, investigating the impact of addressee gender on EFL learner's spoken fluency in different

modes of communication, such as face-to-face, online, or phone conversations, could provide further insights into this area of study.

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## Conflict of Interest

We declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of the paper.

## Author Contribution

The authors confirm their contribution to the paper as follows: **Study Conception and Design:** Hamad Ur Rahman; **Data Collection:** Jebran Khan; **Analysis and Interpretation of Results:** Ruba Urooj; **Draft Manuscript Preparation:** Rukhsana Ahmad. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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