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# 武汉大学本科毕业论文

## 课堂上的性别话语： 中国大学英语教师语言使用的实证研究

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# **BACHELOR'S DEGREE THESIS**

## **OF WUHAN UNIVERSITY**

### **Genderlects in the Classroom: An Empirical Study of Chinese English Teachers' Language Use in University**

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## 摘要

本研究从语言学家 Deborah Tannen 提出的“性别化语言”(genderlect)的概念出发,搜集分析了 20 世纪末到 21 世纪初国内外多位语言学家对于这一主题的研究和结论,以及他们解读男性和女性的说话方式差异的经验方法。继而通过设计小规模的实证试验研究,采用观察、调查、录音、笔录、问卷和论文研究等方式,探讨中国大学课堂上教师性别化语言的发生情况,旨在通过实际调查和数据分析,验证以往关于性别化语言的研究结论,看其是否可以应用于中国大学的英语课堂。同时,在前人研究成果的基础上,本文进一步探讨和分析了大学英语课堂实证研究中所表现出的一些性别话语倾向的普遍性,并讨论了其在这一特定背景下的可能原因和潜在影响。

**关键词:** 性别化语言; 教师; 语言使用; 大学课堂; 师生互动

## **Abstract**

This study focuses on the concept of genderlect, a term popularized by linguist Deborah Tannen to represent dialects specific to gender and to demystify the differences between male's and female's speech pattern. With a small-scale empirical pilot study to explore the occurrence of teachers' genderlects in Chinese university classroom, using observations, surveys, audio recording, transcript, questionnaire and paper study, it aims to verify the previous research conclusions on gendered language through practical investigation and data analysis, and to see whether they can be applied in the English classroom of Chinese universities. At the same time, based on the previous research results, this article further explores and analyzes the universality of some genderlects that have been demonstrated in empirical studies in university English classrooms, and discusses its possible causes and potential effects within this specific context.

**Key words:** Genderlects; Teachers; Language Use; University; Student-Teacher Relation

# **Contents**

|                      |  |           |
|----------------------|--|-----------|
| <b>Chapter One</b>   | <b>Introduction.....</b>                             | <b>1</b>  |
| 1.1                  | Background.....                                      | 1         |
| 1.2                  | Research Questions and Objectives.....               | 2         |
| 1.3                  | Significance of the Study.....                       | 2         |
| 1.4                  | The Layout of the Paper.....                         | 3         |
| <b>Chapter Two</b>   | <b>Literature Review.....</b>                        | <b>5</b>  |
| 2.1                  | Theoretical Foundation of Genderlect.....            | 5         |
| 2.2                  | Genderlect in Language Research.....                 | 5         |
| 2.2.1                | Studies Abroad.....                                  | 6         |
| 2.2.2                | Studies at Home.....                                 | 7         |
| 2.2.3                | Research Gaps.....                                   | 7         |
| <b>Chapter Three</b> | <b>Methodology.....</b>                              | <b>9</b>  |
| 3.1                  | Research Design.....                                 | 9         |
| 3.2                  | Overview of the Samples and Region Distribution..... | 9         |
| <b>Chapter Four</b>  | <b>Results and Discussion.....</b>                   | <b>11</b> |
| 4.1                  | Communication Style: Assertive or Tentative?.....    | 11        |
| 4.2                  | Body Language.....                                   | 13        |
| 4.3                  | Rapport Talk VS Report Talk?.....                    | 16        |
| 4.4                  | Pronunciation.....                                   | 18        |
| 4.5                  | Interaction.....                                     | 21        |

|                                     |           |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Chapter Five Conclusion.....</b> | <b>25</b> |
| 5.1 Summary of Findings.....        | 25        |
| 5.2 Research Limitations.....       | 26        |
| 5.3 Concluding Remarks.....         | 27        |
| <b>Bibliography.....</b>            | <b>29</b> |
| <b>Acknowledgement.....</b>         | <b>32</b> |

# Chapter One Introduction

This chapter will first introduce the background of genderlects. Next, it will state the research questions and objectives. Third, it will manifest the significance of this study and finally lay out the structure of the paper.

## 1.1 Background

Rivalry between males and females has long been a topic for decades, with perceived differences in language playing a part. Genderlects, or gender-related language behaviors, have long been a topic of interest in linguistics and communication studies.

Much has been written about gender issues in language and long are the lists of gender differences that concern different aspects of language use, e.g. grammar (Trudgill 1995, Swann 2000), pronunciation (Wardhaugh 1991), style (Lakoff 1975, Holmes 1995, Trudgill 1995), or interactional issues (Maltz and Borker 1982, Tannen 1990, Coates 1993), to name just the most popular and best studied ones. Certain findings, notably the ones concerning the domination of men in interaction (Zimmerman and West 1975) or the deficient and very affective style of female linguistic behaviour (Lakoff 1975) have already become classics and tend to be widely cited round the world. However, it tends to be often disregarded that these facts have been investigated mainly in the context of “English as first language” and as such do not have to hold true for other ethnic and linguistic groups.

The present study was predominantly inspired by a brief mention of an investigation of a similar nature carried out by L. Kessler in Great Britain (Stockwell 2002). In the study the researcher asked 6 male and 6 female respondents to describe some photographs in order to analyse the number of words that her respondents used per minute, and thus prove or disprove the claim that it is women who speak more; she also investigated the question of the sensitivity of both genders to colours. In brief, Kessler’s findings supported Coates’s (1993) claim that it was in fact men who covered more of the talking time (57% of all the time taken by the respondents). Men also made

a more frequent reference to colour terms, however, the number of these terms was higher mainly due to a variety of modifiers with which they appeared, e.g. very green, rather green. Women, on the other hand, tended to use more intensifiers with their colour terms, e.g. bold reds, vibrant colour; they also made a more extensive use of evaluative adjectives (Stockwell 2002: 42).

This area of sociolinguistic investigation, although extremely popular in the West, has not evoked much interest in the contexts of Chinese language use or English as second language, and the works of the most acclaimed researcher in the field, Kwieyna Handke (1994), do not seem to have a sound experimental foundation and are based on a more impressionistic type of data.

## **1.2 Research Questions and Objectives**

The main questions this study focuses on can be summarized as 3 aspects. First, are there any patterns in male and female teachers' language use in managing classroom activities? If yes, how do these patterns vary based on gender? Second, what are the possible reasons for the identified patterns in male and female teachers' language use, and what are the potential consequences? Third, do genderlects exist in the specific context of English language teaching in Chinese universities? In other words, do teachers communicate differently based on their gender roles, particularly in the context of the higher proportion of female teachers in the sector?

Specifically, it will examine how male and female teachers use verbal and non-verbal language while managing classroom activities, interacting with students and providing feedback, and how this process varies from gender to gender.

In educational settings, genderlects can have a significant impact on student learning and teacher-student interactions. However, little research has been conducted on genderlects in the specific context of English language teaching in China, with other controversial characteristics compared, such as nonverbal behavior, approaching difficulty, communication style and students' preference.

This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the language use of Chinese English

teachers in the classroom. By analyzing audio recordings and transcripts of classroom interactions, it seeks to explore whether genderlects really exist in Chinese EFL classroom of universities, identify patterns in male and female teachers' language use, implicate the possible reasons and induct potential consequences.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

In education, the gender of students or teachers represents a factor that may bring diversity and discrimination into classrooms. Gender communication styles in educational institutions may demotivate students, teachers and other employees, and as a result interfere with academic or job performance. Information that is misinterpreted can cause problems that would otherwise not have existed (Boone and Kurtz, 1984). In the higher education sector, the influences of teachers could be more subtle and intricate.

Drawing upon research into the existence and possible effects of Chinese teachers' genderlects in English teaching, this study also attempts to achieve the following 2 aims:

First, to provide an objective and unbiased description of males and females specifically within English classrooms of Chinese university. With many research results of genderlects inundating nowadays, we should keep a critical attitude. We cannot continue to assume that culture and society have made females more skillful at language and unconsciously internalize and accept ideas that reinforce differences and are indifferent to disadvantages, especially at a time when we expect people to have equal access to opportunities.

Second, it will analyze the enabling conditions and constraints brought by college English teachers, helping these teachers propose more practical and appropriate second language teaching programs by contemplating and avoiding the possible problems they may have in common.

By fulfilling these goals, this study hopes to shed light on the following 3 aspects. First, it will contribute to a better understanding of how teachers' gender influences language use in the classroom, particularly in the context of English language teaching

in China. Second, it may provide insights into how genderlects can affect student learning and teacher-student relationships. Finally, the findings of this study may have practical implications for teacher training and professional development in the field of English language teaching.

## **1.4 The Layout of the Paper**

The paper is structured as follows: In Chapter 2, it will provide a brief review of the literature on genderlects based on former studies; In Chapter 3, it will describe the research methodology, including research design, sample collection and recruitment, data collection and analysis; And in Chapter 4, it will present the research results, discuss the underlying facts, possible reasons and potential influences of these findings for Chinese English male and female teachers' language use. Finally, in Chapter 5 it will conclude on the former results and interpretations.

## Chapter Two Literature Review

The review will begin by discussing the conceptual frameworks that have been used to segregate male and female's language use, highlighting the key constructs and theories. It will then examine the former studies and their conclusions, both abroad and at home. Finally, the review will identify gaps in the literature and provide suggestions for future research in this area.

### 2.1 Theoretical Foundation of Genderlect

The term “genderlects” was coined by sociolinguist Deborah Tannen, who argued that gender differences in language use are not simply a matter of individual choice or preference, but are deeply rooted in social norms and expectations. Tannen’s theory of genderlects suggests that men and women use language in different ways, and that these differences are not just a matter of vocabulary or syntax, but also include differences in conversational style, tone, and body language. She argues that men tend to use language as a way to establish status and dominance, while women use language to build relationships and establish connections.

Other theorists have expanded on Tannen’s work, exploring the ways in which gender differences in communication are shaped by cultural and historical factors. For instance, Janet Holmes (1995) focuses on the ways in which gender differences in language use are shaped by cultural and social factors. She argues that men and women have different communication styles that are based on different cultural expectations and norms, and that these differences can be seen in a range of settings. And John Gray (1992) stated in his *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* that men and women have different ways of thinking and communicating that are based on biological differences. He argues that men are more focused on competition and achievement, while women are more focused on relationships and connection, and that these differences can create misunderstandings and conflicts in communication between the sexes.

Overall, these theorists have made great contribution to our understanding of

gender and language in different ways, and their work has helped to shape the field of gender and language studies.

## **2.2 Genderlect in Language Research**

### **2.2.1 Studies Abroad**

Foreign countries have started to link “gender” with second language learning in classrooms early on, and there have been many related research results such as *The Study of Gender as Social Practice: Implications for Second Language Acquisition*” (1997) and Oxford, R. L. “*Second Language Research on Individual Differences*” (1997) and so on, but almost all of these studies focus on students and explore the influence of their gender on “second language acquisition” and are more integrated with sociocultural fields such as psychology. for example, Blair (2000) discusses that male and female genderlects in a high school in Canada, including the way teenagers talk to each other, the topics of their conversations, and the respective tools they use in language classes. Another one, Krupnick (1985) seeks to know “how gender affects the quality of teaching and learning at Harvard University”, which concludes that the teacher’s personality and years of experience had more impact than gender (identifying as male or female) in class dynamics, showing that this last component was one more within the subjectivity configuration.

Another closely related field researchers have studied on is the attributes that male and female teachers bring to the area of administration. Their findings confirm that women can be, and are, just as capable as men as administrators of schools. Morison and Zeimba (1997) stated that women are “more inclusive, more consensual, more empathetic, [and] more concerned with process than men” (2). “Women tend to be direct, practical, able to deal with detail, sensitive to personality clashes, intuitive about possible problems, and work hard at maintaining relationships within the school” (Porat in Shantz, 1993). But these researchers put more emphasis on the teachers’ role as an administrator, instead of a teacher.

As linguist Ha said, “I realize that the role of genderlects in ELT has largely been

ignored as if researchers failed to understand that gender is a variable that should be considered in teaching (2008). It is foreseeable that more in-depth research on gendered language in the classroom has been on the horizon.

### **2.2.2 Studies at Home**

In China, studies on gendered language have mainly focused on the differences in Chinese language, the exploration of socio-cultural factors, the differences in the discourse styles of both genders, and gender differences in communication, e.g., Zhang, Deming. (2009), *A Study of Gender Linguistics in Chinese*. Studies on teachers have mainly focused on Chinese teachers' teaching methods, teaching styles, teaching strategies and evaluation styles in the classroom. There has been a lot of research on teachers' teaching methods and communicative scaffolding at the micro level. At the same time, teachers' discourse strategies have received more and more attention, and they are mentioned and discussed in many studies, such as Liu Xiaowei's (2019) "Exploring the Application of Teachers' Discourse Strategies in Foreign Language Teaching from the Perspective of Second Language Acquisition." Most of these studies focus on the effects of teachers' discourse volume, questioning strategies, turn-taking, discourse fixation, and evaluative feedback on students' second language learning. The influence of teachers' genderlects" on second language acquisition is still in the window. Studies that integrate gendered language with English teachers mainly focus on the post-2018 period, such as Zheng, Zhi (2018), "Teachers' Gendered Language Styles in English Classrooms and Their Educational Implications" and Kong, Yuling (2019), "A Study of English Teachers' Gendered Language Use in Primary and Secondary Schools in China". These studies have explored the presence of gendered language in the classroom and how to promote gender-equitable classroom teaching, but there are still relatively few relevant research results.

### **2.2.3 Research Gaps**

Despite the growing body of literature on genderlects in language use within and

outside China, there is a lack of studies that focus on Chinese English teachers' language use in university settings. In the meantime, there is a need to explore potential biases in teachers' language use based on gender and how this affects the classroom environment and student learning. What's more, while some studies have identified issues related to genderlects in language use, the practical evidence, which can be collected in the classroom to prove whether genderlects really exist in Chinese college classrooms, is still randomly seen in researches.

Besides the gap in the content of research, some methods are also in the window . As mentioned before, on the one hand, many studies regard students as their research subjects and explore the influence of their gender on second language acquisition. On the other hand, other researches focus on teachers' discourse strategies and then just make the students' academic performance one of the variables. Few related studies have put both students and teachers at the same stage and study them from equally important two perspectives, which can provide more inclusive and convincing results for the research.

## **Chapter Three   Methodology**

This chapter provides a detailed account of the methodology used to conduct a quantitative study on the impression and occurrence of English teachers' genderlects, including the two-passage research design and the stratified random sampling technique.

### **3.1 Research Design**

The research process outlined in the passage involves several steps. The first step is to seek out current resources on genderlects that have been studied in the past. This involves reviewing existing research studies, articles, and books on the topic. Secondly, with the most popular conclusions selected, according to levels of measurability and feasibility, it will decide the way of experimenting these conclusions: One is through questionnaire and the other is through physical observation. Next, for questionnaire, Chinese college students are the main targets for interviewing, and the questions are focusing on their impressions about English teachers (male and female respectively). And for observation, English class in college with female and male teachers will be entered randomly to scrutinize whether the findings from previous studies, including male and female's differences in pronunciation, body language, interaction, communication style etc., are applicable to Chinese English classrooms in universities.

### **3.2 Overview of the Samples and Region Distribution**

For this quantitative and qualitative study, 38 college students(16 male and 22 female) from various majors of different Universities from districts including Wuhan Hubei, Xi'an Shanxi, Beijing, Haerbin Heilongjiang, Changsha Hunan, Guangzhou Guangdong, Zunyi Guizhou, Zhengzhou Henan, Dalian Liaoning, Tianjin, were taken through random sampling for data collection. And the behavior in classrooms of 6 English professors who are engaged in teaching higher level college students were observed, recorded (about 354 minutes in total) and analyzed. Figure 1 shows the places and majors of respondents, 94.74% of whom are undergraduates while the rest 5.26%

are current graduate students.



*Figure 3.1 Distribution of Region and Major among Interviewees*

To serve the intention mentioned above, the study also selected 4 English courses( 2 are conducted by female teachers while the other 2 are by male ones) on *National Smart Education Public Service Platform* (<https://www.zxx.edu.cn/syncClassroom>) , collected their audio recordings( about 80 minutes)and transcript, and analyzed the genderlects manifested.

## Chapter Four Results and Discussions

Tannen's theory, which has been expanded by many other prominent linguists, suggests that men and women use language in different ways, and that these differences are not just a matter of vocabulary or syntax, but also include differences in conversational style, tone, and body language. Based on former study experiences and feasibility measurement, this empirical study will discuss about teachers' gender-tinged language use from five aspects: their communication style, body language, tone, pronunciation and interaction in class.

### 4.1 Communication Style: Assertive or Tentative?

There are researches which proclaim that men tend to use an assertive communication style while women tend to use a more tentative one. Men often communicate with greater volume, lower pitch, and greater inflection, which conveys power and enthusiasm for their ideas (Eakins & Eakins, 1978; Payne, 2001). On the other hand, women generally speak more softly, have higher-pitched voices, and are more hesitant, which can make them appear weaker. However, by entering 4 English classrooms of Wuhan University randomly and interviewing 38 Chinese college students from various provinces, no stable relation between teacher's gender and volume is found, while some findings in the physical classrooms are against this theoretical research result.

*Table 4.1 Female and Male Teachers' Average Frequency of Word*

| Female Teachers' Average Frequency of Word |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Word                                       | Frequency in Unit Time(Per minute) |
| intensifier (so, very)                     | 0.09835                            |
| approximation (about)                      | 0.0555                             |
| disclaimer (I think)                       | 0.04705                            |
| filler                                     | 0.77735                            |

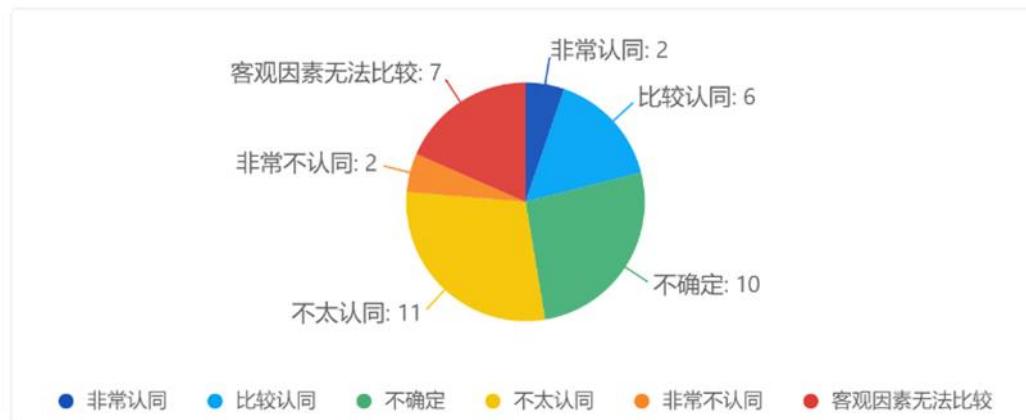
  

| Male Teachers' Average Frequency of Word |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Word                                     | Frequency in Unit Time(Per minute) |
| intensifier (so, very)                   | 0.1053                             |
| approximation (about)                    | 0.0702                             |
| disclaimer (I think)                     | 0.0877                             |
| filler                                   | 0.9298                             |

Allegedly, females frequently use qualifiers to make them sound powerless (Mulac, Lundell, & Bradac, 1986). However, according to the recording statistics, the average frequency for qualifiers (such as “so”, “very”, “super”) used by female teachers in unit time (1 minute) is 0.0984, while that for male teachers is 0.1053. And for the question “Do you agree that female teachers use more intensifiers than male teachers” in the questionnaire, 34.2% of the interviewed Chinese college students do not agree with it while 21.1% agree. These both belie the existed research result which says that females use more qualifiers to weaken their speech, at least not applicable in Chinese college classrooms.

你认同“女老师比男老师使用更多的强化词”吗(如 “very” “ so”等)

饼图 ▾



*Figure 4.1 Students attitudes towards “Do You Agree that female English Teachers in College use more intensifiers?”*

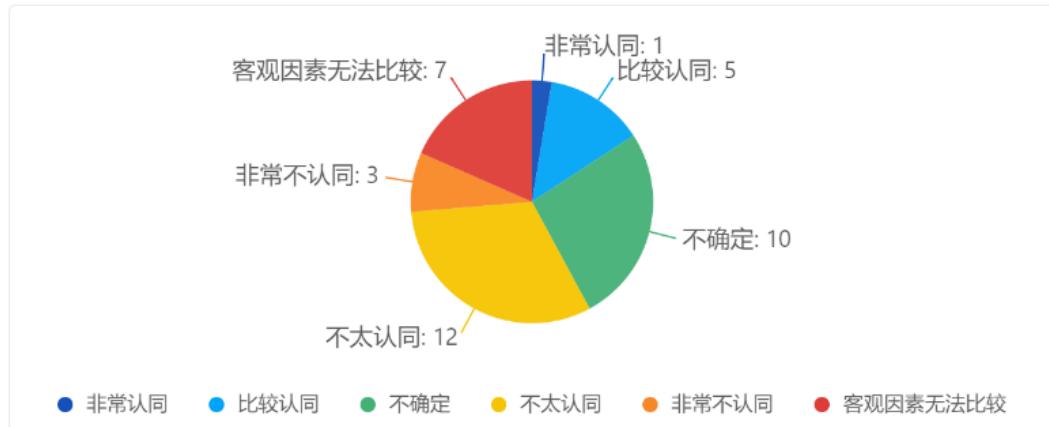
As showed in *Table 4.1*, this study also did a small-scale survey to record and analyze the frequency for disclaimers, fillers and words of approximation used by male and female teachers in Chinese college classrooms. Contrasting to the claim that “females are also known to use more disclaimers, fillers and qualifiers in their speech” (Lemmer, 1996), the result turns out to be extremely “eccentric”. It shows that in male teachers’ speech, appearance frequency of disclaimers such as “I think”, “I guess”, fillers such as “um”, “you know”, “er” or “like” and words of approximation like “maybe”, “perhaps” “could” “about” “may” is slightly higher than female teachers.

It could also be seen from the following *Figure 4.1* that the ratio for Chinese college

students who don't think females use more fillers and disclaimers and those who agree is 15: 6 (38 in total). In other words, even more students tend to think that male college English teachers use more fillers and disclaimers than female English teachers.

15 你认同“整体上女老师比男老师使用的em , I guess, I think ...等词语更多”吗?

饼图 ▾



*Figure 4.2 College Students' Attitudes towards “Do You Agree that Generally Female English Teachers use more ‘em’, ‘I guess’, ‘I think’ ?”*

Though there does exist the differences in frequency of words including qualifiers, disclaimers, fillers and words of approximation, no significant and convincing evidence could be used to promote a universal relation. However, this result could still serve as a reminder that some of the genderlects may be the stereotypes or hypothesis out of date, which are unapplicable and untenable in current situation, typically Chinese college English classrooms.

## 4.2 Body Language

The term ‘genderlect’ extends over speech to non-verbal communication. And the following is an excerpt from Anubha and Prajna Pani’s essay *De-gendering of Genderlect: A Case of Higher Education Institutions in Odisha*, which shed light on the differences between male and female’s nonverbal communication.

*“Women’s ability to read non-verbal cues is one of the greatest strengths (they bring) ... If there is one area of communication in which women excel, it is nonverbal*

*communication. Not only are women more responsive to nonverbal stimuli, but they also interpret these nonverbal cues with greater accuracy. Women display more ‘warm’ body language cues to focus on those who are speaking by orienting head and torso to face participants. This expertise gives women access to information men might not have. They lean forward, smile, synchronize their movements with others, nod and tilt their heads (the universal signal of listening)” (2019).*

The research maintains that females use more “warm” body language such as leaning forward, smiling, synchronizing their movements with others, nodding and tilting their heads when giving clues and responding to the clues received as well. To see whether this “genderlect” really exists in Chinese college English class, both practical study and questionnaire are utilized, and the result is as follows.

**Table 4.2 Female and Male Teachers' Average Frequency of Action**

| Female Teachers' Average Frequency of Action |                                  |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Action                                       | Freucey in Unit Time(Per minute) |
| Lean forward                                 | 0.06135                          |
| Smile  | 0.3311                           |
| Synchronize movements with others            | 0                                |
| Nod  | 0.02605                          |
| Tilt heads(showing they are listening)       | 0.02605                          |
| Hand swinging                                | 0.28235                          |
| Total  | 0.5269                           |

| Male Teachers' Average Frequency of Action |                                  |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Action                                     | Freucey in Unit Time(Per minute) |
| Lean forward                               | 0.5789                           |
| Smile                                      | 0.2807                           |
| Synchronize movements with others          | 0.0175                           |
| Nod  | 0.0702                           |
| Tilt heads(showing they are listening)     | 0.0175                           |
| Hand swinging                              | 2.0526                           |
| Total                                      | 3.0174                           |

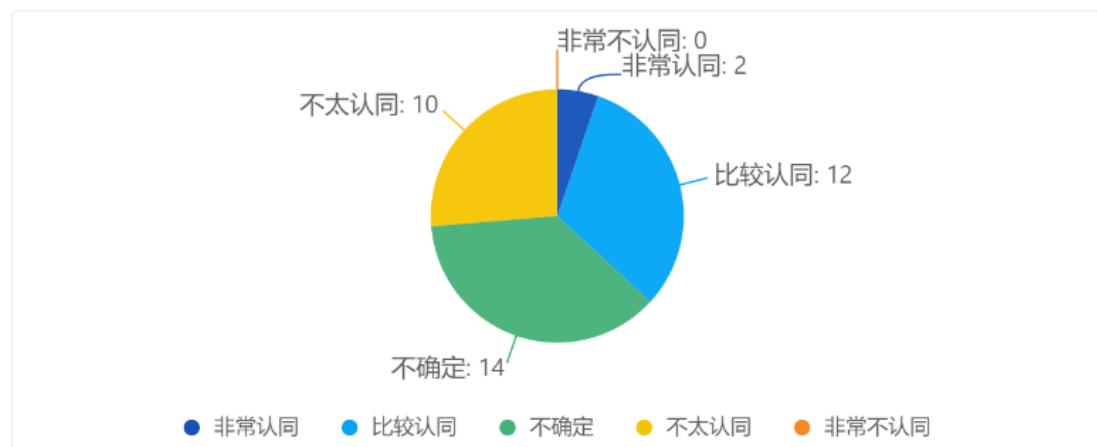
From *Table 4.2*, it could be seen that generally male teachers' average frequency of action far exceeds that of female teachers, with leaning forward and swing hand most noticeable. Except for the action of smiling, which was more frequent in female teachers than in male teachers, all the other actions including leaning forward, synchronizing movements with others, nodding, tilting heads and hand swing, were

more frequent in males.

At the same time, according to the survey results, 26.32% of Chinese college students expressed favorable attitudes towards the proposition that “female English teachers exhibit more expressive body language than their male counterparts,” while 36.84% of respondents disagreed and 36.84% expressed uncertainty about this statement. Upon viewing the graph intuitively, we can see that these three attitudes (agree, disagree and doubt) are almost equally distributed, which means that in the overall impression and perception of college students, there is little difference between the frequency of using body language by male and female teachers.

你认同“女性英语老师比男性老师的肢体语言更加丰富”吗

饼图 ▾



*Figure 4.3 College Students’ Attitudes towards “Do You Agree that Female English Teachers Exhibit more Expressive Body Language than their Male Counterparts?”*

The proposition, illustrating that female use more “warm” body language than males, is highly stereotypical and bears witness to unequal and dominant gender discourses. In Chinese English classrooms, instead of aggravating this stereotype, the role of female and male teachers should be more fairly exploited.

### **4.3 Rapport Talk VS Report Talk?**

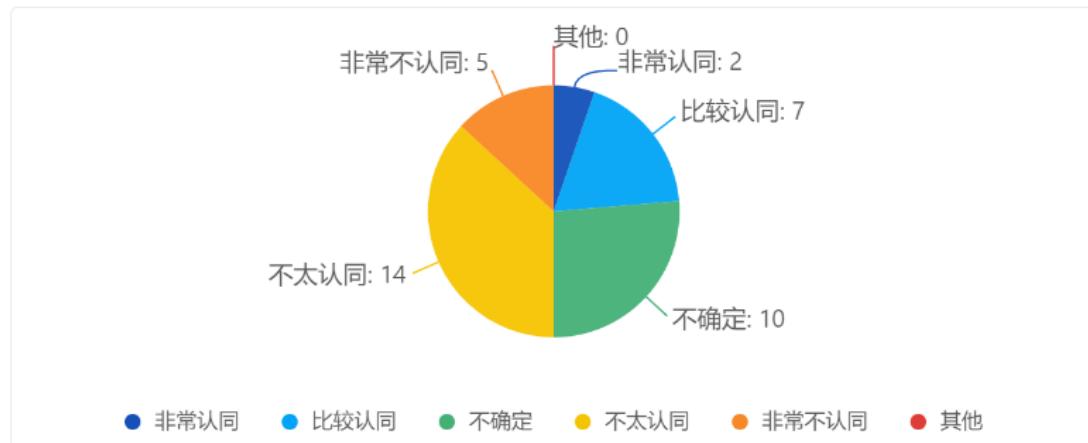
According to Professor Anubha from Birla Global University, “Rapport talk at workplace refers to a communication style meant to promote social affiliation and emotional connection. It refers to the types of communication inclusive of skills of talking, nurturing, emotional expression, empathy and support (Anubha and Prajna, 2019). For most women the language of conversation is primarily a language of rapport: a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships (Tannen, 1994). Deborah Tannen argues that men tend to use ‘report style’ aiming to communicate factual and content-based information whereas women often use a ‘rapport style’ which is more concerned with building and maintaining relationship.

The typical conversational style of women, which seeks to establish connection with others is labelled by Wood as “the essence of relationships” and the use of language as a means to “foster connections, support, closeness, and understanding”. Women are typically described as more expressive, more relationship oriented, and more concerned with creating and maintaining intimacy; whereas men are described as more instrumental, more task oriented, and more concerned with gathering information, or with establishing and maintaining social status or power (Bernard, 1972; Indvik & Fitzpatrick, 1982; Parsons & Bales, 1955).

In 1982, Gilligan suggested that women tend to prioritize relationships, while men prioritize logic. Men use language to establish and maintain their status and independence, while women, according to Gray in 1992, value communication, trust, and support in the workplace, and are fulfilled by collaboration and cooperation (Anubha, 2019). However, while some researchers argue that language use does not necessarily reflect social differences between men and women, this study still tried to gather Chinese college students’ general impression about their English teachers’ talk style.

你认同“女性英语老师更感性，生活化，男老师更理性，讲逻辑”吗

饼图 ▾

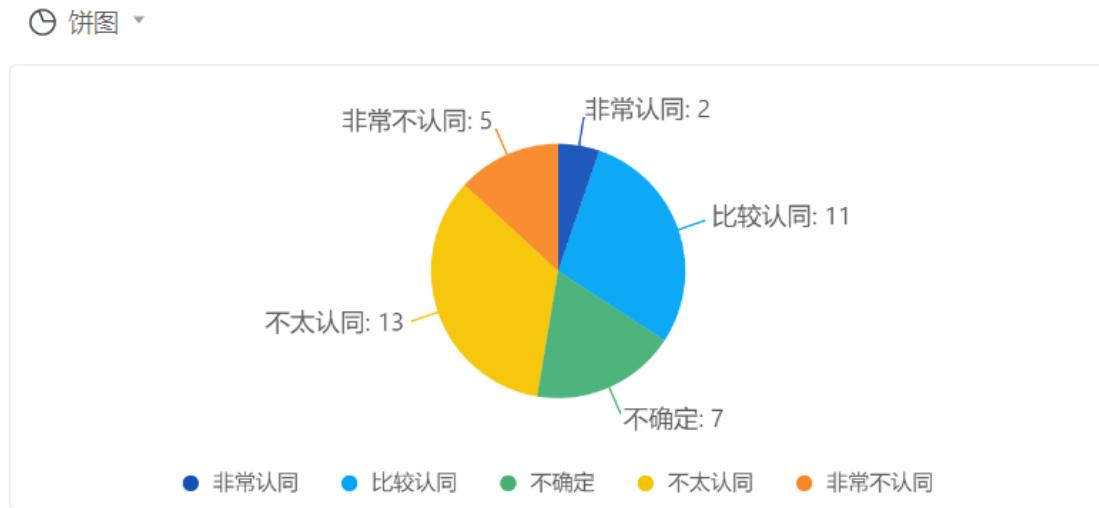


*Figure 4.4 College Students' Attitudes towards "Do You Agree that female teachers are more concerned about building and maintaining relationship while male teachers paying more attention to logic and gathering information?"*

Based on the response of the 38 students, it can be inferred that there was a significant discrepancy between the number of those who opposed the statement, which was 19(occupying 50%) and those who agreed, which was only 9(23.68%). The opposition group was more than twice the size of the agreement group, strongly against the proposition “female teachers are more concerned about building and maintaining relationship while male teachers paying more attention to logic and gathering information”.

An interesting thing that is worth noting is that for another question “Do you agree that ‘Female college English teachers are more approachable?’” (Figure 4.5), 13 interviewees agreed and 18 disagree. The difference gap seems to be decreased compared with the former one. Empirically it may seem to manifest that Chinese college students are more determined to repute that “it’s not true that female English teachers are more sensitive, life-oriented while male teachers are more rational and logical” whereas their level of denial about the hypothesis that “male teachers are more distant than female teachers” is more wavering and uncertain.

你认同“男性英语老师比女性英语老师更有距离感”吗?



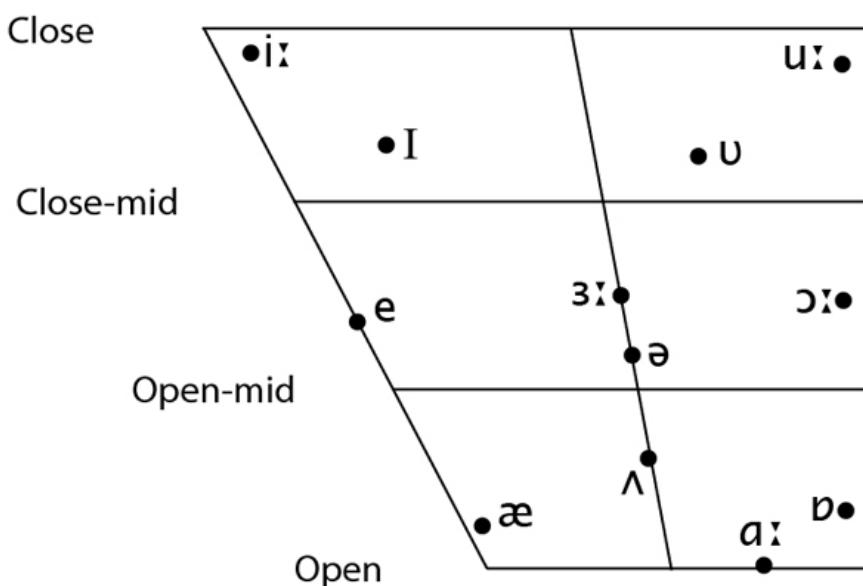
*Figure 4.5 College Students' Attitudes towards “Do you agree that ‘Female college English teachers are more approachable?’”*

#### 4.4 Pronunciation

When pronouncing vowels, women are generally more open than men; and because men are less open than women, they have fewer vowel sounds in their actual speech (Zhao Ronghui, 2003). By keeping tracking of 2 College English Grammar courses for around 40 minutes, with one respectively given by Associate Professor from Jinan University(male) and another from Xiamen University(female), it is noticeable that when pronouncing the open vowels which require larger or the largest openness of mouth, the male professor tends to display smaller openness. For instance, for the same word “must” /mʌst; məst/, the male professor’s actual pronunciation of the open vowel [ʌ] is between [ə] and [ʌ], while the female professor’s is between [ʌ] and [a:], which also could be seen in their pronunciation for “Judgement”. In the meantime, another finding concluded from the audios recorded is that the male professor’s openness range is smaller than the female professor.

In addition to their smaller openness for vowels that require larger openness as mentioned above, another support is that when pronouncing the vowels between “close vowels” and “close-mid vowels” (including [i:], [ɪ],[u:],[ʊ] ), the female professor’s

pronunciation slides closer to the one with even smaller openness than the male. This can be manifested in their respective pronunciation towards the word “LOOK” /lʊk/: the male professor articulates it as /lʊk/ while the female professor’s pronunciation is more likely to be between /lʊk/ and /lu:k/. For this, Zhao Ronghui pointed in her research that one reason may be that women often exaggerate vowel characteristics, for example, [a] [o] before a stressed syllable and after a hard consonant is often pronounced as a very open [a:], which may have a sound length equal to or even greater than the vowel in the stressed syllable (2003).



*Figure 4.6 The openness of Vowels*

This finding has also been observed in the physical English classrooms of Wuhan University. By entering 4 professors'(2 males and 2 females, and all are from the Department of English/Translation, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature) English class randomly, a common pronunciation characteristic that all female teachers exhibit is that they often amplify the characteristic of a specific vowel. If one is a close-mid vowel, then female teachers tend to make it more like a “close vowel”; and if it is an open-mid or an open vowel, then they are apt to make the openness more obvious. At the same time, male teachers seem to have less variation for different vowels. It could be intuitively sensed that when they pronounce [i:], which requires least openness and [ɑ], which requires largest openness, the difference is not expectedly that much as

commonly should be.

The gap in pronunciation between male and female teachers may come from their innate differences in language function. Physiological and psychological studies have shown that females have an innate advantage over males in terms of language mechanisms, with girls reaching full articulation at an earlier age than boys in the first grade (Zhao 2003). On the other hand, according to H. Schnell, the ratio of male to female stutters varies from 2:1 to 10:1, and males account for more than 60% of those with impaired speech function (qtd in Zhao, 114). These conditions affirm the advantage of sound perception for females. And this inherent advantage may account for why the number of female language teachers is far higher than of male ones.

Sociolinguistic research has also revealed a phenomenon that Fassold calls “gender pattern”. It refers to the tendency of men to use “low prestige variants of language”, while women tend to use “high prestige variants of language”. Researchers from China have, to some extent, got the similar conclusion. For example, Mr. Cao Zhiwei’s (1996) research on the Jinan dialect shows that women tend to be ahead of men in the evolution of the urban dialect to the standard language (Mandarin), especially among teenagers. He says: “Urban females are more conscious of their ‘linguistic identity’ than males and more actively and consciously pursue highly socially valued forms of language, which in the dialect area is highlighted by a more active and conscious learning and use of Mandarin and a greater acceptance of it.” (Zhao Jinming Edited, 1997:40). Celina of Russia has affirmed through fieldwork that women are more conservative in their speech. She says: “Women maintain more of the old-fashioned ways of pronouncing words in their cities” (Celina, 1984:177). This means that women are generally more cautious when it comes to breaking out of their inherited ways of pronunciation. They prefer to use the traditional ways of pronunciation that have gained social acceptance (Zhao Ronghui, 2003:110). With “teacher” this specific occupation considered, most teachers in China have high expectation for social prestige and acceptance before they enter the teaching circle, thus this may be one reason why the these genderlects are magnified in Chinese classroom.

Another undeniable source for this may be attributed to social stereotype. As being

articulate and adept at expressing is commonly Chinese people's impression of females, females have a higher tendency to express themselves clearly as their unshirkable responsibility. however, without this restraint, males can be more casual about their daily pronunciation and discourse. this may also account for the pronunciation difference for male and female English teachers in Chinese university classrooms.

#### **4.5 Interaction**

In the research done earlier (*Figure 10*) which observed 30 physical science and 30 chemistry classes, containing a total of 1331 students, the researchers found that “there were significant main effects for teacher sex for direct questions asked by teachers to students” (Jones and Wheatley, 1990:866). Male teachers asked significantly more direct questions of students than female teachers. Male teachers asked an average of 1.00 direct questions for each student, and female teachers average 0.49 direct questions per student. The present study found significant differences for direct questions by teacher sex but no student sex differences. However, Karp and Yoels (1976) reported an interaction effect for their study of college classes; they found that male college teachers asked more direct questions to male students, but female college teachers were equally as likely to ask direct questions of students of either sex (886-887).

*Table 4.3 Previous Studies on the Impacts of Teachers' Sex on Occurrence of Direct Questions in Interaction<sup>1</sup>*

**TABLE III**  
**Analysis of Variance for Direct Questions**

| Source  | df        | MS           | F            | p             |
|---|-----------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| <b>Teacher Sex</b>                            | <b>1</b>  | <b>98.83</b> | <b>10.05</b> | <b>.002**</b> |
| <b>Subject</b>                                | <b>1</b>  | <b>3.89</b>  | <b>0.40</b>  | <b>.532</b>   |
| <b>Teacher Sex x Subject</b>                  | <b>1</b>  | <b>2.99</b>  | <b>0.30</b>  | <b>.583</b>   |
| <b>Session(Teacher Sex x Subject)</b>         | <b>56</b> | <b>10.61</b> |              |               |
| <br>  |           |              |              |               |
| <b>Student Sex</b>                            | <b>1</b>  | <b>3.97</b>  | <b>3.59</b>  | <b>.063</b>   |
| <b>Teacher Sex x Student Sex</b>              | <b>1</b>  | <b>0.24</b>  | <b>0.22</b>  | <b>.644</b>   |
| <b>Subject x Student Sex</b>                  | <b>1</b>  | <b>1.01</b>  | <b>0.92</b>  | <b>.342</b>   |
| <b>Teacher Sex x Subject x Student Sex</b>    | <b>1</b>  | <b>0.35</b>  | <b>0.31</b>  | <b>.577</b>   |
| <b>Session x Stu Sex(Tea Sex x Subject)56</b> |           | <b>1.10</b>  |              |               |

\*\* Significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

In the empirical study, considering the nebulous definition of “direct question”, Only times of the teachers’ asking male students and female students were recorded. For this no special relation is found because many professors adopt the way using a student-list or waiting for volunteers. However, what to some extent concords with the former research result is not the likeliness for male and female college teachers to ask male or female students direct questions that varies, but their inviting willingness and feedback for them that vary.

*Table 4.4 Female and Male Teachers' Average Frequency of Feedback*

| <b>Female Teachers' Average Frequency of Feedback</b> |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| <b>Feedback</b>                                       | <b>Frequcey (Proportion)</b> |
| Criticize   | 0                            |
| Indirect comment("OK", "well")                        | 30.95%                       |
| Praise  | 38.10%                       |
| Simply recognize ("Yes", "Right")                     | 39.29%                       |

(a)

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Jones & Wheatley: *Gender Differences in Teacher-student Interactions in Science Classrooms*, 1990.

| Male Teachers' Average Frequency of Feedback |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| Feedback                                     | Frequcey (Proportion) |
| Criticize                                    | 0%                    |
| Indirect comment("OK", "well")               | 0%                    |
| Praise                                       | 42.86%                |
| Simply recognize ("Yes", "Right")            | 57.14%                |

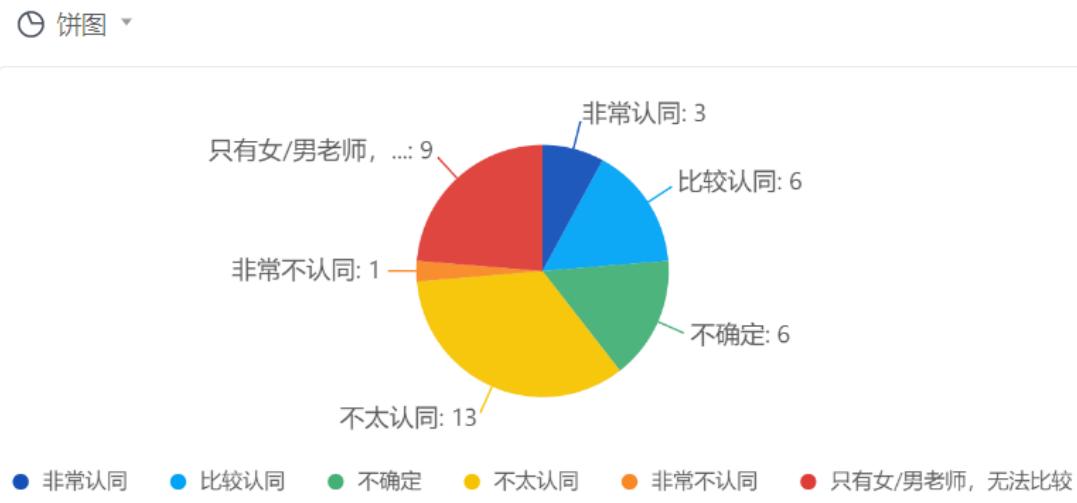
(b)

By observing the behavior of those 4 teachers, it is interesting to notice that though the students to whom they ask questions are randomly selected, regardless of their gender, female teachers' inviting willingness for male students are slightly higher, with subconscious expressions like “*what about gentlemen?*” “*I suppose gentlemen should not be unfamiliar with this*”. Even one of the female teachers displayed a much higher frequency of facing male students in class when asking questions. This corroborates one terminology called Teacher Expectation. That is, teachers may unconsciously or consciously reinforce genderlects by praising certain language patterns or correcting others based on their expectations of how men and women should speak. However, the sample is too small to make a systematic and convincing conclusion while it should be ascribed to the fact that the observation mainly happens in the foreign language and literature department, where male students “innately” belong to a rare and attention-gathering group. But it serves as a reminder that teachers may be influenced by their own physiological (such as sex) and psychological (such as expectations) conditions and then duplicate the influences subconsciously to students.

In terms of the feedback, result shows that in fact male and female teachers showed similar degree of verbal consideration and empathy rather than “Women are more apt to play affirmative evaluation” (Zhao Ronghui, 2003). Studies involving feedbacks provided by those teachers in classrooms have revealed little gender differences in feedbacks. For example, they both avoid using criticism in class, with higher frequency for positive feedbacks including praise and recognition. The slight difference lies in the proportion of indirect comment. However, due to the characteristics of these courses and questions in class, there does exist much possibility for one teacher feel hard to give direct feedbacks (either affirm or criticize). Thus, the difference of it could be out

of consideration.

根据你以往的英语课记忆，你是否认同“女性老师给出的正面评价比对男性老师更多”？



*Figure 4.7 College Students Attitudes towards Male and Female English Teachers' Positive Feedback*

Previous research indicated a significant correlation between college teachers' gender and their level of directness when communicating with male and female students. However, the findings from this empirical study, which analyzed the behavior of Chinese teachers in the classroom and the impressions of Chinese college students, suggest that gender may not play a significant role in a teacher's level of directness. Instead, a teacher's willingness to engage with students of different genders appears to be a more critical consequence.

## Chapter Five Conclusion

With findings on teachers' communication style, body language, tone, pronunciation and interaction discussed about, this chapter will first summarize the findings, highlighting the key constructs. Then it will point out the research limitations of this study. Finally, it will end with conclusion on practical recommendations that can be implemented in Chinese classroom.

### **5.1 Summary of the Findings**

The empirical study aimed to compare its findings with previous research on communication style, body language, tone, pronunciation, and interaction. Out of these, only the results of pronunciation were consistent with previous studies. The findings supported the notion that females may have an advantage over males in terms of language mechanisms by suggesting that female teachers tend to be more open than men when pronouncing vowels, which results in women having more vowel sounds in their actual speech.

For other 4 aspects, firstly, contrasting to the claim that "females are also known to use more disclaimers, fillers and qualifiers in their speech" (Lemmer, 1996), the result turns out that in male teachers' speech, appearance frequency of disclaimers such as "I think", "I guess", fillers such as "um", "you know", "er" or "like" and words of approximation like "maybe", "perhaps" "could" "about" "may" is slightly higher than female teachers. Secondly, except for the action of smiling, which was more frequent in female teachers than in male teachers, all the other actions including leaning forward, synchronizing movements with others, nodding, tilting heads and hand swing, were more frequent in males. This also deviates from the common perception. What's more, though women are typically described as more expressive, more relationship oriented, and more concerned with creating and maintaining intimacy, in this empirical study it finds that from both the students' and teachers' perspectives, female teachers even have higher potential to be more instrumental, more task oriented, and more concerned with gathering information, or with establishing and maintaining social status or power. Last

but not least, it may not be the likeliness for male and female college teachers to ask male or female students direct questions that varies, but their inviting willingness and feedback for those students that vary, which altogether could serve as a reminder that teachers may be influenced by their own physiological (such as sex) and psychological (such as expectations) conditions and then duplicate the influences subconsciously to students.

## 5.2 Research Limitations

In recent years, instead of the colloquial phrases such as “men are from Mars, women are from Venus” (John Gray 1990), recent developments in sociolinguistics and gender studies address the blurring of the traditional male-female binary. “Awareness, questioning, and new conceptualizations of language behavior challenge supposed gender stereotype. And growing acceptance of spectrums of sexuality (GLBT: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender) and the “continuing deconstruction of gender roles” require those interested in language behavior, and specifically in classroom discourse, to avoid looking at male and female speech in simplistic or binary ways. The teachers could not be simply categorized into males and females, whereas they may more or less take on some characteristics that are traditionally assigned to another gender. But because the observation is limited to college classrooms, it is nearly impossible to fairly decide one’s gender by his or her behavior in a specific context. Thus, it lies its foundation on the hypothesis that most Chinese college teachers’ gender accords with their sex.

Another disadvantage is that the study is done only in higher education sector and therefore, the findings might not be applicable to males and females working in several other sectors. The sample size is far too small to determine if these findings are significant. A larger, more diverse and segmented sample in this study would result in helpful corrections to the limitations of the study. Specifically, it would be helpful to have a much larger sample of teacher administrators from all parts of China, covering a wider age group. Moreover, the observation work is mostly done in Wuhan University,

specifically classes given by professors from department of English/ Translation, Faculty of Foreign Language and Literature. And most of the interviewed college students are from Wuhan University. The object of observation and analysis may not be very representative and authentic.

Besides, as more complex theoretical formulations of genderlect emerge, it remains to be seen whether the common notion of males and females in linguistic conflict will persist in the public arena.

### **5.3 Conclusion Remarks**

The observation and discussion towards male and female college English teachers' language use in class are derived from the former studies of genderlects that assert educational environments "led by females tend to have a teaching and learning focus, are less concerned with standardized achievement and tend to be close-knit communities where individuals feel valued and cared for" (Shakeshaft, 1993). And the essay is also based on questioning that "Female administrators have a greater preference for activities related to instructional leadership and communication, give recognition to the context of a situation while avoiding authoritarian solutions, and use a problem-solving approach that incorporates flexibility and creativity". (Marshall & Mitchel, 2002). Those "genderlects" have been interpreted to many versions and thus penetrated into all walks of life around us.

With the result of this empirical study demonstrated, the potential consequences may arise from 2 aspects. Firstly, there may exist discomfort or alienation among male or female teachers who feel that their gender is being unfairly singled out for scrutiny. Secondly, resistance or pushback from some members of the educational community may be skeptical of the findings or feel that they are not relevant to their particular context. However, this empirical study hopes to, in an ideal way, by stating that male and female teachers of Chinese English classrooms do have some gender-tinged tendency to certain behavior, increase awareness and understanding of gender-based differences in language teaching and learning, promote the development of more

gender-inclusive language teaching practices that take into account the possible problems and preferences faced by male and female students and teachers themselves, and improve communication and collaboration between male and female teachers, which could benefit students and the broader educational community.

Of course, there are other variables that come into play besides the gender of a teacher when considering the most appropriate teaching style, including the gender balance, age range and cultural backgrounds of the students. But the above findings on teachers' gender and teaching style can be useful in at least two ways. First, teacher trainers should be more aware of the possible correlation between a trainee's gender and teaching style. Second, experienced teachers need to be aware of any residual gender influence in their teaching. In both cases, monitoring and adapting teaching styles can help.

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