

Male and Female EFL Teachers' Politeness Strategies in Oral Discourse and their Effects on the Learning Process and Teacher-Student Interaction

Mehri Monsefi

Department of English
East Azarbaijan Science and Research Branch
Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran
Monsef_mehr@yahoo.com

Yaser Hadidi

Department of English
The University of Tabriz
Tabriz, Iran
hadidiy@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The objective of the present study is to explore the effect of gender and use of politeness strategies by teachers on the patterns of classroom interaction between teachers and students and learning process in Iranian EFL classrooms. Ten classes in one term lasting 90 minutes each were observed and recorded and transcripts were worked out. Frequency and percentage of discourse acts produced by 5 male and 5 female teachers who were all MA holders in TEFL were computed and compared. As a result, students were seen to be positively influenced by the use of more polite strategies in the EFL context, while also the use of more polite strategies by female teachers had a positive effect on the teacher-student interaction and learning process. Although male and female teachers shared some features in their oral discourse from the point of view of using politeness strategies, the patterns of teacher student interaction were gender related and there were some differences between them. At the end of the survey, it was found that female teachers were more interactive, supportive and acted more patiently with their student's mistakes. They asked more referential questions, gave more compliments and used fewer directive forms, but, on the other hand, male teachers used a more competitive style in their classes, more display questions, and one could see more evaluation on their part, while they also used fewer acknowledgement forms than female teachers. It was also found that there is a direct relationship between using polite strategies and learning process. There are clear implications for EFL contexts, like teachers' knowledge of pragmatic and whole-person goings-on in the classroom and the huge otherwise unknown effects that teachers' personal styles of behavior and socio-psychologically varied treatment of the students could have on the learning outcomes.*

Keywords: *Politeness, Politeness Strategies, EFL teacher, Teacher Student Interaction*

1. INTRODUCTION

That gender is a factor in the process of teacher/student interaction in the classroom has always been something of a widely acknowledged assumption, that, in short, the gender of teachers influences the quality and quantity of interactions in the classroom. The goal of a theory of linguistic politeness which takes politeness as its starting point should not be to explain why speakers say what they say and to predict the possible effects of utterances on addressees. It should aim to explain how all the interactants engaged in an ongoing verbal interaction negotiate the development of emergent networks and evaluate their own position and the positions of others within those networks.

In a recapitulation of visible differences in male-female talk, Lakoff (1973) points out that the general characteristics of a class taught by male teacher are faster-paced, much (excessive) teacher floor time, sudden topic shifts, and shorter but more frequent sudden turns. He argues that, similarly, female teachers are usually described as communicative facilitators and perhaps more tolerant of first language use. Female teachers are also described as being too forceful in choosing topics and asking too many questions.

The question of women asking questions is a complex one. Since Robin Lakoff's famous discussion of language and women's place, linguists have been examining the functions of questions in female speech. Lakoff (1973) argued that tag questions and questions generally were more often employed by female speakers. On questions or requests for information, he draws

attention to the facts that the more one compounds a request, the more characteristic it is of women's speech, the less of men's. A request such as 'won't you close the door?' which is an indirect speech act, is a characteristic of female speech, while 'close the door', a direct speech act, is characteristic of male speech. Lakoff further noted that female speech "sounds much more polite than men's" because of the features such as tag questions and the greater indirectness primarily with the intent to smooth and perpetuate the conversational flow.

Now it is important to understand what 'politeness' is. What does it mean? Politeness is influenced by P (power), D (distance), and R (relationship), and also affected by speech events. Politeness is the use of the right word or phrase in the proper context, which is determined by the rules that are prevalent in society. Watts (2003) states that politeness is determined by the relationship between behavior and the suitability convention, not by specific linguistic forms. For Goffman, 'face' is the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact, an image of self-delineated person in terms of approved social attributes (Goffman, 1955/1967).

In Brown and Levinson's theory, the strength or weightiness of a particular Face Threatening Act (FTA) (e.g. a request, an invitation, or a refusal) is the sum of these factors (1987, p.76-80): 1) social distance (D) between speaker and hearer refers to the degree of familiarity and solidarity they share; 2) relative power (P) of hearer over speaker in respect to hearer means the degree to which the speaker can impose his/her will on speaker; and 3) absolute rating (Rx) of imposition in terms of the expenditure of goods or services by hearer, the right of speaker to perform the act, and the degree to which the hearer welcomes the imposition.

- $W_x = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + R_x$

Following Brown and Levinson, three factors are calculated to determine the weight of the FTAs (i.e., the degree of risk to students' face) in the classroom context and are expected to influence its redress (i.e., the execution of politeness strategies). In the classroom context, teachers are supposed to have much knowledge and experience, they are the guiders in the classroom learning activities, and therefore to enjoy more authority over students and have more power than students. It is teachers' prevailing status in the classroom that brings on relatively great distance between teachers and students. However, the value of distance is changeable; teachers and students can be familiar with each other as time goes on. Rating of imposition in the classroom interaction is referred to as the degree of burdens that teachers put on students' shoulders or the extent of seriousness of any criticism or blame. With regard to EFL classrooms, when applying politeness strategies, the teacher should take three other factors into consideration. The first factor is age. It is easier to understand that the younger a person is, the less awareness he/she has in term of politeness. The second one is students' ratio of gender. As Lakoff (1975) points out, women's language represents an overall conventional politeness. The more girls a class has, the higher degree of politeness is supposed to be used. The third is students' level of English proficiency. EFL context is a special place where non native language is used more frequently. The higher students' overall level of English proficiency, the better students can understand teachers' talk, and the higher awareness students may have in teachers' politeness strategy.

Politeness occupies a central place in linguistic pragmatics. It has been suggested (e.g. Lakoff, 1972, 1973; Brown and Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1980,1983) that politeness is another level to conversational interaction besides the rules of the cooperative principle. Robin Lakoff (1977b) sees Grice's rules as essentially rules of clarity, and proposes that there are two prior rules of pragmatic competence. These are: Make yourself clear and be polite. She takes Grice's maxims as an approximation, at least, of how you conform to the rule making yourself clear and proposes her own three rules of politeness (Lakoff, 1977: 88):

- Formality: don't impose/remain aloof;
- Hesitancy: give the addressee his options;
- Equality or camaraderie: act as though you and the addressee were equal/make him feel good.

Lakoff (1977b: 89) elaborates the second rule as permitting addressee to decide his own options. Leech's view of politeness involves a set of politeness maxims analogous to Grice's maxims. Among these are (Leech, 1983:132):

- Tact Maxim: Minimize cost to other. Maximize benefit to other.
- Generosity Maxim: Minimize benefit to self. Maximize cost to self.
- Approbation Maxim: Minimize dispraise of other. Maximize praise of other.
- Modesty Maxim: Minimize praise of self. Maximize dispraise of self.

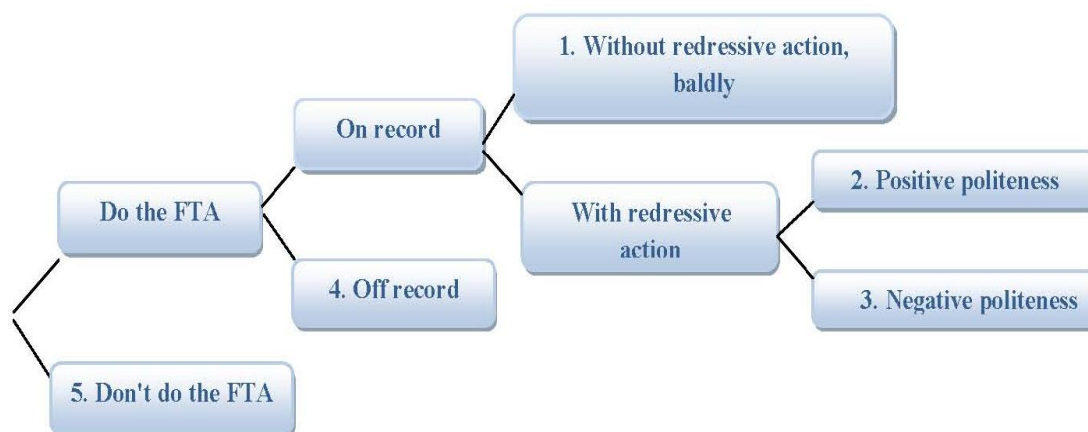


Fig1. *Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory*

2. THIS STUDY

2.1. Research Questions

1. Do male and female teachers have different conversational traits in EFL classroom context?
2. What types of politeness strategies are employed by these two groups of male and female teachers to soften the impact of face threatening acts?

2.2. Context

This research was carried out at one of the major language institutes in Tabriz, Iran. Participants were 12 to 15-year-old male students and their teachers had to cover Connect books during 30 sessions. 90 percent of the students were L1 Turkish speakers. Students in this institute were learning English as a foreign language. They were monolingual speakers studying in the medium of English.

2.3. Participants

10 teachers and their students in 10 classes took part in this study. Five of these were female and the other five were male teachers. Therefore, there were five classes that had female teachers and were assigned as group A, while another five classes had male teachers assigned as group B. The students (all male) were taught by these female and male teachers. All of the teachers had an M.A degree in Teaching of English as a Foreign Language.

2.4. Instruments

In this study, the researchers approach data collection and analysis using a mixed design, i.e.both quantitative and qualitative paradigms of research. On the qualitative side, it involves class observation and questionnaires.

2.5. Data Collection Procedure

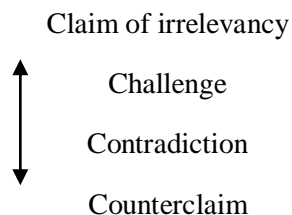
The process of data collection comprised two steps. The first step included the observation of classes and tape-recording the classroom conversations in which one of the researchers was present as a non-participant observer. Using questionnaires was the second set of data.

2.6. Data Analysis

The participants' responses were analyzed in two steps. First, invalid responses were discarded and the total number of valid responses was determined. In the second step, when identifying the utterances of disagreement in the responses, Muntigl and Turnbull's (1995) taxonomy was applied. In this taxonomy, five steps of disagreement which include 'claim of irrelevancy',

‘challenge’, ‘contradiction’ and ‘counterclaim’ were recognized. Then the model of politeness strategies developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) was employed for counting and analyzing the politeness strategies.

Most aggravating



Least aggravating

Fig2. Aggravation-Mitigation Continuum (Muntigl & Turnbull 1995)

Table1. Positive politeness in teachers’ four activities in classroom

Positive politeness	
Instructions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Let’s</i> begin our class. 2. Today we will learn Section A, Unit 2. 3. <i>Could you</i> please read new words to us? 4. Who <i>would like</i> to read new words to the class? 5. <i>Please</i> read carefully and find a similar word for “disgusting”. 6. <i>Shall</i> we move to the topic of the text? 7. Talking about the generation gap, I think we all are familiar with this. 8. Now <i>I would like</i> to ask one of you? <i>Could you</i> please give us an example of different views over clothes (or make-up) between parents and children?
Motivation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Would you like</i> to answer this question? 2. Why don’t you translate what you are thinking about the generation gap into English?
Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You all have done a wonderful job in new words. 2. All of you have done a perfect job. 3. <i>Excellent!</i> 4. <i>Impressive!</i> 5. Keep working hard and good luck in next time’s vocabulary quiz.
Classroom management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quiet <i>please!</i> 2. (Time is up!) <i>Would you please</i> stop talking? 3. Now <i>group discussion</i> time. You three are group one.

Table2. Negative politeness strategies in teachers’ four activities in classroom

Negative politeness	
Instructions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Now please <i>read</i> new words after me. 2. That’s all for new words. <i>Please stop</i> here. 3. Now <i>look at</i> the whiteboard and think about questions here. 4. <i>I</i> appreciate your trying, but you are supposed to illustrate the problem-solving of the generation gap. 5. This question is kind of difficult. Please <i>think</i> carefully. 6. That’s all for the questions. Now <i>I want</i> you to do translation on page 18.
Motivation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gentlemen please, what are your opinions? 2. “<i>Is my father enjoy classical music?</i>” <i>Maybe you can correct this sentence?</i> 3. <i>I’m thinking</i>, perhaps, you <i>can</i> have a try.
Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Well-done, Mr. Wang.
Classroom management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Now <i>please</i> practice this sentence structure with your desk-mate. 2. You, <i>please</i> come here. 3. <i>Can</i> you sit here?

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results of Class Observation

3.1.1. Positive Politeness Strategies

The findings of this study provide some evidence for the existence of a relationship between the teacher’s gender and the type of politeness strategies teachers’ use, as well as the positive

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influence of using more polite strategies on learning process and teacher-student interaction. Although both male and female teachers were concerned about using politeness strategies, these two groups revealed differences in the application of such strategies. The results of the study showed that female teachers are more sensitive about using more polite strategies, but male teachers used different strategies such as partial agreement, uncertainty markers like 'maybe', 'I don't know' (Pearson, 1986), and giving explanation for their disagreement to soften their disagreement. In line with Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies, female teachers attempt to minimize the disagreement between themselves and others much more than male teachers. It was also found that male teachers are more direct in expressing ideas than female teachers are. They expressed their disagreement in a direct way and didn't use positive statements to reduce the threat to the face of their interlocutors.

Results showed that female teachers used twice as many thanking responses as their male counterparts did and they used more strategies and supportive moves that aimed at minimizing the degree of imposition of the request on the student in comparison with male teachers. But male teachers made more declarative and imperative sentences. Some illustrative examples of their oral discourse in the classroom will be presented below.

Symbols of intimacy were used more by those teachers who tried to have more symmetrical relationships with their students and those who tried to decrease the level of imposition on their students; thus, they can create a better context for their learners in order to learn in a stress-free environment, while the students are positively influenced by using these strategies and, as a result, teacher-student interaction improves. In other words, when there is a social distance (non-intimacy) between teacher and student, this asymmetrical relationship negatively affects teacher-student interaction. Brown and Levinson reiterate that there is an iconic relation between asymmetrical social relations and asymmetrical usage (whenever and wherever there is social distance between interlocutors, linguistic choices will be directly influenced too; so social distance/asymmetry triggers linguistic variation and change), yet that alone will not explain, for example, the direction in which particular pronouns are used.

Excerpt (1) is an example of a student-teacher conversation in the classroom interaction in one of the classes in the mentioned institute. Positive politeness strategies are used by the teacher in order for the students and teacher to feel close to each other and reduce the threat to students' face.

(1)

Female Teacher: *Okay, good morning, class.*

Some students: *Good morning, ma'am.*

Female Teacher: *How are you today?*

Some Students: *I am fine, and you?*

Teacher: *I am not good.*

Student (male): *Hwoow*

It can be identified that both students and the teacher employed positive politeness strategies to open the class session; there is use of in-group identity markers (Brown and Levinson, 1987, pp. 107-108). It was done by using group identity marker "class" for calling students, and the students use "ma'am" to call a female teacher who was considered as a respectable person. Calling 'class' instead of 'children' or 'students' could be categorized as a positive politeness strategy, that is, the teacher did not position herself as the more powerful agent, nor did she tend to keep students at a distance.

The strategy was to reduce the threat of face (of dignity) to students. Similarly, referring to 'ma'am' for female teacher, the students gave respect and felt close to the teacher as well. This set of data indicates that the two parties have a good emotional relationship. This was further demonstrated in the utterance 'I'm fine, and you?', 'I'm not good', and followed by an expression of sympathy like 'hwoow' from the students. This expression is uttered with an exaggerated

intonation, stress and some aspects of prosody to show sympathy (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 104). In addition, because of the limitations of utterances to express something, it was possible to express politeness non-verbally.

(2)

Female Teacher: *Yea ... okay, so far any questions?*

Students: *(no answer)*

Teacher: *Hello...?*

Students: *Hello ... Ma'am.*

Teacher: *Any question?*

Students: *No ... Ma'am.*

Excerpt (2) shows that the social distance and the power inequality of the students and the teachers were small. It can be seen from the students' response to the teacher directing student's attention 'Hello..?'; they responded by repeating the same expression 'Hello..' followed by personalmarker 'Ma'am'. It means that the students felt close to the teacher but still held her in due respect.

Giving weight to the students' participation in giving opinions, feelings and ideas reduces the power of the teacher and leaves room for her/his better knowledge and experiences. This can also be illustrated in the following dialogue in excerpt (3). The teacher tried to give opportunities to the students to participate in the learning process. She wanted her students to be involved and active in discussing the subject. Such activities would level out power distribution in the classroom interaction in a desirable way.

(3)

Teacher: *Okay, have you ever talked about the positive sides...of advertisement?*

Students: *Yeah!!!*

Teacher: *What are they? What are the positive sides of...er.er. ad. Advertisement?*

Students: *(no response)*

Teacher: *What are the positive sides of advertisement?*

Students: *Product!*

Student 1: *New product!*

Teacher: *Yea, we can get... what?*

Students: *Information...*

Student 1: *New product...*

Teacher: *Okay, new product! What else?*

Students: *The function!*

Teacher: *The function. Yea, that is information, new product.. What else..*

The limitation of the linguistic ability of students may also have contributed to the difference in strategy choices. Sometimes, the students used short expressions in their responses to the teacher's questions, because of the inadequate knowledge or skills in English. There were some utterances violating the politeness principle, quality maxim, one of Grice's maxims (Renkema, 1993), yet they were acceptable in the classroom. Both the teachers and students tried to make their contribution as required.

Moreover, students tended to use some interpersonal function markers, such as cooperation, agreement, disagreement, response, reaction, checking understanding, and confirmation. For example, some cooperation and agreement markers were found in excerpt (4).

(4)

Teacher: *Viewers. Okay, what else?*

Students: *Advertisement.....*

Teacher: *Advertisement.....? Yeah! Okay, advertisement interrupts the program on the TV. Do you agree?*

Students: *Yes.....*

Teacher: *Okay, but a...a...a... have you ever talked about the positive sides ... of advertisement?*

Students: *Yeah!!!*

Some interpersonal function markers were also employed by teachers and students in their interaction, such as disagreement markers like the ones in excerpt (5).

(5)

Teacher: *Have you heard about her news?*

Students: *No, never*

Teacher: *About her problem?*

Students: *No, never*

Other interpersonal markers used by teacher and students in the classroom were reaction markers, understanding markers, confirmation markers, and some textual function markers such as topic switching, turn taking, repairing, and opening markers.

On the other hand, because of their pragmatic awareness, the teacher used indirect speech acts in classroom interaction.

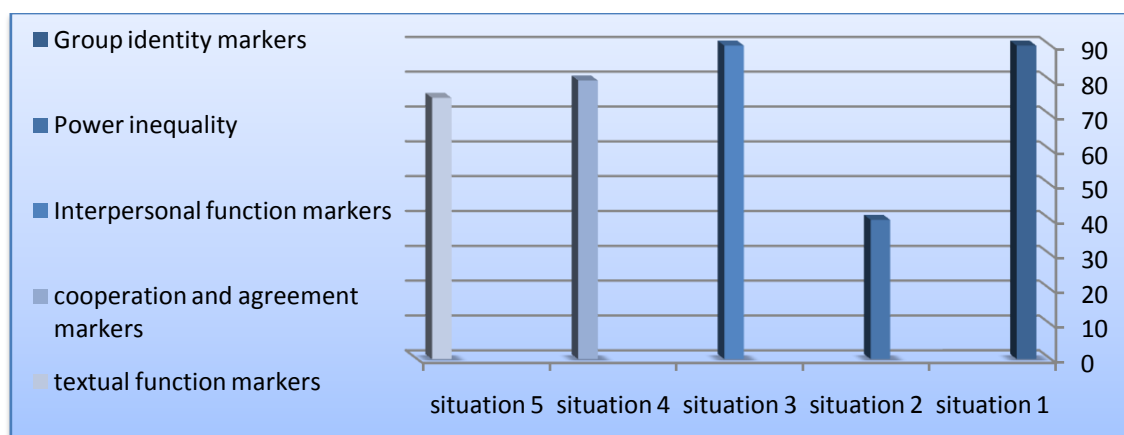


Fig3. *Positive politeness strategies*

3.1.2. *Negative Politeness Strategies*

Negative politeness strategies are intended to avoid giving offense by showing deference. These strategies include questioning, hedging, and presenting disagreements as opinions (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Excerpt (6) is an example of one of the occasions where the teacher softened her direct expression with the conventionally polite expression 'please'.

(6)

Teacher: *The first speaker. Come on. Please come here.*

In excerpt (7), the teacher tried to modify a direct expression with a polite expression in order to avoid a great deal of imposition on the students. He used expression 'a little' to lessen the imposition by implying that the students were not asked to do very much.

(7)

Teacher: *urm! yea! Before we start our class today, I would like to review a little about err..err..err.. the materials we have discussed together. Hmm.. Do you still remember the...err...err...readers' letter?*

Students: *Yes...!!!*

Another strategy that was often used as a negative politeness strategy to emphasize both the speaker's and the addressee's personal involvement in the matter was creating imperative expression. The teacher used modifying elements and politeness markers in his talk. He expressed his request to the student in a polite way by using the word 'please'.

A common way in which the teacher softened her requests was using the affirmative to satisfy a request; then, she lessened the power of the message by creating an impression of option, in that sense serving as a politeness device, as in excerpt (8).

(8)

Teacher: *Ok, ... yeah! err..err..err because now we are err..err..err.. we talk to the ..you know the writing cycle. So, it's time for you to produce your own advertisement but don't worry to do that individually, you will err..err..err.. Work in groups. Ok!*

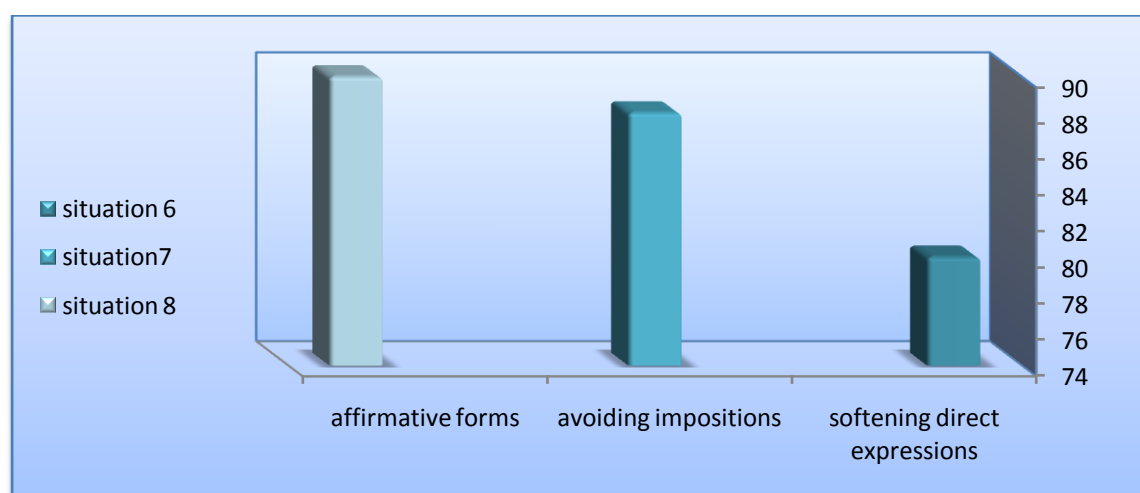


Fig4. Negative politeness strategies

3.1.3. Bald On-record Strategies

The teacher's authoritative role in the class was reflected when she gave commands and instructions, and made requests. Through the choice of direct strategies for giving instruction (excerpt 9), the teacher imposed and created pressure on the students.

(9)

Teacher: *Bring your notebook Ahmad! Come on...!. The time is not enough. Second, Ali!, come here! Reza! ...come here!*

In the classroom context with its asymmetrical power relationship, teachers are in the position of institutional power and it could be argued that this gets partly expressed through the use of direct strategies. The expression 'bring your notebook!' indicated that the teacher did not try to minimize the threat to students' face. These strategies were common and acceptable in classroom interaction as they felt that they had a close relationship. The interaction in the classroom is still largely dominated by the teacher such as giving instruction, giving explanation, showing appreciation, encouraging, motivating, and answering students' questions. The students performed mainly in responding to teacher's instruction, questions and encouragement. Because of the limitations in linguistic ability, the students tend to use some interpersonal function markers, such as cooperation, agreement, disagreement, response, reaction, and confirmation, and use non-verbal expressions. The linguistic expressions in the verbal interaction of both teachers and students are addressing, thanking, apologizing, encouraging, and leave-taking. The politeness strategies employed are positive politeness, negative politeness, and bold on-record strategies.

3.2. Answers to Research Question 1

The results of this study showed that male and female teachers have different conversational traits in the EFL classroom context. In what follows, we discuss different strategies applied by these two groups of teachers in the following.

3.2.1. Instructional Strategies

In order to explore the gender variable, two main subcategories of teachers' classroom discourse were examined qualitatively through textual analysis and quantitatively through calculation of frequency of use. The following sub-categories were examined individually as follows:

1. Indirect instructions include the following:

- Use of pronouns in conjunction with modals as in the following constructions:

- *First person+verb*
- *Second person+verb*
- *First person+verb+second person+verb*

2. Directive Instructions

- Imperatives: verbs used to give firm commands, directions and instructions.
- Hortative: The phrase 'let's' implies a sharing of power with the students unlike imperatives and statements of obligation, necessity and request which tend to make the power of the teacher quite explicit.

Feminine language has traditionally been seen as inclusive and sharing while masculine language expresses dominance and priorities of the individual over the group (Holmes 1995:187). For the study, the use of pronouns was chosen as a means of analyzing the truth of this claim in the discourse of EFL teachers.

The use of traditionally inclusive (and therefore feminine) 'we' with the traditionally exclusive (and therefore masculine) 'I' was compared at the same time. The use of 'you' was examined separately from the use of 'I' as when the former was not used with 'I'. For example, in a sentence like 'you need to write this down' (*second person+verb*), it can be seen to indicate a student-centered, rather than a teacher-centered approach to teaching, i.e., the speaker focused on the students' task, not on the importance of the teacher.

However, when the teacher was 'I' in conjunction with 'you' as in the sentence 'I want/would like you to write this down' (*First person+verb+second person+verb*), there is emphasis on the speaker, while also clearly delineating the addressee. The objective for investigating pronouns is that use of each of these person verbs implies a subtle shift in roles, relationships and expectations: in addition to which statements of obligations and necessity can also be determined through the use of modals.

The use of the first person plural 'we', according to the principles of deixis, generally indicated common ground and the building of solidarity between teachers and students (Wales, 1996:60). While the use of the second person 'you' serves to distance or separate the teacher from the students (Wales, 1996:3). In other contexts, the use of 'you' can also be used to express teacher's expectations. The use of directives (imperatives and hortative), modals which indicate external compulsion on the speaker and modals which indicate internal compulsion or compulsion by force, outside that of the speaker, was compared. Therefore, the analysis investigates teachers' use of direct imperatives/hortative versus their use of 'want', 'would like' versus 'need', 'must' and 'have to/have got to'.

Instructions are an instrumental aspect of the teacher's role as an organizer, defined for the purposes of this study as the language used by teachers in setting up tasks and in telling students what they will be doing during the course of the lesson. This combines those definitions of instructions as produced by Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) IRF structure and later revised in (1992). The table below summarizes these patterns, according to gender, based on the frequency with which participants used these discourse features:

Table3. Summary of instructional discourse pattern

Participant/Discourse Pattern	Female A	Female B	Female C	Male A	Male B	Male C
First Person Singular + Modals:						
I want you to	11		10	13	8	8
I would like to		6	4	18	6	21
I'm going to			2	1		4
First Person Plural + Modals:						
We're going to	2	11	7	3	4	6
We'll	2	1	9	1	4	
Second Person + Modals:						
Need to	15	7	1		4	1
Have to/ Have got to	11	13	8	16	4	5
must			3	3	2	3
Use of Let's	2	5	10	3		4
Imperatives	6	5	10	8	9	35

3.2.2. Questions Strategies

Below in table 4, a quick picture of the discourse of questions is mapped out.

Table4. Summary of questioning discourse

Participant	Female A	Female B	Female C	Male A	Male B	Male C
Knowledge Questions	29	10	19	13	8	23
Comprehension Questions	6	17	19	13	21	5
Application Questions	3	13	5	10	21	5
Procedural Questions	5	25	16	11	23	20

3. 2. 3. The Frequency of Referential Questions and Display Questions

There is a preference for display questions over referential questions by male teachers in the classes under this investigation. Most of the questions that male teachers use are display questions; they ask the questions and students answer them or they explain something and elicit students' responses or production. These display questions are used for the purposes of: checking or testing understanding, knowledge or skill; getting learners to review and practice previously learnt material, stimulating thinking or probing more deeply into issues. Referential questions, on the other hand, are beneficial to the development of students' communicative competence, with female teachers tending to use more referential questions.

Table5. Interactional features of male and female teachers with students in the classroom

Male teacher	Female teacher
Use more directive forms	Use less directive forms
More warning	More patient and supportive
Use display questions more	Use referential questions more
More evaluation	More acknowledgement

3.3. Answers to Research Question 2

The results show that female teachers favor using positive politeness strategies, and they use more group identity markers. They show tendencies geared to decreasing power inequality. Female teachers use more interpersonal function markers and cooperation and agreement markers. They also use textual function markers in their oral discourse. They don't want to impose their power and authority on their students and they don't desire to keep a distance from students. They were friendly with their students and used friendly facial expressions. They tend to hold classes which are more learner-centered and give opportunities to their students to participate in class activities. They tend to be emotionally close to their students, appearing to act on the feeling that this would help them to communicate with their students easily. Female teachers use softening expressions in their direct expressions in order to avoid a great deal of imposition on the students. They try to soften their requests by using affirmative forms to satisfy a request.

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On the other hand, the data gathered from the observation and voice recording of both male and female teachers' oral discourse shows that there are some differences in the female and male teachers' oral discourse from the point of view of using lexis. Female teachers use differentiated vocabulary in trivial areas, they use weaker swear words if at all, and they use adjectives evoking triviality. They use more intensifying adverbs. On the other hand, male teachers tend to use stronger swear words and neutral adjectives. But from the point of view of syntax, female teachers tend to use tag questions, subordinate clauses, with a higher average length of sentences, introductory adverbial clauses and standard language norms, but male teachers use colloquial language and directives. Female teachers tend to use cooperative conversational style but male teachers tend to use a competitive style, but if we compare female and male teacher's interactional features, we will find that male teachers use more directive forms, but female teachers use less directive forms. Female teachers are more patient and supportive. They use referential questions more, but male teachers use display questions more. One can see more evaluation on the part of male teachers, but more acknowledgements on the part of female teachers. Positive politeness strategies are demonstrated mainly by reducing the threat of face using group identity markers and expressions of sympathy, showing respect and establishing a close relationship, and friendly and enthusiastic facial expressions. To reduce power, teachers try to give weight to the students' participation in giving opinions, feelings and ideas.

They also use indirect speech acts and solidarity makers to soften the illocutionary force of their speech acts. Negative politeness strategies are applied in making imperative expressions, softening the direct expressions with the conventionally polite expression 'please', lessening the imposition and the power of the message, using the affirmative form to satisfy a request, and creating an impression of option. These strategies include hedging and presenting disagreements as opinions while 'bald on record' is mainly employed by teachers in giving commands and instructions, and making requests. Bald-on-record is applied by using direct speech acts, not trying to minimize the threat to the students' face, and imposing and creating pressure on the interlocutor.

3.4. Questionnaires

Below is a snapshot of the information gathered from students and teachers.

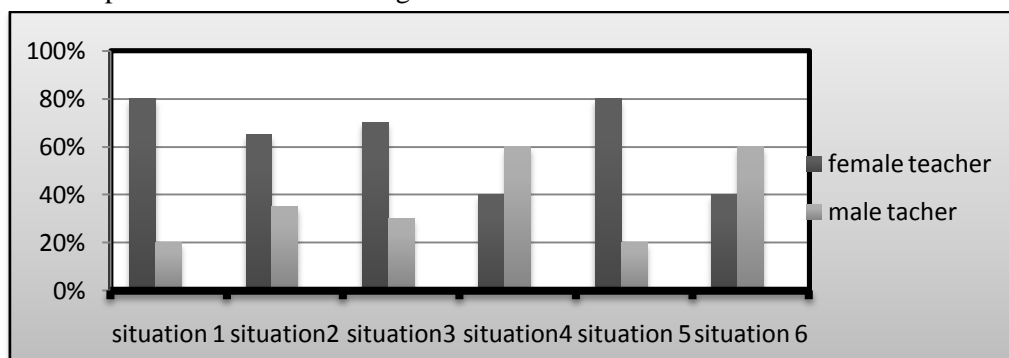


Fig5. Mean percentile in questionnaires which were filled by the male and female teachers

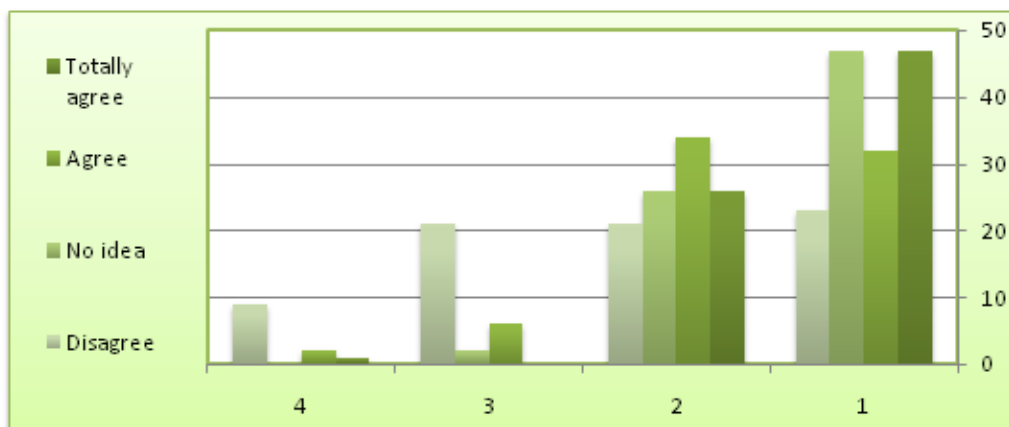


Fig6. Student's Attitudes toward the importance of teachers' politeness strategies

4. CONCLUSION

Going with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, and on the basis of the results of this study, we find that positive politeness strategies are preferred over negative ones. As is common knowledge, positive politeness is oriented towards an individual's positive self-image and emphasizes the need for association between teachers and students. By adopting more positive strategies, the female teachers mean to reduce the threat of FTAs and shorten the distance between them and the students. Using Brown and Levinson's (1987) definitions and assumptions about disagreement, it was found that the speech act of disagreement is most likely to constitute a threat to the addressee's positive face as disagreement usually questions the recipient's competence or even truthfulness and thus damages his or her self-image.

In classes which were managed by female teachers, it was seen that they used many different linguistic means of realizing positive politeness in an attempt to claim common ground by seeking agreement, sharing interests and treating students as in-group members and friends. Besides, the teacher utilizes positive politeness strategy to claim association by virtue of the fact that teachers and students are co-operators in most cases. Positive politeness can make teachers satisfy students' positive face and save their negative face by offering help, asserting understanding of students' needs, showing sympathy for students when they have difficulties or when they suffer embarrassment.

In sum, this study has two important conclusions: female and male teachers have different conversational traits and there is a direct relationship between using more polite strategies and learning process and teacher student interaction.

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AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY



Dr. Yaser Hadidi is Assistant Professor of English Studies in the Department of English, The University of Tabriz, Iran. His areas of Interest include Systemic Functional Linguistics, Discourse Analysis and Literary Linguistics of prose fiction, among others.



Mehri Monsefi is an experienced teacher and an MA graduate of TEFL from the Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tabriz, Iran. Her MA thesis on which this paper is based dealt with politeness strategies as manifested in the classroom and in the interaction between teachers and students.