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Exploring Linguistic Space Occupied by the Teachers and Students of an ESL Classroom in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan: Comparisons Across Gender

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English has been the language of international communication for almost a century. In Pakistan, English language learning is introduced as a compulsory academic subject from a young age as dictated by the Ministry of Education, Islamabad (2006) in National Curriculum.

The National Curriculum aims to develop practical skills in the use of English so that students can use the language in different life situations within and outside of classrooms. In general, English is taught and learned mostly in formal educational settings, such as classrooms, and students have few opportunities to practice the English language outside of this context. Therefore, oral practice of language including dialogue (i.e. talk) and classroom interactions between teachers and students within classrooms and during teaching and learning processes are critical components of English language acquisition.

The current study focuses on an English as a second language (ESL) secondary classroom of a private school in Skardu, Pakistan and explores (a) the overall

linguistic space, classroom talk, classroom interactions, and (b) how the teacher and male and female students occupy the overall linguistic space, that is, the classroom time.

Research Questions

- How is linguistic space occupied by a teacher and students of a grade 10 ESL classroom of a private school of District Skardu Gilgit-Baltistan?
- How do male and female student differently occupy linguistic space of an ESL classroom within a private school of the District Skardu Gilgit-Baltistan?

Key Terms

Linguistic space. The term “linguistic space” is borrowed from the work of Jule (2002) and, for the purposes of this study, refers to all classroom talk and all speech acts of both the students and teacher in its entirety.

Classroom talk. Classroom Talk refers to the conversational participation of both the teacher and the students (Jule, 2002).

Speech act. A speech act is defined as an act that could be performed by speech or utterance (Fairley, 2010).

Silent students. For this study, silent students are those students who participated in classroom but the average number of words in their turns was less than half of the average number of students' turns (Fairley, 2010).

Dominant students. Dominant students are those who participated in the classroom talk and the average number of words in their turns was more than half of the average number of students' turns (Fairley, 2010).

Short and long turns. A short turn is composed of five or less words, and a long turn contains six or more words (Jule, 2002).

Literature Review

Research on gender and classroom interactions in English language classrooms began to gather momentum in the mid of 1990s, but researchers have been exploring gender and classroom interactions within different disciplines, including linguistics, since 1960s (Jule, 2002).

Research in this area now includes and explores gender and English language learning, classroom talk, language learning achievements, and other aspects of English language learning that this research will not explore. Different arguments have offered different and inconsistent evidence as to why language learning achievements are different for male and female students; hence this study. However, most researchers consider classroom interactions and linguistic space two of the most important factors that determine a difference in linguistic learning achievement within a given institution (Shulruf, Hattie &

Tumen, 2008). Naderi and Rashidi (2012) explored how gender affects classroom interaction patterns of EFL classrooms in Iran.

The data, collected from twenty-four EFL classes, revealed that gender is related to classroom interaction patterns between teachers and students. The study also found that male students tend to initiate interactions in a higher frequency, and female students tend to wait to be addressed by teachers.

Focusing on classroom interactions and gender, Jule (2002) conducted her research to explore ESL classroom talk in Columbia. Her findings revealed that the gender of students impacts student participation in classrooms and also impacts the nature of and the amount of teacher attention students receive. As a result, Jule's research revealed that female students had fewer language learning opportunities in the classrooms she observed.

Godinho (2007) investigated the gender differences in linguistic space occupied by secondary-school students in Australia. His study measured word count in oral conversations. From his study, it was revealed that female students had a minimally higher word count because they tended to talk for minimally longer periods of time. A similar study was also carried out by Chen (2007) in a primary classroom in Northeast England. The results suggested that there was no significant difference in male and female classroom interactions; however, the study noted that female students received more positive responses from the teacher.

Lastly, Duffy, Warren and Walsh (2001) conducted their research with almost 600 students in Canada, and it focused on gender and classroom interactions. The study revealed no significant gender

difference across the number of answers of the males and female to questions asked by the teacher.

The results of the above studies are inconsistent; therefore, an additional study is needed because analysis of classroom talk will always be relevant to ESL research for many reasons. Foremost, classrooms are language environments where students use language in different forms and for many different reasons. Secondly, as interest grows in regard to child-centred teaching and learning, it is crucial to look into classroom talk as a primary aspect of the classroom teaching and learning process.

If it is true that female students are not getting equal access to the classroom talk, then classrooms are imbalanced and language learning outcomes are negatively biased. Therefore, it is important to observe and classify student classroom talk by gender to better understand how both male and female students can maximize gain from their classroom experiences (Jule, 2002).

Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive approach because it aimed to describe and explore the characteristics (i.e. patterns) of interactions between a teacher and his students within one classroom setting (Fairley, 2010; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). This study also employed an exploratory approach because it aimed to investigate the phenomenon of linguistic space occupied by the teacher and his students in an ESL classroom. In other words, the study investigated the nature of the responses from both the teacher and the male and female students.

The study's quantitative data is limited to numbers, percentages and averages

(Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012) that are used to compare the classroom talk of both male and female students by counting the number of (a) words spoken by both genders, (b) the length of their turns during classroom talk, and (c) speech acts. The study is not quantitative in nature, however, because the quantitative data, collected through videotaping, do not help to extend or generalize the qualitative results (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Thus, the study is qualitative in nature as it was aimed to explore phenomenon in depth by observing the ESL classroom talk (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Additionally, speech acts help both teachers and students understand various tasks through instruction, initiating discussions, asking questions, responding to a question, repeating a question, explaining a point and so on.

Sample and Sampling Strategies

The researcher employed a purposive sampling strategy to select a sample of participants who wanted to participate in the research and who consented to the videotaping of lessons (Bernard, 2002).

Data Collection Tool and Procedures

The researcher collected the data by videotaping and observing five consecutive classroom lessons in a coeducational grade 10 ESL classroom. As per the school's schedule, each lesson lasted for 35 minutes. The videos were transcribed to count the number of total words, to compare the words spoken by both male and female students, and to compare speech acts across gender. The general classroom observations were also used to capture the nature of both verbal and nonverbal interactions within the classroom.

Data Analytical Strategies

After collecting data by videotaping and classroom observations, the data were

analyzed on various levels. First, the videotaped data were transcribed by watching it thoroughly on daily basis. Second, the classroom interactions were observed and noted by the researcher during the lesson and transcribed more fully directly after each class. Third, the videotaped data were transcribed by the researcher through extensive notetaking of dialogues and action with several repeated viewings of the data. Fourth, the transcriptions of classroom observations were read multiple times and cross-checked with the interactions recorded on video. Finally, the analysis classified (1) total number of words in a lesson, (2) number of words of the teacher, (3) number of words of the students, (4) number of words uttered by males and females, (5) speech acts of the teacher, (6) speech acts from students represented as “response to a

question,” “uninitiated comment,” “question to teacher,” and “storytelling,” and (6) silent and dominant student speakers.

Results

Amount of Speech

In order to explore the linguistics space occupied in the ESL classroom through the amount of speech of the whole classroom, the number of words uttered by the teacher and students were counted in the four consecutive lessons. Table 1 presents the results of the analysis.

The results presented in Table 1 revealed that word count was higher in Lesson 4 (6,569) followed by Lesson 5 (5,643).

Table 1

Word Count of the Whole ESL Classroom

Lesson	Number of Words
1	3,214
2	5,412
3	3,887
4	6,569
5	5,643
24,725 Total	

Teacher’s and Students’ Words Count in ESL Classroom Talk

For further analysis, teacher and student talk was separately analyzed and the total number of words in each talk was explored and changed into percentages to make it more meaningful for the readers.

Table 2 depicts the results. Table 2 reports the results that in all of the five lessons, teacher word count was higher (60%) as compared to student word count (40%). In other words, the teacher occupied more linguistic space than students.

Table 2

Percentages of Word Counts of Teachers' and Students' Talk in ESL Classroom

Lesson	Number of Words in Percentages	
	Teacher's Talk	Students' Talk
1	64%	36%
2	53%	47%
3	69%	31%
4	56%	44%
5	58%	42%
Overall Averages	60%	40%

Male and Female Word Count in ESL Classroom Talk

To explore the differences in linguistic space occupied by female and male students in the ESL classroom, student talk based on gender was also analyzed. Table 3 represents the results of the analysis. Table 3 reveals that in all of the five lessons, male student word count was higher (54%) than female student word count (44%) except in Lesson 3 when the word count was equal.

In other words, male students occupied more linguistic space than their female counterparts.

When individual student talk was analyzed, it was found that, on average, 18 words were spoken at any one time. Interestingly, female students used more words in their responses and 58 was the highest word count for a single response.

Table 3

Word Count Percentages of Male and Female Talk in ESL Classroom

Lesson	Number of Words in Percentages	
	Male	Female
1	62%	38%
2	58%	42%
3	50%	50%
4	61%	39%
5	51%	49%
Overall Averages	56%	44%

Teacher Speech Acts

The term "speech act" encompasses asking questions, responding to questions, repeating questions, explaining a point, initiating a discussion, or redirecting a point

or a question. Therefore, speech acts of this ESL classroom teacher were also analyzed to further explore classroom talk. Specifically, the different types of speech acts were categorized by type and frequency

regarding how speech acts were used to address both the whole class and male and female students.

Table 4 shows that the most frequently used speech act is "Questioning" (59 times) followed by "Explanation" (19 times), "Positive Response" (17 times), and "Instruction" (15 times). Interestingly, the number of questions asked to the males and females were found equal. These questions, as revealed by the classroom observations, were based primarily on the content of the stories being taught in the classroom.

The teacher, in almost all the cases, called the name of students, one by one, and asked questions about the stories contained in the textbook. To answer the questions, each student was asked to come in front of the classroom and answer the questions in front of the class. Though the teacher asked each student to answer questions, fewer female students were prepared or willing to come in front of the classroom and answer the questions.

The second speech act of the teacher analyzed was "Repetition of a student's comment." According to the results, the total number of times a teacher repeated a student's comment was 12. The difference in male and female comments repeated by a teacher favoured male students (8 times) over female students (4 times). This result makes sense because more male students

were prepared to answer the questions of the teacher; thus, the repetition of their comments would likely, and did, occur less frequently. As a result, female students spoke less often and, therefore, got less attention from the teacher.

Videotaping and classroom observations revealed that the teacher also used "explanations" to student questions or comments as speech acts. The analysis, of these explanations, reveals that explanations were used to address both the whole class and to male and female students. Speech acts of "explanation" were offered to male students three times more often than to female students.

Analysis of the other speech acts in Table 4 divulged that the only two negative responses were directed to male students. Interestingly, positive responses were equally distributed between the male students (four times) and female students (four times). Moreover, in the speech act of "praise/reinforcement" directed to both male and female students, a slight difference was found that favoured males (five times) over females (four times). In other speech acts of "general comments and storytelling," the teacher did not address male and female students separately; rather, he addressed the whole class with general comments (three) and storytelling (one).

Table 4

Counts of Different Speech Acts of the Teacher to the Students

Possible Speech Acts	To the Class	To a Male	To a Female	Total
Question	23	18	18	59
Repetition of a student's comment	.	8	4	12
Explanation	15	3	1	19
Negative response to a question	.	2	.	2
Instruction/guidance	8	4	3	15
Positive response	9	4	4	17
Praise/reinforcement	4	5	4	13
General comment	3	-	-	3
Story-telling	1	-	-	1

Student Speech Acts

Student speech acts were also explored to analyze the linguistic space occupied by the students based on gender. See Table 5 for the number of speech acts in the ESL classroom.

According to Table 5, the most frequent speech act was a response to a question posed by the teacher (41 times). Further analysis revealed that male students responded more (26 times) to the teacher questions as compared to female students

(15 times). Similar to the teacher's speech acts in that it was observed that the teacher asked more girls were unprepared to answer the questions asked by the teacher as compared to males, therefore, it was the reasons that boys responded more to the teacher's questions as compared to girls. Interestingly, out of total seven uninitiated comments of the classroom (comments not initiated by the teacher), female students called out more uninitiated comments (five times) as compared to boys (two times).

Table 5

Students' Speech Acts in ESL Classroom

Possible Speech Acts	Group	Males	Females	Total
Response to a question	-	26	15	41
Uninitiated comment	-	2	5	7

Silent and Dominant Students

Silent and dominant students were explored to gain a better understanding of the nature of this ESL classroom. For this study, eight students participated; five were

boys (62%) and three were girls (38%). Two girls in the class did not participate in classroom talk during any of the three lessons observed. Out of the eight students, then, three (38%) were

considered silent students and five (62%) were identified as dominant students.

Differences between silent and dominant students were also analyzed based on gender. For this purpose, the first total summarized the total number of both silent and dominant students, and then the number of silent and dominant male and female students was calculated. Table 6

Table 6

Percentage Differences of Silent and Dominant Students by Gender

Gender	Silent Students	Dominant Students
Female	67%	20%
Male	33%	80%

Length of Turns and Gender

The length of a student talk often has a strong relationship with silent and dominant behavior in students; therefore, “turn length” as a speech act was explored and classified as either short or long (Mariah, 2010). First, the number of turns taken by each student was counted, and then each turn was labelled as short or long. This was done because “turn length” is an important variable in second language acquisition because it “leads to more negotiation of meaning” (Mariah, 2010, p.63). Thus, the number of short and long turns were counted and then classified by

presents the results of this analysis.

According to Table 6, out of the eight participating students, five were male and three were female. Among the three silent students, two girls (67%) and one boy (33%) were categorized as silent; among the five dominant students, one girl (20%) and four boys (80%) were identified as dominant.

gender. For the study, a “short turn” meant a speech act with five (5) or less words; a “long turn” meant a speech act with six (6) or more words. Table 7 describes the turns as long and short according to gender.

According to Table 7, there were a total of 29 short turns and 14 long turns. Out of total short turns, male students called out 21 times (72%) and female students called out eight times (18%). Of the total long turns, male students took nine turns (64%) and female students took five turns (36%). Interestingly, the longest turn was 49 words and was given by a female student.

Table 7

Percentage Differences of Short and Long Turns by Gender

Students	Short Turns	Long Turns
Males	72%	64%
Females	18%	36%

Discussion

This exploration of how linguistic space was occupied in an ESL classroom by the teacher and students revealed important insights. Findings indicated the teacher occupied more linguistic space than learners, which is consistent with the findings of Jule (2002) and Harmer (1998) who also reported in their studies that the teacher's talk occupied more time (linguistic space) of the classroom than the students' talk. By contrast, in language teaching and learning, a balance in both teacher's and students' talk is recommended so that students can learn English by using English (Le & Lui, 2012).

In addition, according to the word count of the classroom talk, boys occupied more linguistic space (56%) as compared to girls (44 %). These findings corroborate the reporting of Zhang (2010), Coates (1993) and Hearn (1992) who found that men speak more frequently and occupy larger linguistic spaces (more of the total talk time) than women. Similarly, Swann (1992) found in his study that boys uttered twice as many words as girls.

One important factor responsible for boys' dominance in classroom talk is a teacher's behavior. Zhang (2010) and Coates (2004) have reported teachers offer boys more opportunities to participate in classroom settings than girls and call on boys more frequently in all of their speech acts except "Positive Response" to a comment or question of a student. Both of these teacher behaviors were also observed in this current study.

Speech acts are language utterances used in a classroom during teaching and learning experiences such as asking and repeating questions, responding to or redirecting a point or a question, and

supporting discussion. These speech acts were also analyzed to further understand classroom talk. Findings showed that boys dominated in "Responding to a Question" of the teacher, while girls dominated in "Uninitiated Comments". Zhang (2010) similarly reported boys outperformed girls in responding to a teacher's questions and discussed factors which worked simultaneously to construct boys' dominance, raising hands earlier and calling out the answers, in addition to being called on by teachers. According to Tajeddin and Malmir (2014), men and women engage in social activities differently; therefore, their choice of speech acts may also differ and are not characteristically biological.

The study also explored silent and dominant students and the results reported that more girls were silent (67%) than boys (33%). This finding contradicts the common stereotype that females of Gigit-Baltistan are more talkative males. The results align with the ideas of Coates (2004) who claimed that women are expected to remain silent and typically not given opportunities to speak more than 30% of the total talk time.

This study also included an investigation of the short and long patterns of turn taking in the students' talk. Findings revealed that boys took both long and short turns; however, the longest turn of the study was taken by a girl. Baxter (1999) confirmed the result of the current study in reporting that girls often took longer turns during their talk, and most waited to explore spaces within which to speak. In addition, their responses were found to be more elaborate and detailed as compared to those of boys. Zhang (2010) reiterated that detailed responses of girls are a prolific practice in linguistic space.

Conclusion

The aims of this study were to explore the linguistic space occupied by the teacher and the students of an ESL classroom in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan. The investigation found that most of the linguistic space was up taken by the teacher as compared to students, and boys as compared to girls.

An explanation for teacher dominance may be that instruction in schooling, especially in language classes, is made through teacher centred approaches. As a result, most of the classroom time is taken up by the teacher, and students have little time to participate in classroom teaching and learning or to interact with each other. This limits students' opportunities to learn language through interactions. An explanation of the dominance of boys in linguistic space may be that girls did not get equal access to classroom talk and opportunities of interaction in the classroom activities. This may have limited their learning of the language and caused them to lag behind acquisition in comparison to the boys.

This investigation might provide a foundation for researchers who want to pursue a similar line of inquiry and explore aspects of classroom talk which were not explored in the context of the study. Findings of this study may inform practitioners, school management, and policy makers who can reflect upon the existing condition of language learning in their schools and take interventions to improve the conditions. Educators are encouraged to manage school resources equitably and adopt teaching and learning activities and behaviors which ensure boys and girls participate equally in English language learning.

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