

TESL NS Newsletter

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Editorial

Hello everyone!



Here is the Spring issue of our newsletter. As you will see, it contains some very interesting contributions. The board suggests a theme for every issue, but we have to print whatever we get. The suggested theme for this issue was GENDER and LANGUAGE LEARNING. Ms. Maureen Sargent, Director of the TESL Center at St. Mary's University, presented this topic at a TESL Nova Scotia Conference in 1998. Our different contributors write on the theme from different angles and perspectives.

We have two pieces of research work, at once informative and amusing, one from Douglas Beall on "The Role of Gender in Creating the Context of Communication" and another from Sandee Thompson, "A Brief Evaluation of 'American Headway 4' with Regards to Gender

Representation". We have, moreover, Kate Brookes's delightful and informative description of her experience teaching both genders in the Middle East in her "A Personal Journey-- Teaching Men and Women". "What Constitutes Beauty" is a charming contribution by an ESL student. We also have a special update from Kathy Burnet on "Communication for Internationally Educated Engineering Professionals". There is, finally, my own contribution, a review of CBC's "War of the Sexes", a five-part series which examines to what extent the differences we tend to associate with the sexes are due to genetic hard-wiring rather than to social conditioning.

On a 'seasonal' note, it seems we are going through global warming in reverse. It was warmer in March than it has been lately. The weather people predict a season of fierce hurricanes. God save us from another Hurricane Juan! While summers are still summers, I wish you the joy of the one we are about to enter, and I wish you all a happy time at your ESL stations. A big thank you to all our contributors and to our webmaster Ellen Pilon.

Ms. Fe Leonor Baculi (Instructor)
TESL Center, SMU

President's Report (May 2006)

Happy spring to you all! I hope the sunshine has encouraged you all to leave work at school and to enjoy your evenings and weekend. Summer is too short in Canada, despite the greenhouse effect, so make the best of it!

This spring, many of you joined us at our annual mini-conference. This year, like last year, we used the Halifax Immigrant Learning Center/ Metro Immigrant Settlement Association's space and we filled it with approximately 40 keen participants. Carolyn Higgins- Poole

started us off with information about teaching reading strategies and walked us through a variety of checklists that we could use with our readers to help motivate them to read more. Sarah Sampara followed with a workshop that enticed all of our sensory learning styles. She activated kinaesthetic learners by getting us up to the walls to read and check things off, gave visual learners lots of visual prompts to look at and used colours and different shapes. She also used discussions and feedback to activate auditory learners. Both provided us with task sheets and websites. Caroline went the extra mile by emailing everyone reference addresses where they could access more information. We had a snack (nothing like fruit, cookies and coffee to get you going!) and then I rounded things off with a look at Neurolinguistic programming (NLP) where we explored memory and senses. All in all, I would say we had a successful event. I encourage all of you to join us next year...and remember, we are always looking for new presenters!

Other than that, the board has been working hard to plan next year's fall conference. It will be located at the Westin again and Jim Howden will be our plenary speaker. The conference is called "*A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Classroom: Laughing and Learning*" and will be comprised of practical workshops based on the theme of humour in the classroom. Again, presenters are welcome. If you are interested in presenting or helping out at the conference, please contact me at dos.english@ili.ca. We would love to have you! Pre-registration is required as we have to make arrangements but under dire circumstances, we can make exceptions. We are your board, after all, but since we are all volunteers, everyone's cooperation to make it a successful, low-maintenance event is appreciated.....hence the pre-registration. The call for presenters is about to go out so please check the website for the forms. We would like to have them in by July 10th so we can organize your conference. Presenters you asked to see again will be approached.

On behalf of the TESL Nova Scotia Board of Directors, I would like to wish you all a safe and happy summer full of waves, sunshine (with lots of sun block!), friends and family and relaxing times!

Respectfully submitted,
Sandee Thompson
 TESL NS President

A REVIEW of "WAR OF THE SEXES "
 [CBC documentary in FIVE PARTS -- Sunday March 12, 19, 26 and April 2 & 9, 2006 at 11pm ET on CBC-TV... repeating: Wednesday May 3, 10, 17, 24 & 31 at 10pm ET/PT on CBC Newsworld]

In "WAR of the SEXES," a recent five-part CBC documentary, experts from various fields conduct some interesting experiments involving women and men to find out to what extent the behavioral differences we associate with the two sexes are, as we tend to think now, largely the result of social conditioning or more or less genetically preprogrammed. When all was done, the experts agreed that much more than we are aware of seems to be in the genes. I caught only glimpses of the series. In what follows, I natter a bit about what I remember.

I remember an experiment the researchers conducted with little babies, male and female. They were set up to watch two tv screens, one of them showing an attractive human face and the other technical things such as cars on a big steel bridge. While the little women spent much more time watching the human face, the little men spent more time ogling the technical stuff. This, the researchers felt, seemed to confirm that at least some of the differences between the sexes may be innate.

So did an experiment with baby monkeys. Monkeys, the researchers reasoned, don't LEARN that little boys and little girls are supposed to prefer different kinds of toys. As it turned out, the little monkeys showed much the

same preferences as their human counterparts -- monkey boys went for the truck while monkey girls went for the doll. Some of the researchers speculated that we may perhaps, without realizing it, condition our young in ways that are in line with the urges that reach us from deep within our biological inheritance.

Each of the five parts deals with a particular human ability or need.

PART I is about LANGUAGE. It investigates whether the fact that women tend to do better in language is due to social conditioning or to a native ability. Three men and three women of comparable intelligence are put through a journalism workshop led by veteran journalists. At the end of the day, the investigators agreed that there may indeed be something in the genes of women that makes them do better with language.

PART II is about "POWER and LEADERSHIP." Men of higher social standing tend to have more sexual partners; with women, there is no relationship between their social standing and the number of sexual partners they have. Women, researchers concluded are more attracted to men with higher social standing while men care less about the social standing of their women. Even women with money and power tend to make the same sexual choices as women in general. It suggests that there may be an evolutionary basis to all this. Women go for the more powerful males because they hold out the promise of protection. These psychological tendencies, though they may not be genetic in origin, have developed over untold thousands of years and cannot be changed overnight, however much sexual identification may have changed.

PART III examines the different ways men and women express EMOTIONS . Because emotions produce physiological responses -- we sweat, we blush, we turn pale, our hearts beat faster, etc. -- the investigators compared the physiological responses of the subjects and their facial expressions with what they were actually

saying. Sometimes the two things tell much the same story but quite often they don't. People's eyes often don't say what their mouths say. When people argue, they may watch carefully what they say but their body language may tell what they are really feeling. Viewed through the evolutionary telescope, when there is heated conflict, women seem to have much more emotional staying power than men; men tend to become defensive and to withdraw.

PART IV deals with SPATIAL, the skills that enable us to position ourselves in relation to the space around us, to judge the speed of moving objects or to identify and compare the shapes of things. Here, the researchers found, men do better than women. To determine whether this is due to their nature or to social conditioning, they sent three men and three women on a car rally through unknown territory to see which team would get their first. The men did, and they got there considerably faster. But the women got there too though they took wrong turns and actually got lost. However, the question whether this was the result of innate differences or of social conditioning remained unanswered.

PART V, finally, is about the different ATTITUDES of the two sexes TOWARDS SEX. An MRI brain scan of people madly in love was done. The subjects would lie in the MRI machine and look for half a minute first at a picture of their sweetheart and then at a picture of someone who was just an acquaintance. The researchers found interesting differences in the brain responses of the men in love and the women in love. Men's brains showed more activity in areas associated with vision. This, the researchers thought, was in keeping with the evolutionary fact that men had to look for women who'd bear them healthy offspring. "Look at her and size her up." The women's brains showed activity in areas associated with memory recall. Makes sense in evolutionary terms. A woman could not tell by just looking at a man whether he'd be a loyal and faithful protector. She'd have to go by what he

told her -- yesterday, a few weeks ago, whenever. Even today, women are more likely to "remember" what a man "promised" because they have the appropriate brain circuits and a social need for it. Romantic love, the researchers concluded, is not so much an emotion but a drive, a pre-programmed drive to win a particular mating partner. But, however much sexual identities may have changed in late years, most of us would still agree that there is a difference in the ways men and woman approach love and sex.

Incidentally, I caught a spot by Radio Australia on CBC's Overnight Radio the other night in which a Linguistics professor explains why "dirty" words seem to come easier in a second language well learned than in one's mother tongue. Scientists are agreed that a second language is deposited in a different part of the brain from that of the first language: the latter is lodged largely in the limbic brain, where emotional meanings are made, while the former resides in the cortical parts of the brain, where reason rules. Accordingly, "dirty words" come wrapped in feelings if learned in the early years of life, in one's first language. In the second language, by contrast, dirty words are something learned intellectually. The second-language learner KNOWS that it is not proper to use the dirty words but does not respond emotionally nearly to the same extent as (s)he does to dirty words in the first language.

Ms. Fe Leonor Baculi (Instructor)
TESL Center /SMU

What Constitutes Beauty?

When people think of women's beauty, the winners of a world beauty pageant or some supermodels come to mind. Due to the influence of the media, we are brainwashed to believe that the standard of women's beauty is the Barbie doll. It is difficult to resist the tremendous impact of this message on us.

Nonetheless, it would be good to get out from under this oppressive message a little bit.

The standard of woman's beauty has changed through history. In the Medieval and Renaissance Ages, a plump woman was regarded as the absolute beauty. Numerous portraits and pictures from those times prove this perspective. Many women in those masterpieces seem to feel proud of being plump; they are definitely very fat by today's standards of beauty. It is not so long ago that our viewpoints varied. Only a century ago, people admired the chubby woman when they were worried about hunger and it was hard to find plump women.

In addition to differences through eras, we tell distinctly the standard of beauty by cultural differences. It might be not as obvious as era's difference. We are living in a time influenced by media world wide. Most people in this world accept skinny women as the beauty; however, there are cultures that plump women are thought the most gorgeous.

In some parts of Africa, people still suffer from famine and they sometimes die of hunger. A skinny woman cannot be regarded as the ideal in their culture. Chubbiness is the standard of happiness and beauty there.

Nowadays many women are obsessed by weight and sizes. We often hear that some women die of anorexia nervosa or bulimia. These diseases are caused by the obsession with diet. Even if they do not die of the diseases, there are so many women distressed awfully by their body. Who afflicts these women so badly? Whenever women turn on the TV, they are compelled to compare their bodies to women sized 36-24-36. To most women in reality, that size is totally absurd and impossible to have. Media propels us to admire those bodies to reinforce the image.

Due to the Barbie doll size ideal spread by media, we are forced to achieve the impossible. This oppression results in producing the broad

field of diet business.

Through time and around the world, we can see that the standard of beauty is variable. Women should realize how stupid it is to follow this trend; thus, they should rebel this man-dominated suppression. When a woman is confident, sweet-hearted and wise, we get attracted by her although she is not beautiful. Our generation may need a pioneer who can reform the misleading perception. Alternately, we ourselves can start just by altering our own thoughts. We women are too precious and meaningful to waste time being annoyed by diet stresses.

Haikyung Lee
(ESL Student)

Update: Communication and Orientation Program for Internationally Educated Engineering Professionals

By *Kathy Burnett*, HILC

The Communication and Orientation for Internationally Educated Engineering Professionals is a new orientation and language program for newcomer engineering professionals. It is currently being offered through the Halifax Immigrant Learning Centre with the classes being held at Dalhousie. The program focuses on the language and communication skills needed to work effectively in a Canadian engineering environment. Participants are newcomers with international engineering qualifications and experience who intend to work in the engineering field in Nova Scotia.

If you peeked in room 2184 any weekday afternoon at the Marian McCain Arts and Sciences Building, you'd see an energetic and motivated group of 13 internationally educated engineering professionals engaged in

discussions related to professional practice, women in engineering, law and ethics, project management, health and safety and much more. Their diverse cultural backgrounds provide opportunities for lively discussion.

Country of Origin	Number of Participants
Chile	1
China	6
Lebanon	1
Palestine	3
Turkey	1

The discussions are well-rounded encompassing the diverse range of engineering backgrounds. The group has a wealth of experience ranging from 2 -25 years! They have worked in more countries than you can count on both hands! We are fortunate they have chosen Halifax to call home.

Engineering Discipline	Number of Participants
Civil	3
Structural	1
Industrial	1
Metallurgical Materials Science	1
Telecommunications	1
Electrical	1
Mechanical	3
Architect	1

The first of the three modules is an Overview to Engineering in Nova Scotia. We're pleased to

welcome guests Colin Dickson, Jonathan Welch, Stewart Sampson, Sandra Oickle, Dermot Mulrooney, Ed Lingley and Denise Schofield. The first module wrapped up with participation from the Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association as they took the group through an exploration of interview challenges and the experience of a practice interview with Nova Scotian employers.

Module B started in May and participants are looking at communication in engineering and explore the value of the critical but sometimes overlooked softer skills needed to work successfully in a Canadian engineering workplace. This will be followed by a module on technical report writing skills.

We're looking forward to a networking event in mid-June with the Association of Professional Engineers of Nova Scotia.

If you would like more information, please contact Kathy Burnett, Labour Market Language Coordinator, Halifax Immigrant Learning Centre, 443-2937 ext. 234.

The Role of Gender in Creating the Context of Communication

by Douglas Beall

Part time ESL Instructor
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M.Ed./TESL (in progress)

"Context is important in communication." This is a common observation made by language educators and researchers these days, and heard so often that for many it has become a cliché. However, if we think about what "context" actually means, we find that it's a complex phenomenon and that gender has a role to play.

Context is very individual. It depends on how you the potential communicator experience the whole situation and interpret the verbal and

nonverbal messages that are being conveyed to you. It depends on your perception of things.

We know, in turn, that people's perceptions of things depend in part on their background experience, on what they bring to the communicative interaction, on what they have learned from the situations and communicative contexts they experienced in their lives before. Everyone grew up in a culture (or cultures, if they moved around), and everyone grew up in specific subcultures within these culture(s). Their subcultures were defined by the extremes within the greater culture: urban/rural, educated/uneducated, wealthy/poor, traditional/modern, etc. They were also defined by what their cultural and subcultural groups considered important: competition/cooperation, hierarchy/equality, distance/intimacy, opposition/consensus, self-expression/sensitivity to others, and so on. Further, cultures and subcultures are not fixed but constantly evolving, and our family's habits and values also affect how we view our experiences. Thus, people from different cultures, subcultures and families grow up with different assumptions about the world and the dynamics of communication.

We could say that, in most if not all societies, males and females grow up in different subcultures. They belong to different childhood peer groups, play with different toys, create different fantasies and engage in different communicative styles when they are young. As they grow up, they are socialized in different ways, affected by their elders' and their peers' expectations of them. As adults they may act according to the expectations they themselves and important others have of them, they may rebel against these expectations, or they may try to act in open, fresh and novel ways.

The sociolinguist Deborah Tannen, a professor at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., concludes in her book *Gender and Discourse* (1994) that, in oral communication, the context is not a given but is created by the speakers'

actions and words. The roles that the speakers take are also not a given but are created through their interaction. In fact, everything that occurs in interactions is a joint production of the parties involved. As we know, even the meanings of the words used in a conversation depend on how they are "framed," or contextualized. We could add that the entire interaction is dependent on how the speakers perceive it, which is in turn affected by the assumptions they bring from their cultural, subcultural and family backgrounds.

For example, Tannen has studied men and women's styles of communication and found that the two genders tend to make different assumptions when engaged in communication. They perceive the world in different ways and signal meaning differently. In fact, their whole purpose in communicating may be different, all based on the fact that they come from different subcultures. Thus interactions between the genders, being forms of cross-cultural communication, can sometimes create frustration and misunderstanding.

One of the examples that Tannen uses from American culture, and which seems to apply to Canadian culture as well, is found in her bestseller *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (1990). Based on a real story about her husband and herself, it is a conversation like this one, adapted here, between two married university professors and a third man of another profession. The married couple currently teach at different universities in distant cities.

Third man: You have to work in different cities? That must be rough. I'm glad we don't have to do that. How do you stand it?

Wife: Well, we fly a lot. The worst part is having to pack and unpack all the time.

Husband: (slightly annoyed) Well, it's really not all that inconvenient. As academics, we have four-day weekends together, and four months in

the summer. And, actually, we're lucky. Studies show that married couples who live together constantly spend less than half an hour talking to each other every day.

To an astute observer like Tannen, this conversation reveals a lot about how men and women in our culture perceive the world and communication. We might ask, why did the wife respond in a way sympathetic to the third man's thrust, while the husband became annoyed and tried to contradict him?

Tannen has this to say about such a conversation. The husband sensed an element of condescension in the third man's remarks and "was simply engaging the world in a way that many men do -- as an individual in a hierarchical social order, in which he was either one up or one down. In this world, conversations are negotiations in which people try to achieve or maintain the upper hand if they can, and protect themselves from others' attempts to put them down and push them around. Life, then, is a contest, a struggle to preserve independence and avoid failure."

The wife "was approaching the world as many women do -- as an individual in a network of connections. In this world, conversations are negotiations for closeness in which people try to seek and give confirmation and support, and to reach consensus. They try to protect themselves from others' attempts to push them away. Life, then, is a community, a struggle to preserve intimacy and avoid isolation. Though there are hierarchies in the world too, they are hierarchies more of friendship than of power and accomplishment."

Tannen adds that, "Women are also concerned with achieving status and avoiding failure, but these are not the goals they are focused on all the time, and they tend to pursue them in the guise of connection." She continues, "Men are also concerned about achieving involvement and avoiding isolation, but they are not focused on these goals, and they pursue them in the guise of

opposition."

To illustrate how these ways of perceiving interactions might cause misunderstanding between males and females, she presents the following type of conversation between a husband and wife (also adapted here). The two are trying to set a date for a dinner party with their friends:

Wife: Well, when shall we have them over?

Husband: I don't know. How does the calendar look?

Wife: The only weekend we seem to have free is June 5th and 6th.

Husband: That's the beginning of the season for my sailing club.

Wife: Well, we could do it on either Saturday or Sunday evening.

Husband: OK, make it Saturday.

Wife: Wouldn't you want to be able to sail later on the first day of the sailing season?

Husband: (annoyed) I said Saturday, so that's obviously the day I prefer.

Wife: (feeling hurt and annoyed) I was just trying to be considerate of you. You didn't give me a reason for choosing Saturday.

Husband: Do I have to tell you everything? If you really need to know, I'm planning to take Thursday and Friday off to go sailing, so I figure that I will have had enough by Saturday night.

Wife: Well, why didn't you say that?

Husband: I didn't see why I had to. And I found your question very intrusive.

Wife: (annoyed) Well, I found your response very offensive! And I don't know why you have

to treat me like a stranger!

What went wrong here? Why did the spouses end up being angry with each other? When the husband first told his wife to make it Saturday, she thought that he might be trying to accommodate her wishes, just as she might try to accommodate him. When she questioned his choice out of consideration, he didn't perceive it as consideration but instead felt that she was trying to pry into his personal sailing plans for that weekend, to know all about his private affairs, like a mother might try to learn her teenager's plans, in effect putting him down. The way in which he initially refuses to tell her his reasons ends up making her feel hurt and angry. She feels like he is rejecting intimacy with her. He assumes that everyone can look out for their own interests and doesn't need to justify themselves. Thus the wife's projection of his motives for choosing Saturday, and her attempt to prevent a potential conflict by making sure he really wanted that day, instead spark a conflict of their own.

Despite their different ways of interpreting communicative interactions, men and women need not misunderstand each other if they can understand their counterparts' assumptions. However, they may find that they sometimes need to adopt the cultural norms of the opposite gender in order to avoid miscommunication, which requires an acquired degree of discernment and flexibility of mind.

It's important to be cautious in generalizing Tannen's observations about North American culture to other cultural groups, however. For example, though hierarchy and closeness may seem to contrast in American and Canadian inter-gender communication, and indeed in communication between members of the same gender in these cultures when it is asserted, for example, that employers and employees cannot "really" be friends, the same is not true of all cultures. For instance, Tannen (1994) mentions a study by Suwako Watanabe (1993) comparing Japanese and American conversation groups.

Watanabe found that while the Americans viewed themselves as individuals participating in a group activity, the Japanese saw themselves as members of a group united by hierarchy. She also cites a study of Japanese and American business discourse written by Haru Yamada (1992), in which he discusses the concept of "amae", as is found in Japanese parent-child and employer-employee relationships. Amae binds two people in an intimate hierarchical interdependence in which both have power in the form of obligations and rights with respect to the other, thus creating a relationship in which hierarchy and closeness align. Similarly, Iranians may choose to take a lower status position, "getting the lower hand" as it's called, thus invoking a cultural pattern of protection within which the higher status person then feels emotionally obligated to do things for him or her (Beeman 1986, in Tannen 1994).

The North American tendency to associate the seeking of consensus and intimacy through indirect speech with a feminine style of communication also does not hold true for all cultures. For example, as Tannen (1994) points out, Japanese men and women both tend to avoid saying "no" directly, so negative responses are phrased as positive ones; the listener is able to understand from the form of the "yes" whether it is truly a "yes" or a polite "no." She asserts that in fact in most of the world's cultures, varieties of indirectness are the norm in communication. Yamada (1992) adds that, indeed, Japanese prefer not to speak at all in potentially confrontational situations, viewing words as a liability in this kind of context.

So, though Tannen's observations concerning North American men and women's assumptions about the world may ring true for some cultures, we need to be cautious about generalizing them to cultures which view the parameters she mentions, such as hierarchy and intimacy, in entirely different configurations.

How does all of the foregoing relate to us? As administrators and/or teachers of multicultural

classes, we must recognize that the "context" of communication is subjective and that what we may assume to be a "given" situation may be interpreted differently by individuals from other cultures and, in addition, may be uniquely interpreted by the two genders of the same nationality.

As educators of multicultural groups of students, fostering cross-cultural sensitivity in ourselves and in our students is needed in order to create harmonious schools and classrooms. Promoting a more frequent use of English as a lingua franca in our school environments will encourage greater inter-cultural communication. Discussions of the roles and perspectives of men and women in different cultures are not out of place but actually very helpful in the second-language classroom, but we must be mindful. We really need to listen to and honour what our students of different cultures and genders are telling us from their own experiences and perspectives, and we must avoid making blanket statements based on our own cultural assumptions. The more we seek to know about each other, the better our mutual understanding in communication will be.

We should recognize that, because males and females grow up in different subcultures, the frustrations and conflicts that can arise between them when they communicate with each other are sometimes actually forms of cross-cultural misunderstanding. Thus, cross-cultural sensitivity needs to extend to the differences between the two genders within each culture, even our own.

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A Brief Evaluation of American Headway 4 with Regards to Gender Representation (Liz and John Soars, Oxford, 2005)

By Sandee Thompson

Background: Sociolinguistics is concerned with individual mental processes involved in speech production and comprehension and is a combination of an abstract system and a social construct. One aspect that has been examined in detail is the different ways men and women are reflected in text, and how this affects the learners who are reading or listening to it.

Simons states that the “interpretation (of text) depends on the information that is available within the text itself” (Simons and Murphy, 1986:192). This includes: spoken text (e.g. monologues, and interviews), written text (e.g. emails, autobiographies, descriptive passages etc.) and visuals, including their number and placement within the text, as well as any audiovisual materials that might accompany the text. Since “without exception all cultures recognize different roles for males and females” (Key, 1975:25), it is important for students to understand the language and social context they are studying in since by using North American texts, we are introducing, and possibly

imposing, our cultural biases on them (Hirvela, 2004).

The discourse of gender involves the construction of masculinity and femininity in polar opposites (Crawford, 1995), which often results in sexism, which is defined as

“the idea or belief the members of one sex are less intelligent or less capable than those of the other sex, and that certain jobs or activities are suitable for women and others are suitable for men” (Sinclair, 1987).

Since the rise of feminism in the early 1970’s, linguists have been exploring “the role language plays in the location and maintenance of women in a disadvantageous position in society” (Fasold, 1990:93). Robin Lakoff, who published her gender studies results in 1975, posited that women’s use of overlaps, tag questions, intensifiers and quantifiers, standard grammar and lexical choices were exclusively negative and had the effect of “submerging a woman’s personal identity” (Fasold, 1990:102). She also expressed the opinion that women were powerless in society and that their vocal patterns reflected this (Crawford, 1995).

For example, in the text, American Headway 4, the speaking patterns of men and women appear to reflect what studies have shown: that men do the majority of interrupting, generally seen as a control mechanism (Fasold, 1980), and that women overlap, backchannel and add details in order to include the listener in the conversation and to ensure they are heard (Fisherman in Fasold, 1990) and (Lakoff in Crawford, 1995). Seventy-seven percent of the hedges, overlaps and backchannels were done by women in the discourse analyzed in my study, demonstrating that the data is accurate.

Fe/Male roles: Since men and women “are socialized in different sociolinguistic subcultures” (Coates, 1988:69), women are commonly seen as the ‘nurturers of society’. Clearly this is not a

powerless position in a community! Their lexical choices and tone of voice often reflect their ‘cooperative’ nature (Coates, 1988) (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003) and much of their dialogue encompass the home. Men, conversely, are typically identified according to what they do in society; therefore, their conversation topics, lexical and semantic choices and style of talking reflect this (Kramarae, 1990).

In American Headway 4, home and family were discussed 60% more by women than by men. Men discussed sports and car-related topics, both when alone and with other people, whereas women only discussed them when they were with men. (Glass, 1992) (Myers, 2004).

Regarding jobs, of the 15% of helping professions represented in the text, all are represented by women, with another 17.5% representing unpaid work, in comparison to men’s 12.5%. At the other end of the scale were the higher paid, more prestigious and powerful job represented by 26% of men compared to 4.5% of the women. This type of textual representation in textbooks perpetuates the stereotype rather than representing North American beliefs about gender equality accurately (Ehlich and King, 1991).

Grammar and Lexis Used: Generally, men and women use different grammar and lexical choices to communicate. Women’s use of adjectives, quantifiers and intensifiers and indirect speech were once seen as diminishing features of female communication (Coates, 1988), whereas men’s use of direct, nonstandard grammar was considered masculine (Coates and Cameron, 1988). In actual fact, “any social group, whether it be a culture, subculture or family, develops communicative patterns that enable group members to cooperate and co-exist with one another” (Haslett, 1990:327). Unfortunately, women’s communicative style has often been interpreted as being less than men’s (Graddol and Swann, 1989) as it is seen as ‘overkill’. For example,

(figure 1) in (American Headway 4, 2003:136) T8.7

“It was **very, very** cold”.
 ...”**all the** clothes that I had, **all the** scarves and the sweaters...”
 “...**little** balls of ice...”
 “and it was **very, very** quiet...”
 “...and I was feeling **so, so** cold...”
 “...and I was beginning to **really, seriously** panic...”

Voice Patterns: Men and women also use their voices in different ways for different purposes. For example, we all use intonation and high inflection when making requests, showing disbelief and expressing excitement but we use it to different degrees, as seen in figure 2.

(figure 2) in (American Headway 4, 2005 chapters 1, 2, 8, and 11)

Pattern	Woman alone	Women together	Women & men together
‘Up-talk’/HRT	9	3	
high inflection	9		
effeminate male voice			
normal pitch	3		
monotone			

Pattern	Men alone	Men together
‘Up-talk’/HRT		
high inflection	1	
effeminate male voice	7	1
normal pitch	7	
monotone		

While the American Headway 4 texts demonstrated that recent studies are accurate, it is of interest to note that the majority of long passages were interviews conducted by men or women...and, typical of the genre, answering questions requires more words than asking them and ensures higher inflection and more ‘uptalk’ (e.g. going up at the end of sentences).

Written Text: Written text includes words as well as visuals and their number, placement and treatment and these also need to be evaluated when determining whether a book treats both genders equally. A lack of female representation could be very de-motivating for learners, as can be seen in the figure below representing American Headway 4.

(figure 3) in (American Headway 4, 2005)

Text	Women	Men	Other
Chap 1	1. Woman's email to a male friend	1. Boy's letter to parents 2. Man's ex-pat story 3. Boy's ex-pat story	1. Story about tourism, written by a man
Chap 2		4. Biography male explorer 5. Biography of male backpacker	
Chap 8		6. Story of a male actor 7. Story of town and its male mayor 8. Acceptance speech by male actor	
chap 11		9. Story about a man and the lottery	2 series of 6 short stories
Total	1	9	7

Visuals: Women were represented equally with men in American Headway 4's visuals, with 33%, as opposed to 20% in their first version of the text in 1986. They were shown in a variety of levels of treatment; however, there were more one dimensional level pictures of women than men and many of them accompanied texts which showed women in stereotypical roles rather than as independent beings.

Ehlich and King state that, “in Canada, nonsexist language is widely regarded as an essential component” in achieving equity (Ehlich and King, 1991:74). So too should it be said for the language learning classroom. Since “the media and the education system are undoubtedly in a strong position to influence society” (Graddol and Swann, 1989:133) and “language affects its speakers’ perceptions of the world” (Graddol and Swann, 1989:134), it is important to ensure that women and men are represented equally and fairly, in spoken and written text as well as with visuals, especially as learners bring different learning styles and cultural experiences with them and will interpret information differently (Gumperz, 1986) (Oxford, 1990).

Therefore, while American Headway 4 represents the sexes equally in the number of visuals, I hope to see more visual representations of men and women as independent beings, read more texts of women as professionals and innovators and hear more authentic listening texts where women are not talking about clothes, hair or family in the 2010 version of this textbook!

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A Personal Journey - Teaching Men and Women In the Middle East

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Our world view is shaped by the society to which we belong. As English Second Language practitioners most of us have been subjected to transplanting into other cultures totally alien to our own. Teaching in an environment that is very different does facilitate observations of the differences in not only culture and beliefs, but also in learning styles and the nature of what are considered to be good methods of teaching and learning.

As an ESL Instructor in the Middle East for eight years I was privileged to witness first hand the amazing unity, strength and cohesiveness that these tribal cultures maintain with their religion and societal values. The onslaught of western culture hidden in plain view via English educational materials has not been wholly accepted without discernment. Creative methods of dealing with the content of some texts were required. Sex, religion and politics were the three main taboo subjects.

The Female Students Perspectives in The United Arab Emirates

Working at the United Arab Emirates University in Al Ain, I taught only female students. The

much smaller male campus was about three kilometres away - a safe distance from the girls. The students were bussed in from all over the Emirates and most lived on campus. Most students went home on the weekends and others had to wait for the holidays before they could leave. >From a western perspective, it is easy to think that these female Emirati students, usually aged between 17 to 24, are in university because they had to be. However, some students were there because they planned to work; others because the ruler decreed it; others because their parents wished them to have the formal education they had not had; and still others were there to get away from home and hold off their inevitable marriage upon graduation. The ruler had declared quantity education for most of his subjects who wished it, and strongly encouraged formal education for men and women. Because of oil revenues everything is free, including laptop computers for all students, room and board, plus the education itself.

In this desert setting, the Bedouin tribes are very traditional and many of the girls studying in university mainly have the option of becoming teachers, or at the very least some other profession that will not bring them into direct contact with males who were not related to them. Many of the women upon marriage, will not be allowed to work outside the home unless their husbands permit it. For this reason and because they expect their husbands to take care of them some of the female students do not see the point of studying English when they will never use it.

All students had to pass level 3 English before they could graduate, even if they were studying Arabic or Sharia Law which necessitated no English. The teachers fully commiserated with the students, but were then charged to teach them English anyway. We all had to contend with multiple repeaters in our classes. During the time I was teaching there, I had one girl in my class who had taken level 3 seven times, and had been in the university for six years unable to graduate. Some girls deliberately failed the

English tests so that they could hold off their marriages which would be inevitable upon graduation. Others planned not to get married and wanted to support themselves. The role model of the latter mentioned students was an amazing Emirati woman who had her Ph.D. and held two prestigious positions in the university. (She was one of the very few Emirati Ph.D.'s in the country). She had never married and at aged 38 was considered far too old. She told us she had wanted to marry, but her cousin had not wanted to wait for her while she finished her education abroad, and in the final reckoning really did not want to marry a woman with a higher education than his own.

The Instructors Perspective - How to Motivate Students

Teaching ESL in Arabian countries is a unique experience. The students have a quality of innocence, openness, and polite directness that is not often found in most worldly-wise youth. The traditional professional reserve often maintained in a western classroom setting did not work well for me in the United Arab Emirates. The female students craved connection on a more personal level, and if this was given they blossomed in their studies. The students wanted to know everything about you, your family, the reasons why you were in the country, how old you were, and if you were married. In western culture many of the questions would be considered too personal, but to these students it was as natural as breathing. They needed to get to know you, so that they could place you in a context to which they could relate. They needed to trust you and therefore be able to work with you. Teaching credentials held no credence for them. One student asked me where my children were, and I told her they were in Canada, which was a big shock to all the students. They could not imagine being away from their parents and families. The student then asked me where I lived and with whom. I told her I lived alone in Habisi. Tears welled up in a good few eyes as they did in the girl asking the question and she replied, "You must be so

lonely teacher." I had to stop myself from crying at this point as I had not felt my loneliness until then! The next day the girl came up to me after the class and said she had been talking to her mother and had told her my sad story and her mother said "tell your teacher she can come and live with us so she will not be lonely." . The beauty of it was that she meant it. If the students think you care about them and they care about you, a connection is established, and they will do their utmost to please you and therefore do their best. I found this connection to be far more important to the students than their own academic gains. It seemed to me that if this connection was not made, the classes could be even more noisy and unruly with much talking in Arabic.

Another way of motivating the students was to make them forget they were learning English and engage them in tactile, kinesthetic, verbal activities such as co-operative poster making, and other creative kinds of work. I did find one student who was not artistic in one form or another. However, the biggest draw to the students was the use of computers, even without the chat lines. From almost English illiterate students who had no postal addresses because they had never written or received letters (in any language), they became very good computer users after only two or three lessons. They transferred their amazing verbal communication skills straight over to the computer and never missed a beat. On the down side, I did not see the point of receiving e-mails from students when I wished them to speak to me as they were in my speaking class!

Once the female students opened up they said what they meant and would be extremely forthright. However, they could not say 'no' directly as it is considered rude and confrontational, which caused some problems until teachers understood this cultural phenomenon. When asked any question, the students do not want to answer or those which will require a 'no', they will reply 'Insha'Allah' (if God wills it). For example, if a student was

asked if they were coming to class the next day and they knew that they were not, they might say 'Insha'Allah' because they did not want to say 'no' and possibly upset or disappoint you. As everything operates by the will of God according to their belief, they are in fact telling the truth under the premise that none of us really knows what is going to happen tomorrow or in fact within the next hour for certain. When one is looking for a student or their homework one has to remind one's self of this philosophical outlook on life!

Learning Styles of Female Emirati Students

Observing the Emirati girls as they learned English was interesting, as their social mores often made the western methods of teaching diametrically opposed to what would be considered appropriate methods. Arabic speakers love to talk, and they are therefore very good at it in any language. I enjoyed teaching speaking classes because they were so lively and rambunctious. However, the old bag of tricks for augmenting speaking classes such as using songs, videos and many kinds of pictures were often not appropriate for religious and cultural reasons. Yet I found that the girls were visual and aural learners and were excellent imitators. While teaching a speaking class, I had tape recorded some students telling me some traditional stories. Most of the students would not speak on the tape and at the end of the class the students who had spoken asked me to erase the tape after pressure to do so from their more traditional peers. Likewise, taking photographs of the girls was a challenge as most were not allowed to have their picture taken (forbidden by their family), the paradox being that all students had to have their student ID photographs taken without their veils.

Another challenge was what to do when there were students within the same classroom who wore no head covering and who listened to western pop music along side completely covered females who would not listen to any music or watch television. Moreover, different factions would not talk to each other and the

traditional covered women were sometimes verbally abusive to their more liberal uncovered sisters! Many of the teaching materials we had included audio and video cassette tapes. Some of the censoring of the videos often made the story line comprehensible, if only to be made comical. This was in large part because most of the sensors obviously did not understand English. Their main concerns were the elimination of physical touching between men and women, the drinking of alcoholic beverages, and any state of undress. Many of the films were very short! Teachers sometimes spent hours going through text books blacking out words such as 'pig.' The choice of text books was governed by the modesty of their content. Some text books had offending chapters ripped out. Many of the materials that I developed and brought to the Middle East needed to be adapted or could not be used because of content issues. Ultimately though, I thought that some of the so called censoring was a positive thing, especially of the magazines and films. I came to the realisation that many of our western materials are too explicit and they are offensive particularly to women.. The west objectifies women, men, animals, and even children, to sell products. The female students could not believe that in the west it was acceptable to have women so demeaned in photographs and in films. Perhaps the most telling question of all that they asked was why the women in particular, allow themselves to be so objectified and participate in their own debasement. I wondered why myself.

Male and Female Arab Students in the Same Class (The Students Challenges)

After four years in the U.A.E, I moved to the Sultanate of Oman. Here teachers had a freer choice of teaching tools and materials. It was very much more like teaching in a western environment except for the dynamics of the mixed gender classes. I had the experience of teaching both male and female tertiary level Arab students within the same classes for the first time. This was not only a first for me, but

also for the students. Male and female school children are separated and put into single sex classes around aged 7 or 8 in Arabia. They will often never meet again until marriage. However the Ruler of Oman, decided to build an English medium university that mirrors the western style of tertiary education, partially so that the students can go on to further education in other English speaking countries and be able to work and communicate comfortably with the opposite sex. Many of the students, male and female, told me they were not comfortable with the mixed gender classes, but had had no choice.

Another challenge for many students was that, they were placed in their disciplines by their entry marks and not necessarily by the majors they wanted. For example, the medical program was filled with mostly women as they had received 97% or more in their high school assessments. Not all the women wanted to be doctors, but would have difficulty changing their designated major as they were considered the elite of the university and Oman wants more Omani doctors. This placement situation had some students in diciplines they either did not really wish to be in, or in which they had absolutely no interest.

Male and Female Students in the Same Class (The Instructor's Challenges)

Teaching a class full of male and female Arab students can be challenging, mainly because most of them do not want to be in the same class together. Every attempt was made to keep them apart on the campus with separate walkways, stairways and different entrances into their classrooms. The females entered the classroom through two doors at the back, and the males came in through the front doors. The male students entered first and sat facing the front of the room so that when the females came in they were not being stared at by the men. I found the male students very respectful of the females and very afraid to upset or offend them in any way.

I was often teaching English for English Specialists, which meant the students were designated to be English teachers, translators or media personnel. I therefore taught many speaking classes where communication became impossible with the two sexes divided by three rows of desks. My first speaking class full of silent new students with uncomfortable white faced women constantly adjusting their head scarves and red-faced men rearranging their turbans. The male students confessed that they felt like the girls eyes were burning into the back of their necks. The more traditional females who had never been out of their homes without a face covering said they felt naked. The ruler had decreed that women could not cover their faces on campus.

The challenge in the speaking classes was to get these temporarily shy and traumatised youths to talk to each other. In the first class, I announced that in the next class the males would sit across from the females - the females on the left hand side of the room and the males on the right. It was as if I had announced the end of the world. Finally, everyone was talking and had an opinion. After the side by side seating had been established, the next few classes were very difficult as everyone was afraid to speak. Once a relationship was established along family lines, where the students relating to each other as brothers and sisters we all felt more comfortable in our new environment..

The second challenge for teachers was that many of the students were not used to being taught by teachers of the opposite sex. It was suggested that the students treat their teachers as parental figures, or for younger teachers as older brothers or sisters. This eventually worked well for me. Many of these students were away from home for the first time and were thrown into a totally alien environment and missed their families so much, especially their parents. Becoming a kind of surrogate mother came naturally to me, as I was missing my own daughters.

Learning Styles

Both in the UAE and the Sultanate of Oman, I found that male and female students had phenomenal memories. If I told them a story in class they could recite it months later very accurately. I had some male students in my classes who could recite the Holy Qu'ran from beginning to end from memory. These students were held in the highest esteem by their peers and society and also by me I might add. All tribal societies honour their oral traditions and value having a good memory because it is essential to the passing on of the store house of their accumulated knowledge. What makes these societies different to non-literate cultures that depend solely on oral history is that they also have the written word of God which is unchanging, irrefutable and all encompassing. However, the remembering of these words and not the reading of them seems to be the most highly valued form of mastery. The female students, on the other hand, did not show off their memorization skills of the Qu'ran, but that does not mean they did not have them. This kind of rote learning is highly valued in Arab cultures. The students could learn masses of vocabulary very quickly; however, they could not necessarily use the words correctly in a sentence.

Memorisation was the easy part for these students. As teachers we were often expected to write the answers on the board to test and exams so that the students could copy them and then memorise them for the upcoming tests. They informed us that this is how their school teachers had taught them. It was difficult to wean the students from this type of learning and throw them into the world of critical thinking and the unknown. They often felt that we were being unkind to them by not 'helping' them. Not all students had been taught in this way - it depended on the teachers they have had, the regions they were from, as well as the schools they had attended - so again there was a disparity among the learning styles of the students. I had one student, a member of the

royal family, who bought her maid to class to carry her books and take notes. She could not really write in English because she had never tried! Another student had gone to an English medium high school so her spoken English was flawless - not so her writing.

The challenges of writing in English were monumental for most students. The alphabet is totally different; Arabic is written from right to left, and the sentence structure is nothing like that of English. Writing an academic essay in English was considered by most students to be by far the most loathsome of tasks. Given that the English essay structure seems to be the antithesis of good Arabic prose, I can understand why. To be considered a great writer in Arabic is to use alliteration, poetic and flowery phraseology and to meander around the point - if there is ever was one - while painting a picture of beauty with the eloquence and mastery of the word. Even in translation the prose is wonderful to listen to, and is very imaginative and lively. Strangely enough, the female students in my classes seemed to master the rather pedantic, formulaic method of English essay writing more quickly than their male counterparts. On further observation, I compared the poetry written in English by the males to that of the females in my writing class and found that invariably the men's approach was different from that of the females. Even though, both the more advanced female and male students were creative poetry writers, the male students often wrote in a more romantic style than the females. They often personified the earth and Oman as a lover. The females, in the main, were far more pragmatic and practical in their approach. I wondered if this made the female students more susceptible to the faster learning of linear, logical method of English academic writing. Then again, the males may have felt more comfortable expressing their romantic side than the females who must needs hide it to maintain modesty.

Questions Asked of Students

When I asked the mixed gender classes why there were more female than male students in many universities, the male students replied that they were more intelligent and stronger than women; however, they could go off the campus and 'play' with their friends, go where ever they wanted and even stay out all night so they spent less time studying. On the other hand, the female students had a dormitory curfew and could not go off campus alone. The female students on being asked the same question said, that indeed the men were more intelligent than them, but that they had nowhere to go and were bored on campus so they studied. If they could have gone off campus they said they would not have studied either. This proved not to always be the case, as some of these female students went on to get their masters in education in England and graduated with honours. They often lived in tiny bed-sitters by themselves, so had no restrictions on their activities - they still studied.

When I asked all the students to research the findings of various studies conducted on male and female student academic achievement world-wide, they were all amazed to find that not only were female students faring better academically than many of their male counterparts in Oman, they were doing so all over the world. Many of these countries did not have the issue of female students who could not go out to 'play.' The students also discovered that the entrance level marks for acceptance into the university in Oman were lowered for some males. The reason being that the university would otherwise be filled with mostly female students. This would counteract what was desired, which was the integration of males and females in the same classes. After the students finished their research, the question was asked again to the male students, "Why do you think that the female students in your class get higher marks than most of you?" They answered, "...because they are smarter than us." When the female students were asked the same question again they said "...because we work harder." This is not a scientific study of course and we

discussed the fact that neither men nor women are smarter than the other gender and that each has its own innate abilities and strengths as well as challenges.

Observations of the Instructor (The Female Students Challenges)

I observed that most of the female students did work hard, they completed their homework on time and studied for quizzes, tests and examinations. They wrote longer entries in their journals. Their handwriting was neater; and they often spoke English more fluently than their male classmates, as well as having larger vocabularies. The male students seemed to prefer kinaesthetic styles of learning, but this was not possible in the confines of our restricted male/ female designated areas classroom. When the students were taken out on trips to such places as museums to gather information, the males were very animated and asked lots of questions, and enjoyed walking around, whereas most of the females tried to find out the answers for themselves, and sometimes complained of being tired. The cultural influences on this kind of behaviour cannot be ruled out as females are expected to be demure in public. They certainly are not demure when they have their all female parties!

The Males Students Challenge

In the end, the studious, academically inclined male students did progress as well as their female counterparts under what seemed to be more challenging circumstances. Possibly the greatest challenge for the male students was that they had not all entered the university at the same level as the females because of the entry level tweaking of marks; therefore, many of the female students already had an advantage over some of their male counterparts. The females were placed in their appropriate class level whereas the males were often placed according to the criteria of having an equal number of males and females in a particular class, which was not conducive to the men's progress. This

was also another challenge for instructors who had in reality students of two or more levels of ability in their classes. Nothing new teachers might say, however, the challenge was to keep the males students self esteem up under the new paradigm shift in their thinking which was that some female students were capable of doing better than them academically. To give them their due though, when I surveyed some of my classes and asked the men if they would marry women with more education than them, over half said yes. The women on the other hand, were not so keen to marry someone who did not have at least the same level of education as themselves. Pandora's box may be opening on the traditional marriage customs of Arabia.

Final Personal Observations

I found that being with the Arabian students and their families was a rich and rewarding experience. The people are kind and generous. In Oman the people pride themselves on being friendly and indeed they are. I found that they are also extremely polite and gracious. The women are self assured and pleasant, while the men are gentle and non-confrontational. The family is everything to Arabs and the closeness of the children with their parents at all ages is very deep. The men spend a great deal of time with their children. Male and female roles are well defined and delineated. When welcomed into some of my past female students homes, I was treated graciously and with a generosity of spirit unknown to me before. Unlike western youth who often cannot wait to get away from home, most of these students did not want to leave home and live alone. The parents also did not want to have their many children live away from them. The opposing world views of Western and Middle Eastern cultures need to be understood when working in the Middle East. In these Arabian cultures, interdependence is valued over independence, and co-operation over competition, and group consciousness versus individual consciousness. We say 'me', 'myself' and 'I'; they more often say 'us', 'ourselves' and 'we.'

Ultimately, many of the learning style differences between male and female students in my classes seemed to be self-imposed because of cultural and propriety norms, along with normal gender differences. Strangely enough, I am now an advocate for one gender classrooms which I disagreed with in the past. In my opinion, male and female students in the same class do not fully express themselves for fear of the 'other.' For example, some females do not wish to appear intelligent, while some males wish to appear very smart, or vice versa! Either way, the students are not being themselves and are not in a comfortable environment that is conducive to learning anything. This is not just an issue relating to teaching in the Middle East, as I felt much more comfortable studying at Mount Saint Vincent University in all female classes than I did studying at Saint Mary's University with mixed gender classes. From the recent finding on the real differences in the processing of information between males and female brains, we may yet come full circle and start separating the sexes in educational institutions once again for the benefit of all.

Submerged in these Arabian cultures, I learned a lot about not only the people but also myself, and had to take a hard look at my cultural mores and what it means to be female. The whole experience was enlightening and uplifting. I highly recommend the journey.