

## CHALLENGES IN ENGLISH WRITING FOR UZBEK LEARNERS CAUSED BY THE ABSENCE OF GRAMMATICAL GENDER

Namangan State University  
Umarova Feruza Normamat qizi  
Mamatova Dilrabo Maxmudjanovna

**Abstract:** This study investigates the difficulties Uzbek learners face in developing English writing skills due to the absence of grammatical gender. Uzbek does not mark gender in pronouns or nouns, while English requires correct use of he, she, and it. These structural differences often lead to pronoun errors, lack of clarity, and reduced writing fluency. The study involved intermediate-level Uzbek EFL learners and collected data through short writing tasks, paragraph exercises, and semi-structured interviews. Findings show that first language transfer causes frequent pronoun mistakes and unclear references. Two teaching methods—contrastive pronoun awareness activities and structured guided writing tasks—were found to improve learners' accuracy, clarity, and confidence in writing. Addressing grammatical gender differences directly in teaching is essential for enhancing English writing skills among Uzbek learners.

**Keywords:** important skills, writing, grammatical gender, pronoun errors, language transfer, EFL teaching, writing accuracy

### Introduction

Writing is one of the most important skills in learning a foreign language. For Uzbek learners of English, being able to write accurately and clearly is essential for academic success and communication. However, many students face difficulties in writing English, even if they know grammar rules and vocabulary. One important reason for these difficulties is the absence of grammatical gender in the Uzbek language. Unlike English, Uzbek does not have gendered pronouns or gender agreement in nouns and adjectives. This difference can create specific challenges when learners try to write correctly in English.

In English, pronouns like he, she, and it show the gender of the subject, and sometimes adjectives or verbs are connected with gendered nouns. In Uzbek, the pronoun u can mean he, she, or it, depending on the context. Because Uzbek learners are not used to indicating gender in writing, they often make mistakes with pronouns or gender-specific words in English. For example, a learner might write “U went to the store” in English, leaving it unclear whether u refers to a male or female. These errors can affect the clarity and accuracy of written texts and make communication less effective.

Research in second language acquisition shows that learners often transfer rules from their first language into the target language. When structures in the first language do not exist in the second language, learners can experience confusion, hesitation, or repeated errors. For Uzbek learners, the lack of grammatical gender in their native language is a key factor that influences writing accuracy and fluency.

This study aims to examine the difficulties Uzbek learners face in developing English writing skills due to the absence of grammatical gender. It also seeks to explore effective teaching strategies that can help learners improve their writing accuracy, clarity, and confidence in English.

### **Research Methods**

This study used a qualitative approach to explore the difficulties Uzbek learners face in writing English due to the absence of grammatical gender. The participants were intermediate-level Uzbek EFL students studying at a university. Data were collected through short writing tasks, paragraph composition exercises, and semi-structured interviews. During the writing tasks, students were asked to write sentences and short paragraphs that included pronouns, descriptions, and narrative content. The written texts were analyzed for errors related to gender, such as incorrect use of he, she, or it. Interviews helped to understand learners' awareness of grammatical gender and the strategies they use when writing. Classroom observations were also conducted to see how students approach writing tasks in real learning situations. This method allowed for a detailed understanding of learners' difficulties and the underlying causes.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study show that the absence of grammatical gender in Uzbek significantly affects learners' ability to write accurately and fluently in English. Two major writing difficulties were observed: incorrect pronoun usage and lack of clarity in gender-specific contexts. These difficulties are closely linked to first language transfer and the structural differences between Uzbek and English.

The first difficulty is incorrect or inconsistent pronoun usage. In Uzbek, the pronoun *u* can mean he, she, or it, depending on the context, and there is no gender distinction in nouns or adjectives. For example, the Uzbek sentence "U maktabga bordi" can be translated literally as "He/She went to school". When writing in English, learners often produce sentences like "It went to school" or "He went to school" without clearly matching the pronoun to the intended subject. This demonstrates direct first language influence, where learners apply Uzbek pronoun rules to English writing. Ellis (1994) and Odlin (1989) explain that first language transfer is common in second language acquisition, particularly when learners' native language lacks a feature present in the target language. For Uzbek learners, the absence of grammatical gender makes it difficult to consistently choose he or she, leading to errors in written texts.

The second difficulty is lack of clarity in gender-specific contexts, which can make sentences ambiguous or confusing. In English, readers rely on pronouns and sometimes gender-specific nouns to understand who or what is being referred to. In writing tasks, learners often leave sentences like “U met her friend”, which, if translated from Uzbek without modification, may cause confusion about the subject’s gender. This problem is compounded in longer paragraphs or narratives, where multiple male and female characters are involved. According to research on cross-linguistic influence, learners struggle most when the first language does not provide cues that are obligatory in the second language (Lado, 1957; Comrie, 1989). In writing, this leads to repeated pronoun mistakes, hesitation during drafting, and a need for revision to clarify meaning.

Both difficulties also affect writing fluency and confidence. Learners may avoid using pronouns, repeat proper nouns excessively, or simplify sentences to prevent gender-related errors. For example, instead of writing “She gave him the book”, a learner might write “Maria gave John the book”, repeating names to avoid pronoun mistakes. This strategy maintains accuracy but makes writing less natural and more cumbersome. Nunan (2004) emphasizes that language learners often reduce complexity to avoid errors, which can limit expressive ability in writing tasks.

These challenges highlight the importance of explicit teaching strategies. Research suggests that learners benefit from contrastive exercises that clearly show differences between the first and target language (Lado, 1957; Ellis, 2006). By comparing Uzbek pronouns with English gendered pronouns in context, learners can develop awareness and gradually internalize correct usage. Task-based writing activities, guided practice, and feedback also help learners gain confidence while producing grammatically accurate texts.

In essence, the absence of grammatical gender in Uzbek creates specific challenges in English writing. Errors in pronoun usage and gender clarity are frequent, influenced by first language transfer, and affect both accuracy and fluency. Understanding these difficulties is essential for designing effective teaching methods that target the root causes of errors and support learners in producing clear, accurate, and confident English writing.

### **Teaching Methods to Overcome Writing Difficulties**

Based on the observed writing difficulties, it is clear that Uzbek learners need teaching strategies that specifically address the absence of grammatical gender. General writing practice alone is often insufficient, because learners tend to transfer Uzbek pronoun rules into English without realizing the differences. This section discusses two effective methods: contrastive pronoun awareness activities and structured guided writing tasks. Both methods aim to improve accuracy, clarity, and confidence in English writing.

**1. Contrastive Pronoun Awareness Activities.** The first method is to use contrastive pronoun awareness activities. This approach helps learners clearly understand the structural differences between Uzbek and English pronouns. In Uzbek, the single pronoun *u* refers to he, she, or it, but English requires choosing the correct pronoun based on gender. By highlighting this contrast explicitly, learners can better understand why pronoun selection is essential in English writing.

A practical classroom activity is a pronoun matching exercise. For example, the teacher writes several Uzbek sentences on the board, such as “*U do‘stini kutdi*” (He/She waited for his/her friend). Students then rewrite the sentence in English, choosing the correct pronouns: “He waited for his friend” or “She waited for her friend”. The teacher can discuss context clues to guide the correct choice. Over time, learners begin to notice patterns and apply them more accurately in longer writing tasks.

Another activity is pronoun substitution drills. Learners receive short paragraphs in Uzbek and practice replacing *u* with the correct English pronouns when translating. This repetition strengthens awareness and reduces errors in their written work. Research on language transfer and contrastive analysis supports this approach, showing that making learners explicitly aware of structural differences decreases negative transfer (Lado, 1957; Odlin, 1989).

**2. Structured Guided Writing Tasks.** The second method is structured guided writing tasks, which allow learners to practice writing sentences and paragraphs with gender-specific pronouns in controlled contexts. These tasks reduce cognitive load, helping learners focus on applying correct English pronouns without being overwhelmed by content generation at the same time.

One example is a controlled narrative writing task. Students are given a story outline with male and female characters, such as: Ali met Maria. \_\_\_ gave \_\_\_ a book. \_\_\_ thanked \_\_\_. Students must complete the story using the correct pronouns: “He gave her a book. She thanked him.” This task explicitly trains learners to pay attention to gender agreement in context, gradually internalizing proper usage.

Another useful activity is peer review with guided prompts. Students exchange their written paragraphs and identify errors related to pronouns or gender clarity. Prompts like “Check if all pronouns match the correct gender” or “Rewrite unclear sentences using the correct pronouns” encourage learners to self-monitor and learn from each other. Task-based writing research suggests that guided feedback and peer interaction help learners correct errors and improve accuracy (Nunan, 2004; Ellis, 2006).

Both methods can be combined in a progressive learning sequence. First, learners participate in contrastive pronoun awareness exercises to understand structural differences. Then, they apply this knowledge in structured writing tasks with guided feedback. Over time, learners become more confident and make fewer pronoun-related errors, improving both accuracy and clarity in written English. Contrastive pronoun awareness activities and structured guided writing tasks directly target the root causes of writing difficulties for Uzbek learners. By making learners aware of cross-linguistic differences and providing controlled practice in writing, these methods help reduce first language interference, strengthen grammatical accuracy, and increase overall confidence in English writing.

### Conclusion

This study examined the difficulties Uzbek learners face in developing English writing skills due to the absence of grammatical gender. The findings show that learners often make errors in pronoun usage and produce sentences that lack clarity in gender-specific contexts. These difficulties are closely linked to first language transfer, as Uzbek does not require gender distinctions in pronouns or adjectives. As a result, learners may struggle to select the correct pronouns in English, which can reduce the accuracy, fluency, and clarity of their written texts.

The study also highlighted the impact of these challenges on learners' confidence. Many students simplify their sentences, repeat proper nouns, or avoid using pronouns to prevent mistakes, which limits the natural flow and complexity of their writing. Two teaching methods were identified as particularly effective in addressing these issues. Contrastive pronoun awareness activities help learners understand the differences between Uzbek and English pronouns, while structured guided writing tasks allow controlled practice of correct pronoun usage in context. Together, these strategies support learners in internalizing English grammatical gender rules, improving both accuracy and clarity. In conclusion, directly addressing the absence of grammatical gender in teaching can significantly enhance Uzbek learners' writing skills, helping them produce more precise, clear, and confident English texts.

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