

## EMPIRICAL STUDY OF GENDER PERFORMANCE IN PEER -TO -PEER TALK IN ESL CLASS

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### Abstract

In order to explore whether and how gender identity is constructed through the linguistic behaviors ,the paper adopts the doing gender approach in analyzing the transcripts recorded in the group discussions in ESL class in China .Female students display both attributes of submissive femininity and dominant masculinity and the result shows that the linguistic behaviors can transcend the clear boundary of gender stereotype . The author proposes new perspectives on designing the teaching materials and teaching strategies on the part of teachers .

### Key words

language and gender ;doing gender ;construction ;gender stereotype ;dichotomy

### 1. Introduction

Earlier studies of language and gender were based on the traditional theory module of gender dichotomy ,depicting different linguistic behaviors by male and female students (Jespersen 1922 ;Lakoff 1989 ;Maltz &Borker 1982 ). The new approach —doing gender approach redefines gender and proposes the novel implication of being flexible and multi faceted . It takes advantages over the other traditional approaches in several aspects ( West &Zim mermann 1991 ).

Instead of assigning women and men to pre determine and examine the speech features ,the new approach focuses on the way people s interactions constitute gender performances and the way people s conversation facilitate the construction of gender identity . This paper aims to explore empirically whether gender identity is constructed through linguistic behaviors in the specific context of ESL class ,especially on the part of female students . Findings from analyzing the transcripts of classroom talk among students<sup>1</sup> help extend the vision about the complex construction of gender identity beyond the simple male female division .

### 2 . Language and Gender :Traditional Study and the Limitations

The study of language and gender<sup>2</sup> has long drawn the attention of social linguistics . Researchers of language and gender generally conducted their research in three domains :women s language ,sexism in language ,different conversational strategies by male and female speakers .

Researchers defined women s language at phonological ,lexical and syntactic levels respectively : women are more sensitive to appropriate tone and pronunciation and more inclined to use standard speech ;women make for more precise discriminations in naming colors ;women are often more observed to tend to use short sentences and tag questions ( Brend 1975 ;Baird 1976 ).

Sexism pervades in many fields of social life, including language (Lakoff 1973; Schultz 1975). For example, Fasold (1990) listed several pairs of English terms for men and women, often with the negative connotations of the latter. Both terms of "bachelor" and "spinster" refer to unmarried people, yet bachelor connotes integrity, independence and sexual freedom while the latter refers to ugliness and futility.

In terms of verbal communication, sociolinguists concentrated their study on gender characteristics in single sex and mixed sex conversation. They found male dominance and female subordination in topic control and turn taking. Men always control the talk and women are marginalized into voiceless role (Tannen 1990).

Meanwhile, researchers generally adopted three approaches to language and gender study: deficiency approach, dominance approach and difference approach.

In terms of deficiency approach, the early articles on language and gender regarded speech style labeling "women's speech" as inferior compared to the "standard" usage of men, owing to the psychological and personal traits of women. Jespersen (1922) held that women's language is an imperfect, deviant or deficient gloss on men's, while men are bearers of the vital forces of language.

As for Dominance Approach, current women's movement started raising our consciousness of female subordination and male dominance in society. The notion of women's inferiority was reassessed in academic research. Lakoff's *Language and Women's Place* (1975), one of the first and most influential works, stated that it was inequality between sexes in society rather than the physical inferiority of women that was reflected in society. Lakoff (1975) found that women tend to use more hedges, qualifiers and polite forms due to low status of women and the social pressure for them to talk like a lady. She suggested that women speak a powerless language conveying a lack of authority.

Regarding difference Approach, Maltz &orker (1982) drew up lists of women's features and men's features and claimed that women and men have formed different norms for conversational interaction. They argued that American men and women come from different sociolinguistic subcultures, having learned to do different things with words in a conversation.

Studies of language and gender in the past 20 years have offered different dimensions of language use and a rich variety of assumptions about the interaction between language and gender. However, their explanatory force has been weakened by the following reasons.

Firstly, the old binary of deficit, difference and dominance all emphasized difference and overlooked categories and similarities by suggesting dichotomies separated by clear boundaries. Yet researchers have recently pointed out that although the majority of human beings can be unambiguously classified as either female or male in biology, there are actually more than two sexes (Crawford 1995). Because the terms female and male insufficiently categorize our social practices, English also includes terms like *missy*, *gay* and *lesbian*, etc. Individuals who fail to fit the strict female-male dichotomy are either ignored or labeled as abnormal.

Secondly, the traditional questions regarding language and gender have tended to reinforce rather than to weaken the prevailing female-male dichotomy. Researchers asking the question "Do men and women speak differently?" not only presupposed that women and men do speak differently but have too often found the language of women deficiency.

Thirdly, another question "in what ways does language—in structure, content and daily usage—reflect and help constitute the sexual inequality?" represented another major area of language and gender research (Kramer et al. 1978: 38). Feminists interested in exploring how dominance was achieved through language explore how interruptions, topic control, use of generic pronouns and nouns and polite forms all constituted evidence that language not only reflects power relationship, but helped to maintain them. Such studies reinforced the predominant assumptions that females and males are essentially different.

Furthermore, gender is not only a physical category but also a social category which works

independent of other aspects of social identity and relations. It works differently across communities, and that the linguistic forms of that meaning work differently across communities. Therefore, we need to reexamine the underlying presuppositions, seek new approaches and study it in a specific context.

### 3. Language and Gender :New Approach — Doing Gender Approach

#### 3.1 Evolving Concept of Gender

Gender is a term whose implications are very complicated, carrying at least three distinguishable meanings for the word. It belongs to either the grammatical, psychological, or social and cultural categories. In "Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics", David Crystal (2001) defined gender as a grammatical category used for the analysis of word classes displaying such contrasts as masculine/feminine/neuter, animate/inanimate, etc. "Grammatical gender" has nothing to do with sex, but which has an important role in signaling grammatical relationships between words in a sentence. Opposed to it is the "natural gender" representing the innate physical traits of male and female. As a sociolinguistic category, gender is intended to emphasize the social and cultural distinctions and characterizes the socio-cultural features of identity which make up the contrast between "masculine" and "feminine".

There were some further explorations about this term. In "Talking Differences: on Gender and Language", Mary Crawford (1995) viewed gender as the social construct and as a system of meaning that organizes interactions and governs access to power and resources. Gender existed, not in persons but in transactions and it worked at three levels:

At the social structural level, "gender works as a system of power relations. Men have more public power in most societies, controlling government, law, public discourse and academics. Alternative views of gender relations are culturally muted, and ideologies of gender can be represented and reproduced as objective facts".

At the interpersonal level, "gender functions as a cue. Gender cues are used to tell us how to behave toward others in social interactions, although much of this sex differential treatment happens outside awareness".

At the individual level, "gender works as masculinity and femininity. Within the discourse of gender, certain traits, behaviors, and interests are associated with each sex and assumed to be appropriate for people of that sex" (1995:13-17).

Accordingly, Bergvall (1999) tried to create a comprehensive theory of gender on both the micro-level and the macro level by defining gender as "possession of three aspects: what is borne, what is achieved and what is thrust upon us". The first aspect of gender "arises from innateness and is usually conceived in terms of dichotomized and oppositional female/male sex (gender) difference". The second aspect of gender referred to the performance construction and achievement of gendered identity. The third aspect of gender, "which was thrust upon us by social expectation, demanded consideration of the force of socially ascribed nature of gender, the assumptions and expectations of long time dichotomously ascribed social roles against which any gender performance was constructed, adjusted to or resisted" (1999:282).

Recent research emphasizes the ways in which individuals "construct" their gender identity in interaction. West & Zimmerman (1987) maintained that at birth we were assigned to one or the other gender physically, but affected the initial gender assignment. The way we were treated and raised was not dependent upon the biological distinctions labeled "female", women learned female rules and become socialized female through obeying those rules. Hence "A person's gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but, more fundamentally, it is something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others" (1987:140). Women and men were constructed as a fact to reinforce the construction of gender, meaning the appropriate doing of gender meant the reproduction of the "institutional arrangements that are based on sex category" (1987:146), hence the West and Zimmerman's conceptualization of "doing gender" in defining gender as a social construct.

Gender is one major construct that organizes our world and our social construct, something that we

do in interaction instead of being based on biology and nature. The doing gender approach defines gender as a socially situated, on-going performance and it focuses not on dichotomous differences expected under the roles of feminine and masculine, but on the fluid enactment of gender roles in specific social situations (Butler 1990). Gender identities are constructed through the everyday actions and discourse of participants within a certain social order and influenced by societal expectations.

### 3.2 Social Constructions of Education and Gender

#### 3.2.1 Gender Dichotomy vs Multiple Gender Roles

College is an important division of setting in which to examine how gender roles are constructed and enacted through discourse. The social atmosphere of educational institutions is organized in a dichotomous assumption of female and male. Still pervades in the college is the use of the terms female and male or women and men to describe two distinct groups. This gender polarization arises starting at birth. As Butler (1993) pointed out, the perception of dichotomy was primarily driven by the "sedimentation" of social constructions and expectations towards a particular end to regulate and control the performance of sex and gender. Few students in college seemed compelled to overtly question the rigid dichotomy. This overt social role assignment of students would support traditional linguistic researchers in making neat divisions between behaviors of "men" versus "women". They treated gender polarization as the "the ubiquitous organization of social life around the distinction between male and female" (Bem 1993 §0-81).

Regarding the question whether this dichotomy extends to the classrooms, Crawford & MacLeod (1990) and Sadker & Sadker (1990) have convincingly documented that college classrooms present a "chilly climate for women" where women are often either ignored or asked simpler questions. The research project by Sadker & Sadker (1993) indicated that women have unequal access to the conversational floor and are silenced in public contexts by means of participant observation, audio and video recordings, and interviews with students. However, as Swann (1993) pointed out, these findings needed to be interpreted with some caution. The differences between sexes were always average ones, and men and women behaved differently in different contexts. In other words, these were tendencies, not absolutes that have been documented in mainstream English speaking classes.

Gender role differences may be suppressed since most students presumably hope to succeed in their studies and prepare for their chosen careers. While the higher educational system rewards the drive for academic success, students' goals are affected by how they adjust themselves to dichotomized gender roles and hence the evident multiple gender role demands and conflicts in college. Kramarae & Treichler (1990) argue that the educational system rewards competitive ways of knowing and doing, traditionally regarded as "masculine", not the traditionally "feminine" style otherwise representing the competitive display of knowledge.

#### 3.2.2 Female's Gender Conflicts in Classroom Talk

Analysis of discourse of students in classes and in small group discussions at a college provides considerable evidence that women are caught in the tension between conflicting gender role demands. The dilemma for women who wish to enter this domain is how to respond to the traditionally masculine norms, while simultaneously responding to the conflicting, traditional feminine role expectations. Women who are learning to become professionals must either accommodate to or resist the gender roles and discourse in this field. In their academic exchanges, women display a variety of linguistic behaviors against the gender stereotypes. At times, these women express their perspectives assertively in ways usually associated with stereotypically "masculine" speech patterns. Yet they are also facilitative of the teachers' ideas and may be apologetic and hesitant after making some of their most powerful assertions, characteristics associated with stereotypically feminine speech patterns (Holmes 1992). Thus they exhibit linguistic behaviors that range from those traditionally considered masculine traits (competitive, assertive) to those traditionally considered feminine ones (cooperative, facilitative).

Within the campus culture, the complex construction of gender performed through the linguistic interactions of women and men call into question a simple female-male dichotomy. By any strict notion of gender as simply a duality of feminine or masculine roles, their behaviors would lead them to be labeled as aberrant and deviant as not fitting either females or males. Apparently their behavior is not easily

explained from a difference (two culture) approach that assumes a dichotomy of "women's language styles" and "men's language styles" (Maltz & Borker 1982). Accepting the predetermined, dichotomous categories of female and male may lead to the exclusion of critical variation as noise or aberrations, rather than exploring the variation and its significance in the construction of gender roles. A simple dichotomy also fails to account for conflicts while producing the linguistic forms. The study underscores the need for a more complex culturally and linguistically situated theory of gender which is ever changing rather than fixed.

It can be explained, however, from the doing gender approach that defines gender as something created during social interactions instead of an innate characteristic of an individual. It could be emphasized that there is considerable variation that can be exploited by teachers in their own class. To understand the variation in how men and women use language, we should not start with men and women as fixed categories or are treated the same in all contexts, but with a particular community of practice. From this perspective, the female college students can be seen as responding actively to context specific gender expectations. Their complex linguistic interactions provide, therefore, a critical site for the examination of gender roles, theories of gender, and the role of language and gender. So far the research concerned with gender characterized language use has been conducted in mainstream, white, standard English speaking context in the United States and other English speaking countries. There has been relatively little detailed research to date on how men and women construct their gender identity through interactions in Chinese context.

Thus this paper attempts to analyze how gender roles of male and female are constructed in ESL class talk in China, emphasizing the female's effort to negotiate their multiple roles. By adopting a doing-gender approach to language and gender research, it breaks the limits of stereotypical division between male and female and provides the contextualized examination of how gender roles are constructed through classroom talk, especially the group discussion among peer students in Chinese context, emphasizing on how female college students negotiate their multiple roles. Also, the study offers some suggestions for teachers and students about achieving the maximum learning and teaching effects.

## 4. Method

To consolidate the validity and reliability of the study's findings, the researcher selected the participants and settings, identified the sources of data and designed the procedures for data collection and analysis by audio taping and transcribing the group interaction in ESL class. The methodology for this study was adapted from previous studies about language and gender (Coates 1999; Tannen 1992). The context sensitive approach was employed to examine the features of conversational interaction among Chinese students.

The experiment for this study took as its primary assumption that gender was a shifting, fluid category. Gender roles were thus not predetermined by sex, but constructed and enacted largely through linguistic discourse. The presupposition was that the subjects shared the similar English proficiency level and their performance in classroom remained the same as they spoke their native language.

### 4.1 Participants

The conversation reported came from an experiment on the discourse of college courses in a university. The undergraduate students enrolled by the English department in the university aged between 18 and 20. About 80 percent of those enrolled were women, while people of minorities and other traditionally underrepresented groups accounted for less than 10 percent.

A sample class was randomly selected through personal acquaintance consisting of 39 female students and 8 male students. They were the first-year English majors attending the intensive English course. All the subjects had passed the national college entrance examination in English before gaining admission to the university, implying the same level of intermediate-upper English proficiency and performance among them.

### 4.2 Data Collection and Settings

Before the experiment, the researcher explained to the intensive English course teacher about the

purpose and procedure of the experiment. As class started, the teacher first divided the whole class into 5 mixed sex groups with 8 or 9 students in each. She then assigned the topic for group discussion "Suggestions for Foreign Language Teachers in Our Department" drawn from the teaching materials in that teaching session. The students were told that all the group discussions would be recorded for the purpose of gathering and proposing valid suggestions to the department head so as to enhance the work performance of foreign teachers. The students got highly motivated to express their opinions and involved themselves into taking full advantage of what they had learned from the class for the practical purpose.

The data for the study came from all the episodes of 5 group conversations concurrently conducting in the intensive English course. The recordings were made in each group using a cassette tape recorder for data transcribing and analysis. Each episode lasted about 50 minutes and a total of 250 minutes of audiotape were collected, which was used as the source of data in this study.

The data and transcriptions were expected to be collected and gathered in the natural and genuine settings for the students. Therefore the researcher did not show up during the experiment as an unexpected "outsider". Also the researcher did not allow the teacher to share with the students the experiment goal since the students would feel daunted and unnatural once aware of being observed and recorded for the pre-designed experiment. Capping 47 students to encourage in-class discussion, this course could represent a common experience for most of the undergraduates of the institution.

#### 4.3 Units of Data Analysis

To implement a systematic approach in conducting and analyzing the results, the transcriptions had been examined utilizing the multiple units of analysis: amount of talk, turns and floors, and utterances with assertive or facilitative functions.

Previous studies varied a lot as to how the amount of talk was measured. In this study, the amount of talk was measured in terms of the gender-specific distribution of talking based on the average percentage of time spent in a conversation. One independent variable was taken into account: the ratio of female and male students in each group.

Turn taking and floor holding tactics were regarded as the stance of controlling and dominating the conversation. Analyzing the subjects who were holding the floor and taking turns of the conversation could reveal the gender-related powerful and dominant control in conversation patterns.

Another factor was about the assertive and supportive remarks in the conversation. The former was stereotypically labeled as men's style and the latter women's. This study identified whether female and male students' speech showed significant features of assertiveness and facilitativeness respectively or they displayed the traits and characteristics in turn. Shen (1997) outlined the two groups of functions based on the taxonomy of functions proposed by Edelsky (See Table 1).

Table 1. Functions of Utterances

ASSERTIVE FUNCTIONS	SUPPORTIVE FUNCTIONS
informing or explaining	complying
initiating a topic	acknowledging
soliciting response	repeating
giving a positive or negative opinion	interpreting
criticizing /praising	summarizing
reporting or story telling	analyzing
arguing /validating	chiming in
announcing or warning	hitching on
joking or teasing	

#### 5. Results and Findings

Among the 250-minute-long 5 episodes of audio-taped conversations, no significant difference was detected in terms of the amount of talk, in proportion to the female-male gender distribution. Male

students and female students participated in the conversation almost equally . They actively shared the opinions ,or led to further in depth discussion ,or proposing the counter arguments in turns .

Merely looking at the amount of talk could obscure what was happening with the content of the talk . As Bergvall & Remlinger (1997 ) observed that ,in these class conversations ,men did more of the task -divergent talk . They did not mute their voice as much as women ,hence men had a presence in the conversation even when someone else held the floor . Meanwhile ,the women employed more strategies labeled by Holmes as “facilitative ”that were supportive of the speakers .

In analyzing all the 5 episodes of conversations ,we found that male students preferred initiating the topic for discussion and gained the constant support from the female counterparts . Yet the female students were not acting as the “passive ”followers all the time . They turned the topic when necessary and held the floor for further exploration disregarding the male counterparts reaction . The constant support to the male students and floor holding strategies were employed at the same time by the female students . The traits of being assertive and supportive were mixed among them also . The conversation recorded in this experiment revealed that many women challenged the previous research which found systematic women s silence in public settings ( Fishman 1983 ) .

The following presented a fraction of detailed transcribing and analysis of data collected from the 250 -minute long episodes in group discussions . This was the demonstration of how the data analysis was conducted in one of the five episodes .

Table 2 showed the amount of talk in one group of 5 female and 2 male students in the intensive English course under analysis here ,the women produced 63 percent of amount of talk roughly proportional to their representation of 71 percent in class numbers while the men 27 percent of talk amount compared with 29 percent . No significant difference was detected in terms of the gender -distributed amount of talk in this group .

Table 2 .One of the Episodes :Gender Distribution in Amount of Talk and Percentage in Group Size

Sex	Amount of Talk	Percentage in Group Size
Male	37 %	28 %
Female	63 %	72 %

The following excerpts detailed some of the complex interactions occurring when the group attempted to identify and pose solutions to problems with the teaching method of Mr . Pinter —their foreign language teacher . How the female students of the group presented themselves as compared to their male counterparts were noted in the following exchanges .

In Example 1 ,F1 tried to start the conversation by inquiring the other people s opinions about the oral English of their foreign language teacher . F2 offered the hesitant and mitigated answers though she responded quickly . Next M1 ended the first turn with simple answers .<sup>3</sup>

#### Excerpt 1

- 1 F1 :Do you think our foreign language teacher s English is very good ?
- 2 F2 :I don t think so . I think his oral English is not very good ... for example ,
- 3 he can t ,can t speak fluently and clearly .
- 4 M1 :And he is not a native speaker . He ,he is not a Native Speaker .

It is evident that M1 held the floor at the very beginning of the conversation . F1 s initial questions and F2 s quick response reflected their active participation in this group discussion . Yet F2 s pause showed that her inassurance while M1 asserted that it was because the foreign language teacher “is not a native speaker ” . No one else further explored this issue and everyone seemed to have taken it as conclusive remarks .

Another conversation turn started along with F3 s initializing a different topic . Still F2 gave a quick , simple response ,but M1 required her answers in more details . Again F2 spoke out her opinion in a hesitant way and was obviously trying to gain support from M1 .

Excerpt 2

- 1 F3 : Do you think in the oral English class ,every student has the same chance to practice our  
 2 oral English ?  
 3 F2 : No .  
 4 M1 : Why not ? Why do you think so ?  
 5 F2 : It s ( ) and she didn t ... want to talk aloud ,with our classmates . Do you think so ?  
 7 M1 : So you mean the problem comes from the students just because someone is ( )

This time M1 still held the floor though he does not initiate the second turn . After the first set of question answer ,M1 asked for an answer in more details by interrogative sentences “ Why not ? Why do you think so ? ” F2 answered ,though she was not sure whether it was right or wrong and anticipates an affirmative response from M1 . Again as F2 presented her explanation ,she bracketed all her efforts with unassertive remarks . “ Do you think so ? ” showed her self deprecation in spite that she was giving the reasonable answer as M1 did in the first turn . F2 s hesitancy and self deprecation contrasted sharply with M1 s assertiveness and she downplayed her own contribution to problem solution , while covertly encouraging and supporting M1 .

In the following example ,F2 offered some suggestions for oral English teaching ,but was refuted by M1 . M1 s refutation was immediately embraced by all the female peers unanimously .

Excerpt 3

- 1 F2 : I think Pinter makes us choose our ...selves choose the topic which we like ,then let us  
 2 discussion ( ) . I think it will be better ((laughing ))  
 3 M1 But ( ) change the topic is not enough //  
 4 F2 [ Yes ] .  
 5 M1 [ Do you think so ? ]  
 6 F1 [ Yes . ]  
 7 F2 [ Yes . ]  
 8 F3 [ Yes . ]

In this excerpt ,we found the distinctive phenomenon of laughter -within a turn exclusively within the women s talk . This kind of laughter was always paired with a self deprecating implication by F2 ( Line 2 ) ,a strategy barely employed by any of the two men in the group . F2 s laughter took on its negative connotation by its association with unassertive remarks “ I think Pinter makes us ” , “ I think it will be better ” . Despite the good suggestions she offered ,F2 employed a covertly negative self assessment by laughing to herself .

In another excerpt of the discussion ,while the three women agreed with M2 s suggestion of the alternative way for the oral English teaching ,F2 also pointed out another important aspect that should not be missed . But she belittled her own contribution preceded with her laughter .

Excerpt 4

- 1 M2 : The teacher always said he is ( ) and very some ,some strange . ( ) I think it is only his  
 2 character ( ) we can t change his character ,can give you ,( ) to make our ,our  
 3 conversation become easier .  
 4 F3 : I don t know //  
 5 F2 : [ I think Mr . Pinter should change his ways of ] //  
 6 F1 : [ of teaching ]  
 7 F2 : [ of teaching ] ((laughed ))  
 8 On the other hand ,our classmates should change our ,our //  
 9 F1 : [ attitude ]  
 10 F2 : Yeah ,attitude . We must realize that oral English is very important for us .  
 11 M1 : Yes ,I just find that men ( ) good prepare for the teacher s oral English teacher s classes .  
 12 Have you prepared for it ?  
 13 F2 : No .  
 14 M1 : Yes . So I think before our oral English class ,we can ...in ourself ( ) we should

- 15 prepare for the classes . (2) Yeah . ((in a merry voice)) Some others ( ) ? And then what ?  
 16 F2 : Yes , we have two oral English classes , and he asks some questions : What do you do in  
 17 the oral English classes ? And the answer is do other things , do something as you like .  
 18 I think this is re revenge us . Bao fu wo men zen me shuo ? (in Chinese pinyin —“ how  
 19 to say pay a revenge on us ”)  
 20 M1 : revenge  
 21 F1 : Before some unhappy things happen ,  
 22 M1 : m ...  
 23 F1 : So we , all our students like him .

In the example above , the topic by F2 was further explored only after M1's confirmation . M1 makes conclusive remarks initiated by “yes” . This took its connotations of dominance and authority while F2's utterance of “yes” carried supportive and facilitative implication . Though it was F2 who brings this issue into consideration , M1 seemed to appropriate her ideas to make further explorations while F2 was marginalized to a supportive position .

However , F2 did not always remain self-deprecating all the time . At the latter half of the discussion , she interrupted M1 twice .

#### Excerpt 5

- 1 M1 : Mr . Pinter's native language is German . His English may be just like our teachers ... We  
 2 just ( ) the Chinese , so there must be some difficulty in ( ) between us . We ( ) so , but  
 3 maybe we can have more chance to talk with him .  
 4 F1 : I think the former should be ( ) . ((laughing))  
 5 M1 : You mustn't , you mustn't keep silence . You can't keep //  
 6 F2 : [ I think , it's the foreign teacher  
 7 want to be liked by the Chinese students . He ( ) by the Chinese students' characters . He  
 8 will think about what Chinese students thinking . He will think always , he will not think  
 9 more about himself . For example , in his teaching , he will not give us the topics , which  
 10 are not very unfamiliar with us . What's more , he would not give the topics such as the  
 11 social programs //  
 12 M1 : [ problems ]  
 13 F2 : Yeah . He will find ... the very familiar topics in our students .  
 14 M1 : But as far as I understand , the foreign teacher maybe feel that to trust , to understand  
 15 his students is not his duty . He think his duty is just to teach English , to make open  
 16 our mouth . He just think duty is teaching , not others . But others //  
 17 F2 : [ I don't think so . Though  
 18 he is studying ... he is teaching in China Shiba (in Chinese pinyin —isn't he ?) .  
 19 ((laughing)) . So he could spend a lot of spare time ... to learn something . But our stu-  
 20 in Chinese students . If he did so , he can think in a different way , also he can give us  
 21 some topics which interest our students .

As M1 persisted that it was students who should pay for the unsuccessful oral English class , F2 asserted that “it was the foreign teacher” and she prefaced her interruption with assertive phrase “I don't think so” . But her in turn laughter , accompanying her assertive remarks in line 20 was a strategy that might mark the speaker's intention to mitigate strong assertions .

The analysis of all the 5 episodes showed that the construction and enactment of gender roles in these exchanges was very complex . All the group members collaborated in finding a solution to teaching problems traditionally associated with women and also they demonstrated assertive strategies traditionally associated with men . In contrary to data from previous studies on classroom discourse , these women frequently played a heavy part in the discussion in some classrooms . Yet , at other times , these same women remained silent and their work may be seen as facilitative rather than substantive . As they attempted to accommodate to conflicting and shifting demands and to find ways to succeed , they sometimes act in ways associated with traditional masculine stereotypes and at other times in ways associated with traditional feminine stereotypes .

In the course of examining the linguistic actions of these college students, it becomes clear that the women display speech behaviors that transcend clear boundaries; they are assertive, forceful, facilitative, apologetic and hesitant by turns. The interactions suggest that these women are subject to the forces of traditional stereotypes, as some students assert what they are undergoing in the classroom. These differences can not be seen as violations of gender identity, but as a result from challenges to conflicting gender roles.

Women who have succeeded in college study have survived a rigorous process that has outweighed a large number of other potentially advantageous women. One might expect that those who survive would be strong and determined and might claim that in order to succeed, women must accommodate to more stereotypical male attributes themselves of becoming assertive and task-driven. College female students are expected to be actively participating students and to pursue their academic careers.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Theoretical Implication

While traditional gender stereotype helps to some degree improve interpersonal communication and maintain solidarity, it is left far behind relative to the more dynamic social needs in specific circumstance, i.e. the assumptions and expectations of socially ascribed nature of gender against any specific performance of gender is resisted, accommodated to and constructed. Gender as a factor works inseparable from other social categories when considering its relations to its linguistic behaviors such as the level of education, the social economic status, their emotions, the age and the social-cultural background which are not just additive. These will affect the symbolic representations of femininity and masculinity one has access to or influenced by, though one cannot talk about class without taking account of gender. By adopting behaviors that challenge the social stereotypes, we can change over time what is perceived of appropriate feminine and masculine behavior. One can broaden the stereotypical gender expectations and alter social gender norms.

### 6.2 Teaching Material Design in Class

Regarding gender imbalance in the instructional materials, Swann (1993) showed the concerns about the imbalances in children's reading materials because of their potential immediate and local effects. They may affect the way pupils respond to a particular book and the subject associated with which it is associated; they may also affect the pupils' performance on assessment tasks. There is further concern, that in the long term, such imbalances may help to reinforce gender differences and inequalities. "They may influence children's perceptions of what are appropriate attributes, activities, occupations, and so forth for males and females. Introducing alternative images may redress the balance, and also have a disruptive effect, causing pupils to question accepted view of girls and boys and women and men" (p. 113).

In any decision, teachers should consider a broad range of questions, including the ease with students and teachers use the textbook, the interest level of topics discussed in the textbook, the selection of vocabulary items and grammatical constructions. The equitable and inequitable of female and males in any textbook should be a factor for consideration. Gender equity is regarded as one of those standard criteria by which textbooks and other materials are judged fit or unfit for use in the classroom. When teachers find their teaching materials are not balanced with respect to gender. For example, the science text includes few contributions by women, or that the women included in texts are portrayed only in traditional roles, they can adopt texts that affect images of women and men in the less traditional roles.

### 6.3 Teaching Strategies in Class

Simply providing alternative images in the teaching materials may not be sufficient as the goal is to encourage students to question traditional notions. Teachers may encourage students to talk about traditional and alternative images, to identify social roles of men and women, to investigate stereotypes about the language use, to critically reading and responding to sexist materials, to challenge representative performance of the students. Thus, the classroom can provide a forum for students to question the practices of male dominance and female's marginalization, to discuss about strategies for resisting such practices. Meanwhile, teachers provide a favorable context for equal participation of men

and women in classroom ,maximally reducing the possibility of students voiceless role . Only after both male and female students consciously learn to challenge and reconstruct alternative notions of what gender is and should be ,and teachers effectively control and maintain the gender balance in classroom talk can the teaching effects be maximally achieved .

## 7 . Conclusion

As shown in this paper ,doing gender approach regards gender as a shifting and fluid category . We regard it as a socially constructed act in specific contexts with the idea that predefined dichotomous categories of male and female may lead to the exclusion of critical variation as noise . This helps understand the way college classroom talk works . Female college students display mixed stereotype gender characteristics :assertive ,forceful ,hesitant and subsidiary by turns . Doing gender approach regards those differences not as aberrations of gender identity ,but as results from challenging gender conflicts .

The data analysis of experiments in Chinese context provides an empirical study demonstrating the construction of multiple gender roles in classroom talks . It concludes that Chinese female students in college tend to transcend the boundary between men and women and they are subject to gender conflicts in classroom talk . After all ,the study can only shed some light on gender performance of Chinese college students and we need more in depth and wide range experiments for further explorations on this issue .

## Notes

- 1 . Classroom talk is mainly divided into two types :teacher centered talk and group discussions among the students . This paper focuses on the interactions among the students .
- 2 . The distinction between sex and gender was originally an attempt by feminist researchers in the 1970s and 1980s to separate biological categories (sex )from social ones (gender ) . In more recent years ,some feminist theorists have argued that both sex and gender are socially constructed and they claimed that sex ,like gender ,is socially constructed . Here the paper adopts the traditional distinction between gender and sex ( Bem 1993 ) .
- 3 . The transcription conventions used in this chapter are as follows :( Coates 1996 )
  - //interruption :placed at the end of an utterance when another speaker interjects ,or utterance internally where minimal responses occur . Multiple interjections are followed in serial order by the response .
  - [ overlap or interruption :marks beginning of overlapping or interrupting speech
  - ] end bracket :mark the extent of overlap ...short pause :each point indicates about 1 /2 second pause
  - self interruption :placed at point of interruption
  - , comma or series intonation :where speaker intends to continue
  - ( )unclear utterance :words not clear .

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(...continued from p. 114)

## Appendix C

### Background Knowledge for the Passage

万圣节是每年的10月31日。

关于万圣节有一种传说是来自凯尔特人。据说凯尔特人十分崇拜自然之神，害怕冬天的来临。因为冬天常与死亡或幽灵相联系。每年的10月31日也就是他们日历中一年的最后一天，他们认为鬼魂会从墓里出来，所以牧师们常会燃起篝火来吓唬鬼魂甚至把收获来的谷物扔进火里作为给鬼魂的礼物。凯尔特人在这天还常会穿上与鬼一样的衣服。他们相信这样伪装自己鬼就不会加害他们了。发展到现在人们还会在这天穿上各式各样的吓人的衣服开化装舞会来取乐。

这个节日里孩子们是最开心的了。因为他们可以去每家每户要礼物。如果主人不给，他们经常会做一些恶作剧，比如在人家门上画彩笔画，向玻璃上吹肥皂泡，把针插进门铃里让门铃一直响个不停等等。

但在这天有些问题需要注意：孩子不要单独出去要礼物，要的礼物要先看清楚再吃，因为有人可能使坏，送给他们玻璃、毒物等作为礼物。对大人来说也要注意一些事情，因为这天可能会有人装扮成要礼物的孩子趁机入户抢劫。