

GENDER STEREOTYPING: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF A CLASSROOM INTERACTION

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ABSTRACT

Stereotypes have certain impact on the human behavior in the society. People usually accept them because it is not easy to resist it even on the base of some known realities in a society. In the Pakistani society there are some gender stereotypes which are prevalent in the attitude of male and female behavior. Present study was conducted to analyse gender stereotypes in a classroom discourse. Van Dijk Model (1993) of discourse analysis was applied on the classroom interaction in this regard. Stereotypical gendered behaviour was observed in the classroom interaction. The results of British and American classroom research by Michcelle (1983) and Bergvall (1996) were also replicated and verified through this study conducted in the Pakistani context.

Keywords: *Gender, Stereotyping, Discourse Analysis, Classroom Interaction.*

INTRODUCTION

Gender Stereotyping is an indispensable phenomenon. Males and females are looked at through the lens of certain prevalent and deep rooted gender stereotypes. The behavior, language, manners, conduct, deeds, actions and activities of males and females are all judged for the adequacy or inadequacy through the prism of gender stereotypes. Cameron (1988) asserts that the reductive tendency of a stereotype is quite obvious involving the interpretation of one's behavior in the light of certain stereotypes that are applied to the entire groups. Certain fixed characteristics are obsessively focused and exaggerated through stereotypes.

Research Questions

Following Research questions were formulated to receive a reply through this analysis:

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1. What type of gendered behaviours do we find existing in the classroom interactions?
2. Does this research verify the results of British and American classroom research by Michcelle (1983) and Bergvall (1996)?
3. What is the role of female participants of the interaction towards the traditional gendered behaviours?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pre-feminist work on language and gender accepted the existing stereotypes regarding gender and further strengthened those stereotypes by reproducing and favouring them in their androcentric writings. Jespersen is witnessed in 1922 talking about women as the ones who have

1. an attribute of soft spokenness
2. an attribute of making a talk which is but a nonsense
3. an attribute of talking too much without having anything to say
4. an attribute of being a decorative sex
5. an attribute having talk as their main function

Often labelled with titles like chatterboxes, strident-nags, and good-for-nothing sorts women were placed at a much lower pedestal than men (Graddol & Swann, 1989). The researchers realize that the demonstration and representation of women as language users is found in mass existence favouring the stereotypes attached to women. They also believe that situation comedies, newspaper cartoons, horror movies cementing the stereotypes are found in abundance wherein ridiculing the women by their stereotyped garrulous, senseless, and abusive style is considered to be the part of the legitimate humour.

Same verbal qualities like slanging, matching, verbal confrontations and excessive speech when used by men are taken as intellectual, smart and cool. The other entity called women is always a problem maker, a trouble creator and an emotional stuff (Macdonald, 1995 & Herbert, 1976).

Stereotyping basically involves the grouping of people into normal and abnormal; acceptable and unacceptable; 'US' and 'Them or Other'. Women are taken as belonging to the 'other', 'unacceptable', 'abnormal' and 'subordinate' group (Hall, 1997).

The stereotypes for normalcy are basically established by the ruling group according to their own world view. The ruling group makes these stereotypes appear natural for everyone. The representational practices for repeating these stereotypes through literature, media, art, and the whole fabric of life including the teaching methodology plays a very important role in establishing the hegemony of these stereotypes (Dyer, 1997).

In studying spoken communication among a group of students Victoria (1996) found that female students have to cope with the conflicting demands to behave in a stereotypically feminine way in order to participate in heterosexual social and sexual affiliations, and to behave in 'masculine' ways to thrive in their studies. Women are entangled in double-bind situations in which they do not find victory on either side. If females speak like men they are called norm breakers, and are resisted by others but if they are facilitative they are taken for granted and are not given due recognition.

In a research on expectations of talk in British classrooms, Michelle (1983) found that boys were encouraged and stimulated by teachers to be assertive in classroom communication and the female students in the class esteemed most those boys who exhibited most ability to do so. The same admiration was altogether missing for those girls showing assertive style. The stereotype is not strengthened just by the opposite male gender but same female gender either in the form of female teacher or female class fellow plays an equal role to get these stereotypes reproduced, observed, and practiced. The researcher found that British school girls will throw a heap of scorn on the girl showing a masculine behavior because they themselves believe in the dominance of males over females and find it disgraceful that female should follow the male style in any situation. Therefore, stereotypes about British and American school girls expect them to be apologetic, hesitant, supportive, silent and subordinate. The female students according to the said research are under considerable pressure and these stereotypes weigh heavily on them.

Looking at the researches done regarding the gendered behaviour of teachers in the classroom this project was picked up to analyse one interaction session of a Bachelors level classroom in a university at Pakistan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The interaction session took place in the last 20 to 25 minutes of the one and a half hours lecture of Pakistan Studies class. The class comprised of 25 students and out of 25 students 14 were boys and 11 girls. The seating arrangement was right and left. All the boys were sitting together on the right side and all girls on the left side. The students belonged to Engineering Department of the University. Collectively 6 people took part in the session namely:

1. Teacher
2. Rizwan (male Student)
3. Aisha (Female Student)
4. Uzma (Female Student)
5. Salman (male Student)
6. Arsha (male Student)

The sentences spoken by the participants were noted down by the researchers and are being reproduced here.

Teacher: We normally do not fulfil our national responsibility. We throw garbage on the roads, waste so much food, do not stop harassment and so on. What do you think, why is this so.....?

(Giving a respectful glance to Salman)

Yes Slaman!

Salman: Yes ma'm its true. Almost the same trend is being followed all over the world. Amm! And only do that thing which benefits them.

Teacher : (With A smile) Very true indeed. Yes guys??

Uzma: AA hh... ..Maam..When we Arshad interrupting while



Uzma already
had started

Arshad : And

Teacher: Yes Arshad! (Teacher gives floor to Arshad after giving an annoying glance to Uzma)

Uzma: (To herself in a whisper) Not Fair...

- Arshad :** Yes mam people really don't understand. No patience in people... they shout, they scream
- Teacher:** (With a smiling face and soft expressions) why is it like that in your opinion boys!
- Uzma:** Maam
- Teacher:** (With taunting expressions) Hmm you again! Yes Uzma!
- Uzma:** Mam inequality is the reason for all mischief and when we treat others bad they react bad and when...
- Teacher:** (Interrupting Uzma) What do you think Class?
- Rizwan:** Mam intolerance should be taken as crime.
- Teacher:** (With smiling expressions) Very good point.
(Suddenly everybody starts discussing the topic with each other and the class gets disturbed. The teacher turns towards the girls' side)
- Teacher :** Be quite girls keep silence. Don't make noise. Ok.....Aisha would you like to add a point.
(Although intellectual talk falls heavy on females)
(Everybody laughs and girls laugh in a way of naughty kid accepting his/her mischief)
- Teacher:** Yes Aisha?
- Aisha:** Mam we should do something individually as well
(A week earlier I went to market with my friend and found that there was group of boys throwing comments on every passing by girl. None of the girls respond to them and passed by them quietly. As I passed by them the boys repeated the same cheap action. I stopped immediately turned to them and insulted them well. All of them ran away. And Mam...)
- Teacher:** (Interrupting Aisha) So your mother did not reprimand you?
- Aisha:** Mam if at all I had told my mother. (Everybody Laughs)
- Teacher:** Emotional.
- Uzma:** mam!

- Tecaher:** (Holding her head with her hand) Uzma you again,
your mother must be much teased with you.
(Everybody laughing)
Ok what's it!
- Uzma:** Ma'm Aisha's situation could have been dealt with more tactfully.
- Teacher:** (Changing the topic) Have you marked the attendance?
- Rizwan:** Yes, mam.
- Teacher:** (With a smiling face) ok, so boys did you do something to change the surroundings?
- Arshad:** mam I try to fulfil my responsibilities at individual level.
Just in the beginning of the semester I found few boys ragging a girl making fun of her in student café.
(I straight away went there and holding the neck of one of them said "son! Better get away")
All of them ran away and proudly looking at my friends I moved to take a cup of tea.
- Tecaher:** (With an astonishing smile) Excellent, Arshad!
Really! Brave boy!
Ok Students, See you next week. Girls hope to have a greater and better participation from you in the next class.

I will apply Teun Van Dijk Model (1993) of Discourse analysis to the given interaction. This Model describes in detail how to inter-relate power and dominance relations to text and discourse structures thus relating macro level social cognitive understandings to micro level text and talk. It also tries to find out how power and dominance is maintained, produced and reproduced through discourse.

Discourse Analysis

The discourse analysis of above narrated classroom interaction is conducted in the following:

a. Access

The interaction takes place in a class room of a semi-government university to which lower social class students don't have an access due to heavy fee

structure of the institute.

Normally students of higher middle class or lower higher class study in this university. So the interaction pattern that will be witnessed in this class can be taken as the typical example of overall ideology prevalent in the society as the establishment of normalcy is done by higher powerful classes and is directed at subordinate groups of the society (Dyer, 1997).

b. Genre

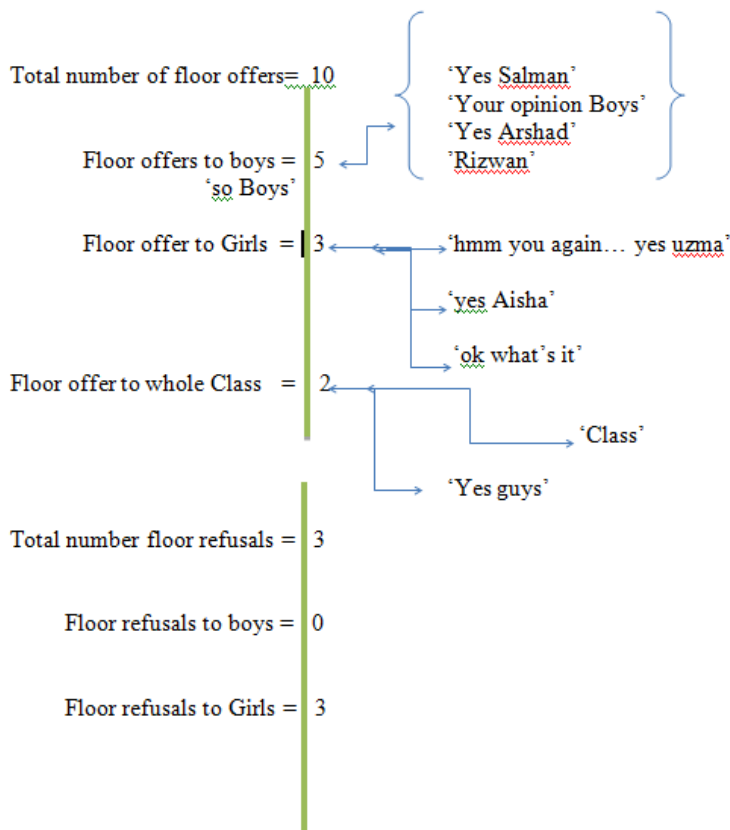
The genre is classroom interaction in which students belonging to different backgrounds and gender study together. The students do get an opportunity to learn and voice their opinion through the classes in the university. The topics of the class lectures are taken from standardized course outline of the university.

c. Communication Acts and Social Meaning

Many different discourses can be recognized in this interaction through different linguistic and conversational tools used by the participants. Discourse of 'Male as Norm' is quite obvious throughout the interaction. Not only the male students but also the female teacher along with the female students are seen to have a tilt towards preferring and valuing male interaction over the female interaction. Following linguistic strategies can be taken as a proof:

d. Floor offer

The teacher offered floor to the class for a total of ten times. Out of which five times it was exclusively offered to boys, two times to the whole class, and three times to the girls. While offering the floor to the whole class, one time the term 'Class' was used whereas the other the term 'Guys' was used which is basically a masculine term and is so powerful that it is used at times to refer to both genders and so by using this term again 'male as a norm' discourse is cemented.



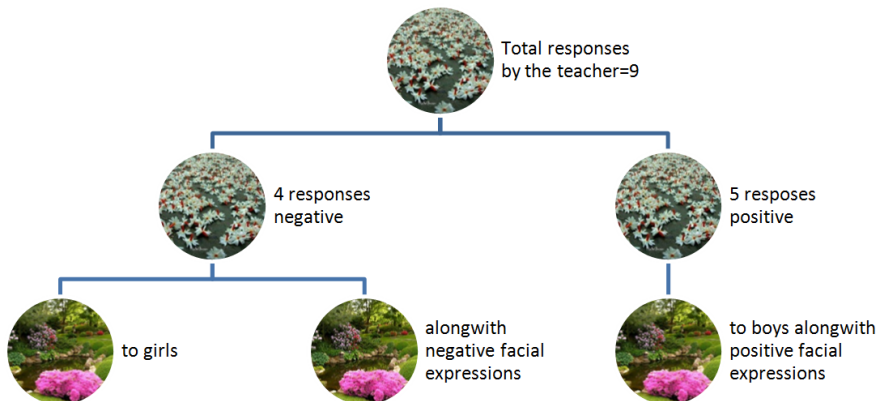
In one of the three floor refusals the floor was refused to the female student Uzma by interrupting the female student's already started words and the teacher did this in favour of the boy (Arshad) who started speaking simultaneously when Uzma had just started with first few words as shown below:

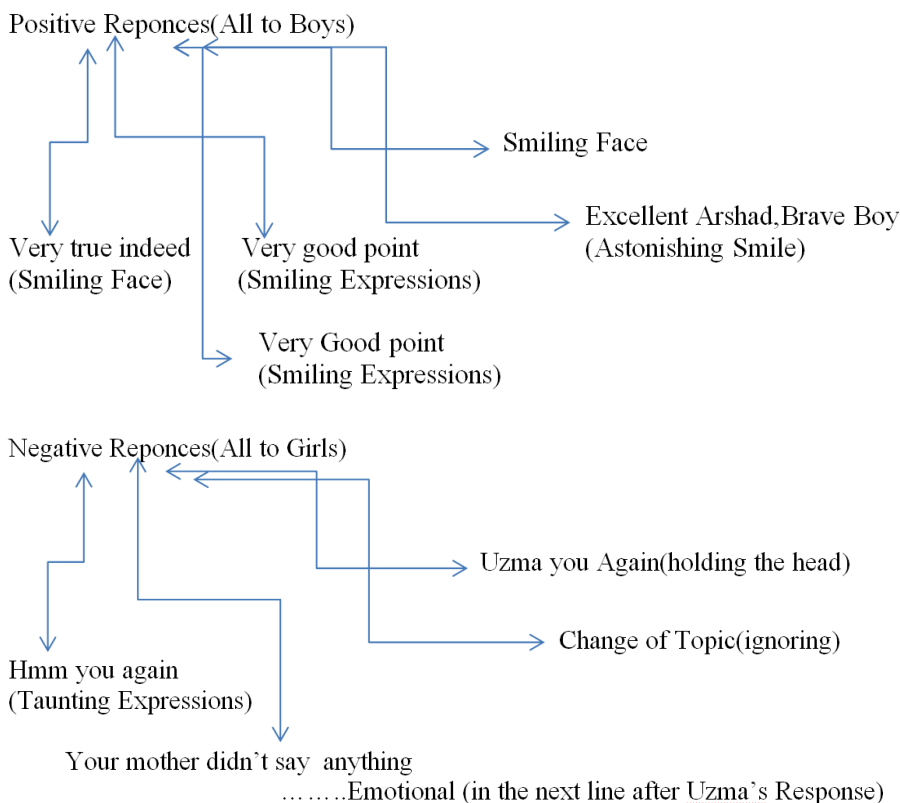
<i>Uzma</i> : AA hhMaam..When we		(Arshad interrupting) (Uzma already had started)
<i>Arshad</i> : And		

This chunk serves as a straight reinforcer of the stereotype that men have intellectually, socially, individually superior existence as compared to females who are just empty-headed trouble makers (Herbert, 1976), so it is quite justified to interrupt an inferior word and existence in favour of a superior word and existence. The pattern of highly determinant floor offers administered by a female teacher shows that she is proving the role of the teacher as hegemonic norm enforcer as Michelle (1983) found in the research that boys were encouraged by teachers to be more interactive and girls were not offered the same.

e. Response of the Teacher to Male and Female Participants

Through out the interaction session in this classroom the female teacher gave her feedback nine times at different points to the participants of the interaction. Out of 9 responses 5 were positive responses with smiling facial expressions and appreciation words whereas 4 were negative responses with sneering facial expressions and derogatory remarks. All the negative responses were for the female students and all the positive responses were for the male students.






The analysis of teacher's response given above no doubt serves as an ample proof of female students being at disadvantaged positions. The powerful, authoritative male of society is still powerful through the helpful implanters of hegemonic norms though the people in academia like the teacher in the above case. It is through these strategies that the stereotypes regarding the superiority of males and inferiority of females is reproduced and relived again and again (Hall, 1997).

The discourse of 'females being emotional' is deplorably visible in this classroom interaction when a student Uzma on describing her personal experience of stopping the trouble makers is bestowed with the title of being 'Emotional' which exactly matched the stereotype of declaring the entire woman community as trouble-maker, good for nothing chatter-boxes with all the meaningless activities (Herbert, 1976).

f. Interruptions

Three places of interruptions are found in the interaction and out of the three none is directed towards boys. The interruptions being always pointed towards female students further proves the research by Stanworth (1983) who found that boys were encouraged by the teachers in the class to be more interactive and assertive. This is the way through which hegemonic male dominance and female subordination is continued.

Interruption-1

<p>Uzma: AA hhMaam..When we</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(Arshad interrupting while)</p>		<p style="font-size: 3em;">}</p> <p>(Uzma already had started)</p>
<p>Arshad: And</p>		

Interruption-2

Teacher: Yes Arshad! (Teacher gives floor to Arshad after giving an annoying glance to Uzma)

Uzma: Mam inequality is the reason for all mischief and when we treat others bad they react bad and when...

Teacher: (Interrupting Uzma) What do you think Class?

Interruption-3

Aisha: Mam we should do something individually as well. A week earlier I went to market with my friend and found that there was group of boys throwing comments on every passing by girl. None of the girls respond to them and passed by them quietly. As I passed by them the boys repeated the same cheap action. I stopped immediately turned to them and insulted them well. All of them ran away. And Mam...)

Teacher: (Interrupting Aisha) So your mother did not reprimand you?

One of the three interruptions is by a male student Arshad towards the female student Uzma. Two of the three are interruptions towards the female students (Uzma and Aisha) by the female teacher. The pattern of the interruptions

clearly shows the existence of the same hegemonic stereotype of male superiority as found in British and American Schools by Bergvall (1996) Stanworth (1983) where girls are expected to be shy, submissive, soft-spoken and presenting their views tentatively.

Macro Semantics Topics

The topics of discussion roamed about social and individual responsibility for the society. But amazingly both the boys and girls quoted two example of fulfilling the individual responsibility through the incidents which prove the 'discourse of women as objects of gaze' and receivers of actions without their own will (Mulvey, 1992). The quoted incidents by the students were regarding the girls being disturbed by mischievous boys in market and café, therefore, indirectly the discourse of women as object of gaze was reproduced and relived in the classroom interaction being analysed. Further the comments of the teacher (although intellectual talk falls heavy on females) are a speaking indication of stereotypic representation of females as irrational, nonsense, empty vessels whose only function is to be involved in gibberish talk Herbert (1976).

g. Participant Positions and Roles (Double-bind Situation)

A very interesting dilemma of female students existing in a double-bind pressure situation as the participants of interaction can be witnessed in the interactions. A few examples are mentioned in the following:

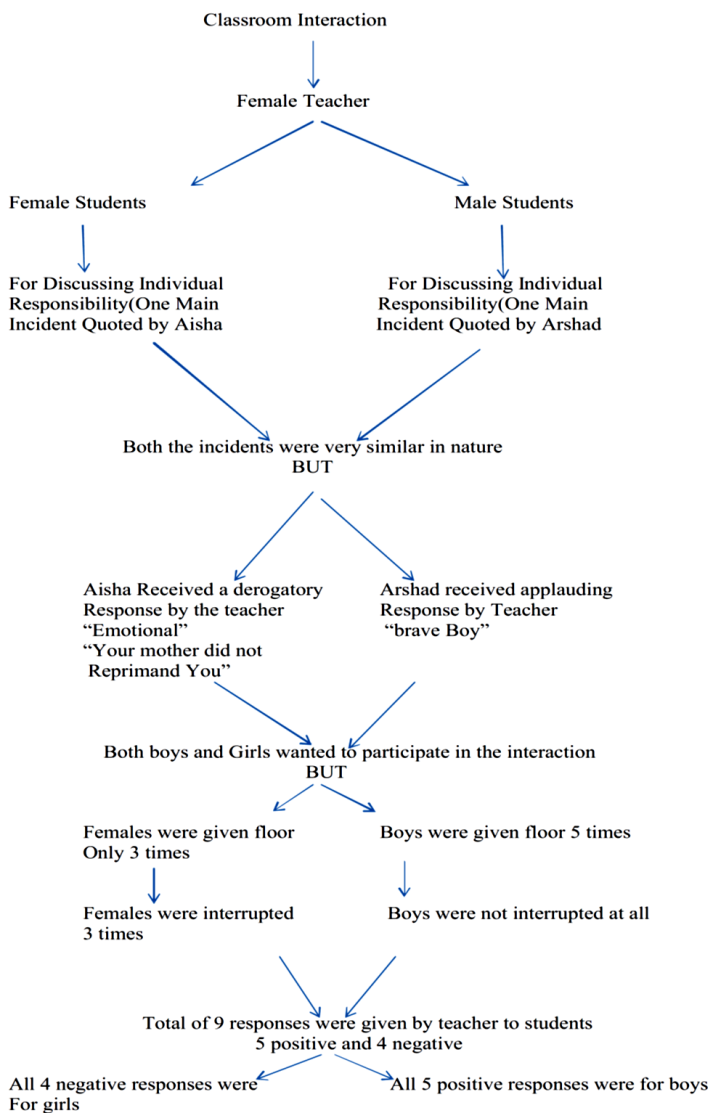
- Teacher:** (Holding her head with her hand) Uzma you again!
- Teacher:** (with taunting expressions) Hmm you again!
Yes Uzma!
- Teacher:** Be quite girls! Keep silence! Dont make noise!
Ok.....Aisha would you like to add a point?
- Teacher:** (to Aisha) Emotional....!
- Teacher:** Ok Students, see you next week. Girls hope to have a greater and better participation from you in the next class.

So here we find that the female students are in no win situation as when they want to communicate and are assertive they are resisted by the teacher and are commented by others negatively and when they are hesitant their performance and capability is taken as low. This exactly matches the research

outcome of Bergvall (1996) in American schools. The desperate whisper of Uzma on being refused the floor:

“Uzma: (To herself in a whisper) Not Fair.....” sounds volumes of pressures that this double bind situation has put on her.

h. Superstructures: Interaction Schemata



i. Role of other Participant Female Students

To understand the role of female participants towards other male and female participants in the selected interaction, kindly have a look at the following excerpts of the interaction

Teacher: Be quite girls keep silence. Don't make noise. Ok.....Aisha would you like to add a point. Although intellectual talk falls heavy on females. (Everybody laughs and girls laugh in a way of naughty kid accepting his/her mischief)

Uzma: Ma'm Aisha's situation could have been dealt with more tactfully.

Firstly, the comments of the female teacher that intellectual talk falls heavy on females seem very strange as the teacher herself is a female but according to the researchers it also bears a testimony to the fact that not only males have a role to play in invigorating the existing social, gender and other stereotypes but females have an equally important participation in doing so. This is because females conspire secretly in their own oppression and they believe in the view that it is only right for the boys to dominate. The female teacher very clearly seems to belong to this category thereby working to cement the pre-existing stereotypes through molding the classroom interaction and so the brain of the students to accept and propagate the stereotypes. The laughing style of all students on the comments of the teacher approved of her comment thereby further cemented the stereotype behaviours of the society.

The comment of the female student Uzma against the incident narrated by Aisha and impressing upon the need for having been more tactful is but again a cry for not disturbing the stereotype in which a female should be indirect, apologetic, supportive, tentative and cooperative. Vocal girls face a heap of scorn thrown on them from other girls for being Vocal (Michelle, 1983) as done by Uzma. Therefore, the female participants of the analysed classroom interaction verified the findings of the previous researches by Bergvall, (1996) and Michelle (1983).

CONCLUSION

Finally, looking at the research questions posed on this analysis we found that stereotypical gendered patterns were found in the analysed classroom interaction placing males at an advantageous and superior positions as compared to females. The research results of Michelle and Bergvall (1983 &

1996) in this analysis were replicated and reproved. The female participants of the interaction were found having a cementing role in strengthening the stereotypes. The research can be broadened and further tested for the validity of results by taking into consideration a greater number of classroom interactions and from different universities so that the above analysis can be tested for its worth for being generalized.

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