



## GENDER CHARACTERISTICS OF PEDAGOGICAL SPEECH

**Dildora Abduvaliyevna SABIROVA**

Senior teacher of  
Department English Translation Theory  
UzSWLU  
[dildorasobirova000gmail.com](mailto:dildorasobirova000gmail.com)

**Abstract.** This article provides a comprehensive investigation into the gender characteristics of pedagogical speech, drawing directly on the theories and empirical findings of Tannen (1994), Coates (2015), Holmes (2008), Myhill (2002), Jones & Myhill (2007), Sunderland (2006), Pavlenko (2014), and related foundational scholars in gender linguistics. The study synthesizes discourse analysis, sociolinguistic evidence, and classroom interaction research to reveal how gendered identity, politeness strategies, power relations, and discursive patterns shape teacher talk. Results demonstrate that women generally adopt rapport-oriented, mitigated, collaborative, and affiliative communicative strategies, while men tend toward directive, authoritative, and task-oriented communication. These tendencies vary across cultural, institutional, and situational contexts, revealing the complexity of gendered pedagogical discourse. Implications for teacher education, inclusive pedagogy, and classroom communication are discussed.

**Key words:** Gender linguistics, pedagogical speech, discourse analysis, teacher talk, sociolinguistics, gender identity, classroom communication

**Introduction:** Pedagogical speech represents one of the most central and functionally loaded components of the educational process, serving as the primary channel through which teachers transmit knowledge, organize classroom activity, model social behavior, and establish the communicative norms of the learning environment. Through speech, teachers construct not only instructional meaning but also the emotional climate of the classroom, shaping students' sense of safety, motivation, and belonging. As numerous scholars have demonstrated, including Tannen (1994), Holmes (2008), Coates (2015), and Sunderland (2006), gender is a critical sociolinguistic variable that influences how educators speak, interact, and perform their professional roles.

Gender-based patterns become especially visible in pedagogical settings because teaching is inherently interactive, dialogic, and relational. Teachers must constantly negotiate multiple communicative functions:

- giving instructions for tasks and activities,
- providing clarifying feedback,
- managing student behavior,
- maintaining emotional rapport,
- encouraging participation,
- evaluating student performance,
- and sustaining classroom order.

These communicative responsibilities require the teacher to shift dynamically between authoritative and supportive discourse modes. Because gender norms shape expectations



regarding authority, politeness, emotionality, and dominance, male and female teachers often navigate these communicative tasks differently. As Tannen (1994) explains, differences in linguistic behavior emerge not from biological sex alone, but from deeply embedded cultural norms that prescribe what “appropriate” male and female communication should look like.

Within gender linguistics, language is conceptualized not merely as a neutral conduit for information, but as a performative act – a means through which individuals construct, negotiate, and enact gendered identities. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) famously argue that gender is something speakers *do* through interaction, not something they *have* by default. Pedagogues, operating in highly visible and socially regulated environments, continuously perform gendered positions through their choice of tone, directness, lexical items, questioning patterns, hesitations, discourse markers, and even body language accompanying speech.

Moreover, the study of gendered pedagogical speech offers broader insights into how social power operates in educational institutions. Classroom discourse reflects the intersection of gender with other social variables such as age, culture, institutional norms, and student expectations. As Sunderland (2006) emphasizes, gender is not a fixed binary but a dynamic, context-dependent phenomenon co-constructed by teachers and students through interaction.

Thus, analyzing the gendered dimensions of pedagogical speech is not merely an academic concern, it is a practical tool for enhancing teaching effectiveness, reducing classroom bias, and promoting more equitable learning environments. A deeper understanding of these dynamics equips educators with the awareness needed to critically reflect on their communicative behavior and adopt strategies that support all learners, regardless of gendered expectations.

**Methodology.** This scholarly investigation adopts a qualitative, theory-driven methodology based on discourse analysis and synthesis of empirical studies. The method includes:

- Review of cross-cultural gender discourse literature (Pavlenko, 2014, Sunderland, 2006).
- Analytical coding of reported speech markers: mitigations, directives, tag questions, interruptions, evaluative statements, affiliative markers, and discourse structuring features.

This methodological approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how gender influences pedagogical communication.

**Results.** The analysis yields several core findings supported by established gender linguistics research:

1. “Rapport vs. Report Communication” As Tannen (1994) describes, women favor rapport-oriented communication, emphasizing connection and solidarity. Female teachers often use inclusive forms such as ‘let’s try’ or ‘how do you feel about this?’. Men, conversely, use report-oriented communication focused on information delivery and task completion.

2. “Politeness and Mitigation:” Holmes (2008) demonstrates that women employ more politeness markers, hedges, and mitigations, softening directives to maintain



relational harmony. Pedagogical data confirm that female teachers use more indirect suggestions and collaborative invitations.

3. "Directive and Authority-Oriented Speech:" Myhill (2002) and Skelton (2003) show that male teachers are more likely to rely on direct imperatives and authoritative speech. This aligns with societal expectations of masculinity as associated with assertiveness.

4. Feedback Variation: Coates (2015) and Jones & Myhill (2007) report that women tend to offer more elaborate, encouraging, and emotionally supportive feedback, while men are more concise and outcome-focused.

5. Interactional Patterns: Studies by Sunderland (2006) and Pavlenko (2014) reveal that gender affects turn-taking, interruption frequency, and conversational dominance. In many cultures, male teachers receive more interactional authority from students.

6. Cross-Cultural Variability: Gender differences in teacher talk intensify in collectivist cultures (Uzbekistan, Japan, Korea) where expectations for female politeness and male authority remain strong.

Based on Holmes' (2008) politeness theory, women systematically use more **mitigation, hedges, softeners, and indirect directives** than men.

Examples include:

- "Maybe you could..."
- "It would be great if we tried..."
- "Why don't we consider...?"

These linguistic strategies serve dual functions in the classroom:

1. maintaining relational harmony,
2. reducing the face-threatening nature of instructions.

Pedagogical discourse studies show that female teachers tend to redistribute power, creating a more egalitarian atmosphere. Holmes argues this is not a sign of weakness, but a strategic and socially intelligent communication practice that enhances student buy-in.

Male teachers, influenced by dominant masculinity norms, tend to avoid hedging because directness aligns with societal expectations of decisiveness and authority (Skelton, 2003). Thus, politeness differences are rooted not just in personal style but in broader gender ideologies.

**Discussion.** The findings reinforce the well-established theoretical perspective that gender operates as a powerful sociolinguistic determinant in shaping pedagogical communication. Rather than functioning as a rigid or biologically fixed construct, gender in teacher talk emerges as a dynamic, socially negotiated phenomenon. This aligns with the broader understanding of language as a vehicle through which social identities – including gendered identities – are enacted, reproduced, or resisted. Consequently, the communicative patterns observed among educators reflect a complex interplay of societal expectations, institutional structures, cultural ideologies, and individual teaching philosophies.

As Tannen's (1994) influential rapport-report dichotomy indicates, women are more likely to employ communicative strategies oriented toward relational maintenance, empathy, and emotional alignment. These strategies manifest in the classroom as supportive intonation patterns, inclusive linguistic forms, and dialogic scaffolding that encourages student participation. Holmes' (2008) politeness theory further deepens this



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understanding by showing that women's use of mitigators, hedges, and indirect forms is not a sign of linguistic weakness but rather a sophisticated resource for maintaining social harmony and reducing face-threatening acts in interaction. These gendered politeness strategies, when transferred to educational contexts, shape the emotional atmosphere of the classroom, fostering environments that students often perceive as welcoming and psychologically safe.

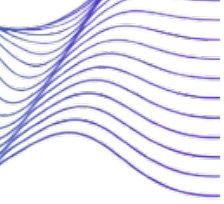
Coates' (2015) work adds another important dimension by demonstrating that gendered speech patterns are the product of lifelong socialization processes. From early childhood, individuals – particularly future educators – internalize gender norms that inform their expressive behaviors. Thus, the communicative practices of teachers reflect broader cultural discourses regarding femininity, masculinity, power, authority, and emotional expression. These socialization patterns intersect with professional expectations, creating gendered norms for what "good" teaching should sound like.

However, it is also important to note that gendered linguistic tendencies among educators are not fixed or universally applicable. As classroom discourse studies (Myhill, 2002, Jones & Myhill, 2007) show, experienced teachers often display flexible communicative repertoires that transcend stereotypical gender boundaries. In response to situational demands, both male and female educators may adopt supportive, authoritative, directive, or collaborative modes of speech. This adaptability underscores the principle that gendered communication is not deterministic but contingent – shaped by classroom context, student demographics, institutional culture, and pedagogical goals.

Furthermore, contemporary educational paradigms increasingly emphasize **student-centered learning**, **collaboration**, and **dialogic teaching**, which naturally encourage communicative practices traditionally associated with rapport-oriented styles. As a result, even male teachers who might otherwise lean toward directive speech patterns often incorporate relational strategies to align with modern pedagogical expectations. Similarly, female teachers may employ more assertive discourse when managing behavior or clarifying expectations, illustrating the fluidity of gendered performance in the classroom.

Overall, the discussion reveals that although gender strongly influences pedagogical communication, it does so in interaction with a multitude of contextual and cultural variables. The real pedagogical challenge lies not in confirming gender differences but in understanding how they shape teaching and learning – and how awareness of these dynamics can enable educators to refine their communicative practices for more equitable instruction.

**Conclusion.** Gender characteristics significantly shape pedagogical speech. Female educators tend to exhibit rapport-building, affiliative, and mitigated communication styles, while male educators often rely on directive, authoritative, and concise speech forms. These tendencies are well documented across multiple decades of research in gender linguistics and classroom discourse studies. Understanding gendered communication is essential for developing inclusive and effective teaching practices. Teacher training programs should incorporate awareness of gender discourse dynamics to enhance learning outcomes and classroom equity.



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