



**RESEARCH PAPER**

***Baetai!* *'Bachay!* *'Yaar !*, *'Oye !*: Learners' Perceptions about Classroom Discourses of Male and Female Pakistani ESL Teachers**

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**DOI**

[http://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2022\(6-1\)12](http://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2022(6-1)12)

**PAPER INFO**

**ABSTRACT**

**Received:**

October 03, 2021

**Accepted:**

January 10, 2022

**Online:**

January 15, 2022

**Keywords:**

Classroom  
Discourse,  
Discourse,  
Gender  
Language,  
Pedagogical  
Identities

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The current exploratory study was designed to investigate differences in the male and female ESL teachers' discourses in EFL classrooms. Insights from the discipline of discourse, Sinclair Coulthard's (1975) model, Difference theory and Socio-Constructionist theory formed the theoretical framework of the study. Data of the study was collected by using convenient sampling technique. The sample of the study was 100 students Master's Program at the department of English of a public university in Pakistan. The results of the study show that majority of the learners (around 60%) are of the view that the classroom discourses of the female ESL teachers are different from the male ESL teachers discourses in their nonverbal classroom behaviour use of hedges, softer expressions and modal verbs. The greater use of clearer indicators of differences of the classroom discourses of the teachers appeared in their paralinguistic, nonverbal behaviour and prosodic features.

**Introduction**

'The beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder' goes a frequently quoted citation. If beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, the beauty of sounds lies in the ears of the listener, so to speak. While this world contains limitless colours and shades of sights that fill human heart with admiration and pleasure, there is rich variety of sounds and pure music in the world of nature that make our body and soul sway with pleasure. The linguistic landscape of this world seems to be replete with varied kaleidoscopes of human sounds in the form of languages, dialects, idiolects and accents. All these languages and dialects are signs of the Almighty Allah, the Creator

of this vast and unfathomable universe. The variation of human sounds is part of the overall beauty of nature and scheme of existence and identification. Humans identify one another because of their dialects, accents, idiolects, prosodic features, paralinguistic and linguistic idiosyncrasies. Thus, similar patterns of variations and identification exist in the communication of men and women, boys and girls.

Gender and language interrelate to each other. Language of a society greatly influences its social and cultural values and norms. Gender plays a major role in different use of language by men and women. Gender is a social definition of men and women. Males and females use different types of language in the same situation. The use of different language by boys and girls in the same context is due to their biological make-up and their social roles. For example, men mostly use language to transfer knowledge and to give directions while women use it to interact in society (Minasyan, 2017). Social context influences the behaviour of males and females in the society. Sights and sounds around us influence our social behaviour. Teachers' interactions with students in the classroom or classroom discourses play important roles in shaping the learners inside-classroom and outside-classroom discourses. Besides, classroom discourses stand for pedagogical identities of ESL teachers as well. Therefore, from pedagogical and linguistic perspectives, it is important to study the classroom discourses of male and female ESL teachers. Furthermore, learners' perceptions about their teachers are also important. How do learners perceive the classroom-discourses of their instructors? In this context, the current study was designed to investigate differences in the male and female ESL teachers' discourses in ELT classrooms.

## **Gender**

In academic domains the discipline of gender studies undertakes social, psychological and political studies with regard to men and women in society. It deals with human perceptions, responses and cultural approaches about or towards gender. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1999) and Doray (2005) make an argument about gender and sex and hold that sex is a biological reproductive capacity of male and female, while gender is the social identity of a biological sex. Thus, as already explained, gender refers to men and women as natural categories of human beings in society or gender variations in human world.

## **Gender and Language**

As already stated, language variations do exist across human genders. Initially, research on language and gender focused primarily on the linguistic characteristics of women. As a result, we have become aware of all the details of how women speak and use hedges while how men speak remained undiscovered, as far as some early reported attempts are concerned. But, since contraries set off each other,

it is very difficult to believe that how scholars could focus only on women's characteristic language without comparing women's language with the language of men's language. Lakoff (as cited in Doray, 2005) termed man's language as 'powerful', 'direct', 'clear' and 'succinct' (p. 205). Not only do gender influences the speech produced by men and women but it also influences how society responds to the gender variations in human world.

### **Gender and Social Influence**

Xia (2013) states that language and society have a great relationship together; any change in the society gives birth to a change in the language. Moreover, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1999) state that girls and boys grow and develop differently and people respond to both of them differently when they are growing as babies. People behave gently to female babies and playfully to male babies (Ali, 2016).

### **Gender and Cultural Influence**

Culture is shared knowledge. Shared values, practices, traditions, customs and beliefs make culture. "Culture is an umbrella term which takes into account aims, traditions, capabilities, techniques and mechanisms that grow a group of people in a given period of time; it is also the attitudes, norms, and physical objects that put us on a track in life" (Kuo & Lai, 2006, p.2). Culture does not become culture overnight. There are subcultures within a macro culture. Culture refers to collective patterns of our thoughts and practices. Culture and society are two concepts entangled with each other. Culture has a strong relationship with gender differences. Cultural background sometimes affects the ways men and women think, behave and speak. Bernat & Lloyd (2007, p.88) conducted a study to explore the gender effects on learners' beliefs about language learning. They concluded that culture prompted different responses from different genders. Xia (2013) cites the Yana language of California as an example of cultural influence on gender differences and argues that the aforementioned language has specific terminology to be used in conversations either by men or to men.

### **Discourse**

Discourse means language used in a specific context either in society, a class or at work (Gee, 1989). Cook (1990) defines discourse as 'language in use, for communication' (p.6). He further argues that 'discourse may be composed of one or more well-formed grammatical sentences—and indeed it often is—but it does not have to be. It can have grammatical 'mistakes' in it, and often does (p.7). Discourse can also contain meaningful human sounds beyond language. In this context,

discourse has strong relationship with real life semiotics, paralanguage and nonverbal behavior. Symbols and signs convey meaning. Therefore, they are part of discourse. Semiotics is the study of signs. Malmkjaer (2000) argues that 'semiotics or semiotic is the study of signs and linguistics can be seen as that sub-discipline of semiotics which is particularly concerned with the nature of the linguistic sign' (p.465). Discourse is often compared to an iceberg with culture being at the bottom and verbal behaviour or language forming the tip of the iceberg, as shown in figure 1.

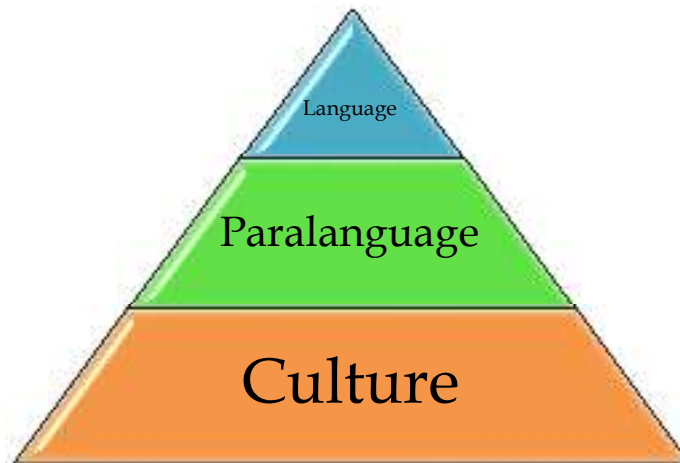


Figure 1: Discourse as Iceberg

Thus, the three components contain subcomponents such as social situations, traditions, customs, habits, cultural preferences, symbols, signs, festivals and the like. Paralanguage refers to nonverbal behaviour encompassing gestures, perfumes, space, silence, facial expressions, intonation and all other nonverbal aspects which contain meaning.

Gee (1989) defines discourse as the relationship among variables like roles, speech, norms, behaviors and cultural identities (p. 526). Discourse in a classroom, therefore, refers to verbal and nonverbal communication between teacher and learners. Teacher's talk in the classroom has a tremendous effect on interaction between a teacher and student. It changes the classroom environment. Male and female teachers use different language in the classroom. Teacher-student interactions set up classroom activities. Without teachers' direction and instruction, learners cannot learn a language in the classroom. A good teacher's talk produces a healthy relationship between teacher and learners. Teachers' healthy talk with their learners is essential in learners learning (Fikri, Dewi, Suarnajaya, 2014).

## **Theories on Relationship between Gender and Language**

Theories related to gender and languages are Difference Theory and social constructionist theories. These theories explain gender differences in the discourse of men and women. Both (Difference theory and Social Constructionist) the theories explain influences on different use of language by man and woman.

### **Social Constructionist Theory**

According to Social Constructionist theory, gender is socially accepted behaviour of males and females rather than their natural behaviour in society. An Individual identity also varies with the variation in his or her talk. Different cultures consist of different social identities of human beings. It is the gender or sex that builds an individual's language use and his or her language use constructs his gender identities in a society. Identity closely relates to the community in which a person lives. Moreover, in terms of teachers talk, it is classroom where teachers' use of language shapes his pedagogical identities. It has been or may be commonly observed that among students certain teachers are known by their typical phrases and sentences which they repeat in the classes or by their unique dialects or idiolects or by certain unique features of their accents. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1999) also state that identities are built through the language. Identity building, to a great extent, relies on discourses employed.

Bell, McCarthy and McNamara (2006) and Coates & Johnson (2001) suggest that context is closely related to language and conversations. Context causes language differences but male and female humans use different language in the same situation, as it is the society, which forces men and women to behave in masculine and feminine way respectively. Men mostly intrude and extend over women's speech during conversations (Tannen 1994 and West & Zimmerman 2015).

### **Difference Theory**

Researchers who are in favour of this approach (Difference Theory) are Maltz and Borker (1982) and Tannen (1990, 1994), who describe that language differences are due to differences in brought up process of men and women. The differences in language use are due to psychological differences, difference in socialization, social power and cultural differences. Different rate of language acquisition in individuals is due to biological differences that cause psychological differences. Men choose language forms that show assertion of control while women's linguistic choices show interpersonal talk that involve others. Maltza and Borker (1982) offer a model for communication between two ethnic groups in order to find out cultural differences in male and female conversations. Different cultures make language differences in

male and female conversations (Maltz and Borker, (1982). If we think about these assertions of Maltz and Borker, we can surmise that it is not only the domain of gender where society exercises its influence; there are other domains as well where society tries to exercise its control and influence. Society does exist as a shaping force—evil or good. One example is the practice of ‘Sati’ among Hindus in India In sati, a widow would voluntarily throw herself on to her husband's funeral pyre (Hawley, 1994 and Sakuntala, 1992). Maltz and Broker (1982) claim that men and women in their socialization process learn different patterns of language from early childhood by socializing in one sex peer group. Boys and girls are asked to use language differently from their very early childhood as they make interactions in the same sex groups.

Coates (2015) views on men and women language explain that the society and culture take man as dominant and woman as subordinate in society. Gender biased behaviors are seen in society from past to present, men have more occupational opportunities in society than women (Coates 2015). Coates believes that status and structure of society caused or prompted linguistic differences between men and women. In the background of this literature review, the researchers tried to find answer of the following question in the current study.

Teachers’ classroom discourses are mainly spoken but their spoken discourses are accompanied by nonverbal discourses. Cameron (2001) observes that ‘when linguists and other social scientists analyse spoken discourse, their aim is to make explicit what normally gets taken for granted’ (p.7). Thus, this study will take into account what normally gets taken for granted regarding teachers’ classroom discourses.

## **Material and Methods**

Nunan (1992) argues that ‘research is a systematic process of inquiry consisting of three elements or components: (1) a question, problem or hypothesis, (2) data, (3) analysis and interpretation of data. An activity which lacks one of these elements (for example, data) I shall classify as something other than research’ (p.3). In the light of this definition, the current study contains all the said components of research—research question, data and analysis. Kaplan argues that ‘the aim of methodology is to understand, in the broadest possible terms, not the product of scientific inquiry but the process itself’ (as cited in Cohen and Manion, 1986, p.43). Thus, our discussion on methodology describes the process adopted for the current research. Gravetter and Forzano (2011) argue that ‘research designs are general categories that classify research according to how the study is conducted (p.191). As far as the design of the study is concerned, it was an exploratory and a descriptive study. It was based on a questionnaire designed and piloted by the researchers. Learners enrolled in M.A English (linguistics) program at the department of English

of a public university (name withheld) were selected as participants of the study. Copies of the questionnaire were administered among more than 125 participants. The analysis is based on 100 completely filled out questionnaires.

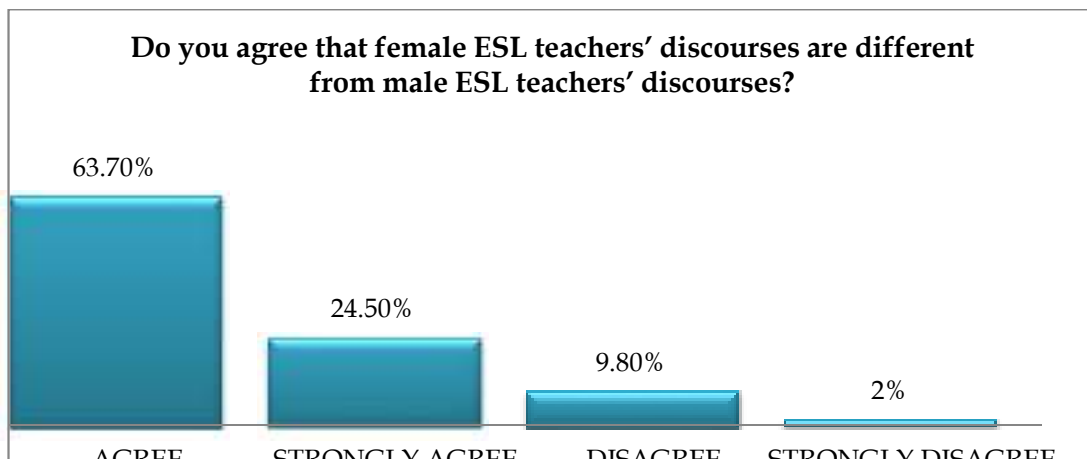
### **Population and Sample**

Population of this study was learners of M.A English program studying at public universities of Pakistan. Convenient sampling technique was used in data collection. A sample of 100 learners was selected conveniently. Questions in the questionnaire had four options for the respondents, which were 'agree', 'strongly agree', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. The data was analysed in terms of percentages of the choices provided for each question. The analysed data was presented in the form of graphs.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Item. 1. Do you agree that female ESL teachers' discourses are different from male ESL teachers' discourses?**

This was a simple, direct and general question regarding discourse differences in male and female ESL teachers.

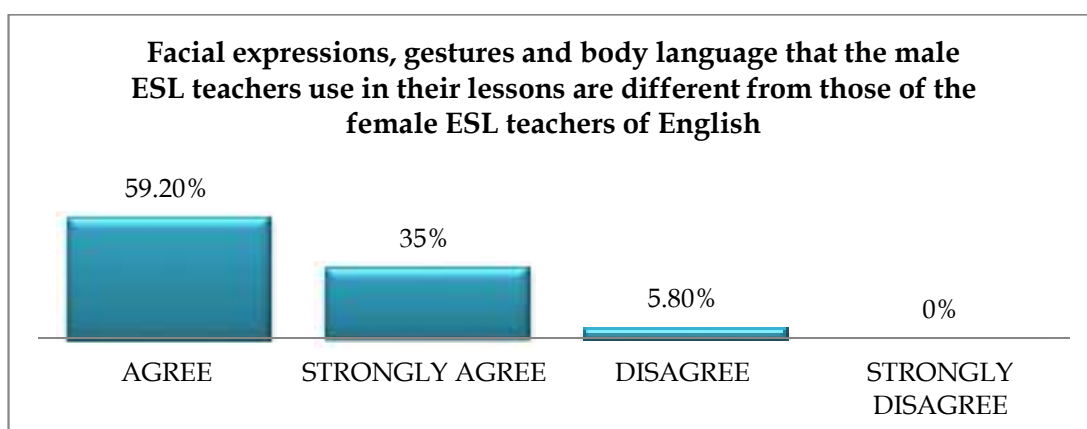


Graph 1: Differences in Classroom Discourses of male and Female Teachers of English.

Graph 1 shows that 63.7% of the respondents agreed to the statement and 24.5% of the respondents strongly agreed to the statement, while 9.8% of the respondents disagreed and 0.2 % of the sample strongly disagreed. The statistics show that the participants are of the view that there exist differences in the classroom discourses of male and female teachers of English. The differences of male and

female discourses have been observed by the learners. Around 89% of the respondents agreed that there existed differences in the discourses of the ESL teachers gender-wise. This was a general question. The next question asked the learners about nonverbal aspects of male and female ESL teachers classroom discourses. As, already explained, nonverbal aspects form important components of discourse. Our identities, our psychological make-up and thoughts are reflected in our nonverbal behaviour. Nonverbal behaviour is a semiotic language of its own kind which we use consciously or unconsciously and attach meaning to it.

**Item 2. Facial expressions, gestures and body language that the male ESL teachers use in their lessons are different from those of the female ESL teachers of English.**



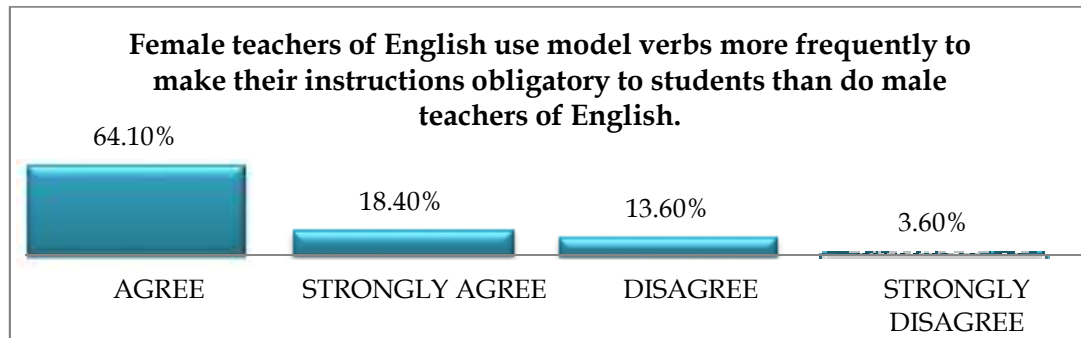
Graph 2: Differences in the Nonverbal behaviour of Male & Female Teachers of English

Graph 2 shows that 59.2% of the respondents agreed that facial expressions, gestures and body language of the male teachers are different from those of female teachers in the classroom. 35% of the respondents (students) strongly agreed, while 5.8% of the respondents disagreed. Results show that male and female instructors use different expressions, body language and gestures during their lessons in the classroom. In fact, if we look closely, the main difference between the discourses of male and female human beings in general lies in the use of paralanguage such as the features of prosody (intonation and stress patterns) and gestures. On the surface level, both men and women use the same stock of words. But their choice of words, delivery of words and the nonverbal behaviour which accompanies these features define more sharply the discourse differences of male and female humans. This applies to classroom discourses as well. The next question asked the students about modal verbs.



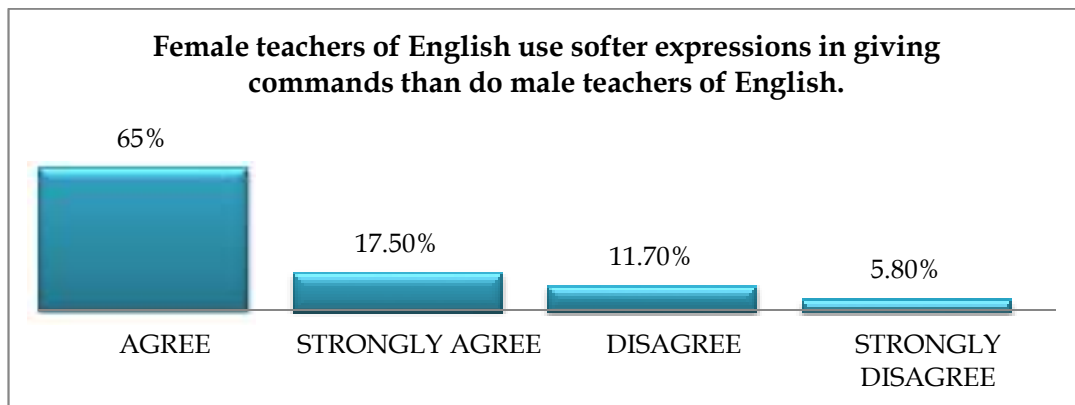
**Item 3. Female teachers of English use modal verbs more frequently to make their instructions obligatory to students than do male teachers of English.**

Graph 3 below indicates that (64.1% of the respondents) agreed that female teachers use modal verbs more frequently to make their instructions obligatory to students than do male teachers. 18.4% of the respondents strongly agreed, 13.6% of the respondents disagreed while 3.6% of the respondents strongly disagreed. Results show that female ESL teachers use modal verbs more frequently than do male teachers of English in the classroom to make their instructions obligatory to students.



**Item 4. Female teachers of English use softer expressions in giving commands than do male teachers.**

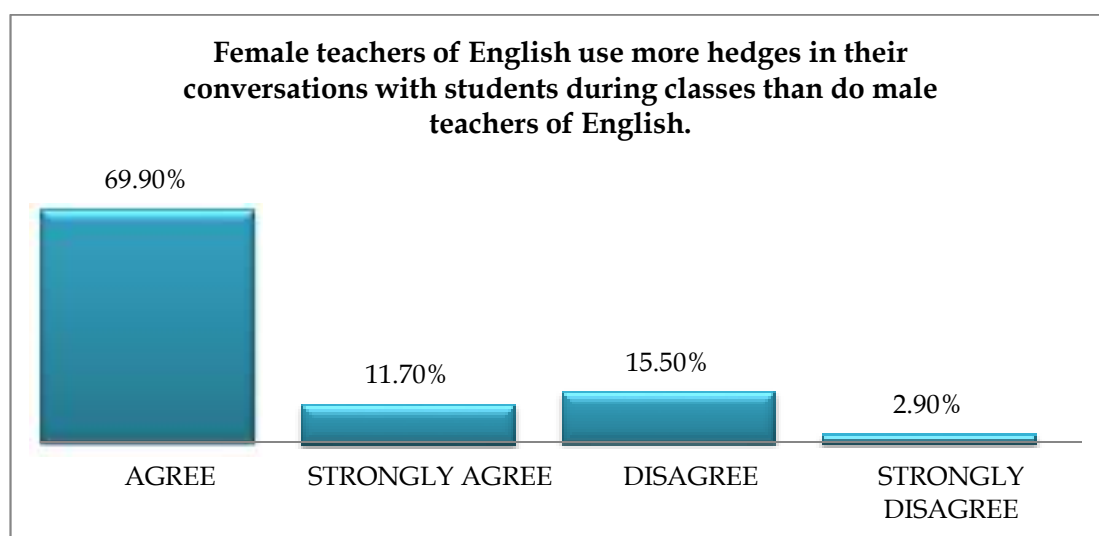
Graph 4 shows that (65% of the respondents) agreed with the statement, female teachers use softer expressions in giving commands than do their male counterparts. 17.5% of the respondents strongly agreed, 11.7% of the respondents disagreed while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed.



Graph 4. Female teachers of English use softer expressions in giving commands than do male teachers of English.

Item 5. Female teachers of English use more hedges in their conversations with students during classes than do male teachers of English.

Graph 5 shows that (69.9% of the respondents) agreed that female teachers of English use more hedges in their conversations than do their male counterparts. 15.5% of the respondents disagreed, 11.7% of the respondents strongly agreed while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. Thus, the perception of 81% of the respondents was that female ESL teachers used hedges more frequently than male ESL teachers. A hedge is defined as a word which is used to express ambiguity, tentativeness, indecisiveness, probability, and caution instead of confidence, decisiveness, certainty and accuracy. Gender-wise discussions on hedges are given in sociolinguistics. 'Sort of' and 'you know' are the two examples of hedges. They are taken and termed as protective devices for protecting faces of the people involved in conversations.



In addition, the learners of English contributed their individual views on the subject. One learner said that domestic circumstances influenced teachers' behavior with the students. The students could guess about the person on the other end when the teacher picked call in the classroom during the lesson. They said that male teachers used sometimes expressions of harshness but were kind to students from wealthy families. The students reported that the male teachers were stronger in eye contact than female teachers were. The male teachers used gestures more frequently and vigorously than the female teachers did. The female teachers liked to engaged students more frequently in group-work and task-based activities than the male teachers. The female teachers were more formal in their choice of words than the male teachers were. Male teachers shifted to regional languages expressions in the form of code-switching more frequently than did their female counterparts. The female

teachers confined their lectures more to the already prepared notes of the lessons than did the male teachers. The learners also highlighted that the female teachers seemed to be weaker in making things clear in the subjects and topics than the male teachers. Their remained confusion and vagueness in their lessons delivered. The male teachers frequently told stories, jokes, anecdotes and examples from rustic or village life. During the lesson, the female teachers preferred to stand more behind rostrum than did their male counterparts. Some students drew attention towards paralanguage, prosody and nonverbal behaviour as the clearest indicators of the discourse differences in the male and female ESL teachers. Furthermore, they gave their perceptions about the characteristic or typical expressions generally used by male and female ESL teachers that are given below:

#### **Expressions of Male ESL Teachers**

<b>Expression Used</b>	<b>English Translation</b>
<b>Be attentive!</b>	Be attentive!
<b>Try to understand ....are you taking me (accompanied with gestures)</b>	Try to understand ....are you taking me (accompanied with gestures)
<b>Oye!, Oye Yaar!</b>	Hey you!, Hey ! My friend!
<b>You! The red shirt</b>	You, The red shirt!
<b>You are not sitting in your drawing room.</b>	You are not sitting in your drawing room.
<b>You understand?</b>	You understand?
<b>I mean to say...</b>	I mean to say...
<b>You would be thrown out of the class...</b>	You would be thrown out of the class...
<b>Mai tumhein kharka don ga</b>	I shall knock you out!
<b>Aisi ki Taisi phair don ga</b>	I shall crush!
<b>Kia baat hay ( Loudly and angry)</b>	What's the problem?
<b>Sorry for that...</b>	Sorry for that ...
<b>Mujhay Patta hay tumhain kitna aata hay</b>	I know how much you know!
<b>Get out!</b>	Get out!
<b>Allah kay banday!</b>	O servant of Allah!
<b>Oye Sharif admi</b>	Hey gentle man!
<b>Theek hay?</b>	Is it ok?
<b>No cross talk!</b>	Don't talk with one another!
<b>Hans kio rahay ho?</b>	Why are you laughing?

**Expressions of Female ESL Teachers**

<b>Expression Used</b>	<b>English Translation</b>
Apko kuch nahi atta	You don't know even the ABC (of the subject)
Bachay! , beetay! ,	Baby!, son !
The thing you should have learnt in college, you are learning in the university.	The thing you should have learnt in college, you are learning in the university.
I don't bother; I shall give ZERO to all.	I don't bother; I shall give ZERO to all.
Sir !(for students senior in age)	Sir !(for students senior in age)
Isn't it so?	Isn't so?
Sort of / like	Sort of / like
Ap to buhat nikamay hain	You are so dull.
Ap nay parha kia hay	What have you studied?
You might be wondering	You might be wondering
Aisa hota hay na	Sometime, it happens like
Are you getting me? Are we clear?	Are you getting me? Are we clear?
Samajh agai bachaay	Did you understand?
Right?	Right?

**Conclusions**

The findings about learners' perceptions about male and female ESL teachers discourses show that 88.2% of the respondents hold they perceive differences in the classroom discourses of male and female ESL teachers. This finding of the current study is compatible with the finding of Ali (2016) "there were gender differences in using language" (p.73). Around 60% of the participants hold that female ESL teachers differ from male ESL teachers in their nonverbal classroom behaviours. More than 64% of the respondents agreed female teachers of English used more hedges, softer expressions and more modal verbs in their classroom conversations than do their male counterparts. These differences were manifested in their pedagogical methods, vocabulary, ways of giving instructions, intonations and behaviours due to gender differences. Male and female teachers of English used different vocabulary in the classrooms. Female teachers of English used careful language, polite language, more tag questions, softer commands, and greater use of "we" as an inclusive term and used more hedges in their conversations. On the other hand, male teachers of English used more authoritative language, appeared to be more casual, dominant and not so conscious about their vocabulary use in the classroom. Thus, gender seems to have impact on classroom discourses of both (male and female) ESL teachers. Vocabulary used by male and female ESL teachers is not

very different. The real difference in the discourses of male and female ESL teachers was perceived in nonverbal behaviour, paralinguistic aspects and prosodic features. This final line of the conclusion then links us to the fact that linguistic characteristics and idiosyncrasies, accents, intonation patterns and paralinguistic aspects, whether innate or developed under external social and cultural influences perform certain functions in the overall scheme of existence.

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