

# Investigating Medical Students' Perspectives toward University Teachers' Talking Features in an English as a Foreign Language Context in Urmia, Iran

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**Abstract**—This study aimed to investigate medical students' attitudes toward some teachers' talking features regarding their gender in the Iranian context. To do so, 60 male and 60 female medical students of Urmia University of Medical Sciences (UMSU) participated in the research. A researcher made Likert-type questionnaire which was initially piloted and was used to gather the data. Comparing the four different factors regarding the features of teacher talk, it was revealed that visual and extra-linguistic information factor, Lexical and syntactic familiarity, Speed of speech, and the use of Persian language had the highest to the lowest mean score, respectively. It was also indicated that female students rather than male students were significantly more in favor of speed of speech and lexical and syntactic familiarity.

**Keywords**—Attitude, gender, medical student, teacher talk.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE classroom is a typical context in which students face with foreign language features. Accordingly, foreign language (FL) learners have little or no direct contact with the target language, the people, or the culture outside of classroom [1]. FL Learners only contact with teachers' talk in their FL classrooms. The kind of language used by the teacher for instruction in the classroom is known as teacher talk (TT) [2]. Allwright and Bailey [3, p. 139] claim that "talk is one of the major ways that teachers convey information to learners, and it is also one of the primary means of controlling learner behavior". Therefore, the TT phenomenon is a very important behavior in FL learning, and it is a main source of language exposure in a language learning classroom; therefore, teachers should use more comprehensible speech during their instructions [4]. Nunan [5, p. 189] confirms that "Teacher talk is of crucial importance, not only for the organization of the classroom but also for the processes of acquisition". Teachers can use their talk and make it useful through a controlled utilization of their talk [6].

The current research was an attempt to investigate the attitudes of medical students toward TT behavior in UMSU. The first objective of the study was to find out the main

factors in medical students' attitudes toward some features of the TT phenomenon. The second objective aimed to investigate male and female students' attitudes towards some features of TT in order to see differences. This study intends to explore such helpful insights by examining four major features of English TT from medical students' perspectives including (a) rate of speech, (b) lexical and syntactic familiarity, (c) visual and extra-linguistic information, and (d) the use of Persian language.

In the past, most of the researches on TT [4], [7]-[9] have merely worked on the analysis of various phenomena about TT and its characters and structures. There is no research relating to the attitudes of students about TT in the Iranian context. Due to the importance of TT in language classes, the present study aims to investigate medical students' attitudes toward some features of TT in the EFL context regarding their gender.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scientific studies on the TT phenomenon started in the early mid-1980s. These studies were inspired by different findings from 'caretaker speech' studies in first language development [10], [11] and 'foreigner talk' research in natural second language acquisition [12], [13]. Park [14, p. 19] illustrated that "foreigner talk is used as a general term for the modified language that native speakers use with non-native speakers". 'Caretaker speech' register is a discourse utilized by adults when speaking with babies or young children who do not have full adult competence in the language [15], [16].

TT research evolved partly because of the theory of instructed second language acquisition proposed by Krashen and Terrell [17]. They argue that TT is an indispensable source of comprehensible input in the second language classroom. They also emphasized that TT may be considered, in a sense, as 'caretaker speech' or 'foreigner talk' in the second language classroom. TT is the language typically utilized by FL instructors during the time spent instructing. According to Park [14, p. 21], TT is considered as "the systematic simplification such as lexical, phonological, and grammatical modifications". Long and Porter [18] also confirm that TT includes features such as reduced, simplified forms, and less complex syntactic and idiomatic expressions mainly in the EFL context.

EFL is an acronym for English as a Foreign Language, and is studied by individuals who live in a context where the target language (in this case English) is not the language of

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communication in the society. Accordingly, English is considered as a FL for Iranian students. Regarding the learning of the English language in the EFL context, the classroom is the main place where most of the learning process of English language occurs for the FL learners all around the world. Oral input is the main instructional process that is presented by teachers in the classroom. So teachers' talk is an important part of the target language instruction. Teachers undertake a vital part in shaping classroom talk and in expanding chances for learning [19], [20]. Therefore, the language of instruction and its features in a classroom context is a significant phenomenon, since it is intended for language learning to take place in the most effective way. Regarding the importance of language learning, it is also significant to know students' perspectives toward the TT phenomenon in four main features including (a) rate of speech, (b) lexical and syntactic familiarity, (c) visual and extra-linguistic information, and (d) the use of Persian language in the EFL context.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Participants

The current study was conducted in UMSU, Iran. A total of 120 medical students (60 males and 60 females), mostly between the ages of 18 years and 22 years, were selected as the sample participants of this study. The participations were in their first and second year of studies at UMSU, and were non-native speakers in the EFL context. The national language of all students in Iran is the Persian language. The participants were chosen randomly by the researchers, mainly based on students' willingness to spend time to fill out the questionnaires.

#### B. Data Collection Instrument

The design of the study is a comparative survey based research. The study basically depends on quantitative data collection method. In order to evaluate medical students' attitudes toward the TT phenomenon, a researcher developed descriptive questionnaire was conducted in the study. All the items of the questionnaire were taken from the items of a questionnaire designed by Matsumoto [21]. The questionnaire for this study was initiated with the section for gathering the background information of the participants including age and gender. The second section of questionnaire was a 5-point Likert-type scale with 27 closed-ended items ranging from '1=strongly disagree', '2=disagree', '3=neutral', '4=agree', '5=strongly Agree'. The participants were asked to read each statement and indicate their level of agreement by choosing a number in the questionnaire regarding four features of the TT phenomenon including speed of speech, lexical and syntactic complexity, the use of visual and extra-linguistic information, and the use of Persian language.

To determine the reliability of the instrument utilized in this study, the survey was piloted. A pilot study preceded the actual administration of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was piloted with a random sample of 30 medical students in

UMSU. The present research can be said to be valid because it measured what it was designed to measure; that is, it was designed to measure the subjects' attitudes toward TT. This sort of validity is referred to as content validity. Every student completed the survey without any questions or problems, ensuring that the survey was valid for the respondents and the researcher. As a result, the survey was deemed to have 'face validity', too. The study effectively obtained sufficient and reliable quantitative information adequate to formulate a conclusion ( $r = 0.71$ ). There was sufficient data regarding students' attitudes towards TT. The survey questions explicitly investigated participants' attitudes towards TT. Good internal consistency for the total Questionnaire (0.85) and for subscales (Rate of Speech 0.70, lexical and syntactic familiarity 0.76, visual and extra-linguistic information 0.81, and the use of Persian language 0.78) was found using polychoric correlation.

#### C. Data Analysis

The present study can be described as exploratory in nature as the intent is to discover the perceptions of FL students. Quantitative research method was engaged in this project. Quantitative analysis attempts to 'quantify' results based on numbers. The data analysis for this quantitative study was through examining the answers of the questionnaires. Statistical procedures used to analyze all of the data included descriptive statistics including Mean and Standard Deviation, and inferential statistics including Exploratory Factor Analysis, One-way Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with groups being a between-subject factor and factors being a within-subject factor, and Independent sample t-test using SPSS software, version 23.

### IV. RESULTS

#### A. Descriptive Statistics

According to Table I, generally, most of the means were higher than 3.00. The mean for item 20 ("teachers should try to speak only English at least once a week") was the lowest mean and the mean for item 15 (visual and extra-linguistic information in TT can make class interesting) was the highest one. Additionally, the results of descriptive statistics regarding the shape of normal distribution of data are reported in Table I. Skewness and Kurtosis values should be within the range  $\pm 2$  to accept the shape of normal distribution of data. According to Table I, all skewness and Kurtosis values located in range between  $\pm 2$ . Therefore, the shapes of data distribution for all items were normal.

#### B. Evaluating Main Factors in Medical Students' Attitudes towards Some Features of TT

To do so, it is needed to explore the factors related in students' attitudes towards some features of TT. To explore the factor structure of the questionnaire items, an exploratory factor analysis was performed. A principle axis factor analysis using a direct oblimin rotation procedure was performed on the 27 questionnaire items. Based on scree plot and the interpretability of the factor solution, a four factor solution

was selected. Four factors were rotated. The pattern structure of the factor analysis and items loaded in each factor are presented in Table II.

According to Table II, four factors emerged as the factor loading. The first factor contained seven items with factor loading above 0.40. This factor was labeled as *speed of speech*. The second factor contained nine items with factor loading above 0.40. This factor was labeled as *lexical and syntactic familiarity*. The third factor contained five with factor loading above 0.40. This factor was labeled as *visual and extra-linguistic information*. The fourth factor contained six items and labeled as *the use of Persian language*.

TABLE I  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF PARTICIPANT'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOME FEATURES OF TT

Items	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
1	3.08	1.16	1.00	5.00	0.063	-0.795
2	3.18	1.16	1.00	5.00	-0.455	-0.838
3	3.19	1.14	1.00	5.00	-0.123	-0.863
4	3.50	1.06	1.00	5.00	-0.590	-0.378
5	3.80	1.12	1.00	5.00	-1.053	0.527
6	3.35	1.23	1.00	5.00	-0.353	-0.942
7	3.59	1.09	1.00	5.00	-0.501	-0.584
8	3.86	1.00	1.00	5.00	-1.128	1.170
9	3.76	1.00	1.00	5.00	-0.897	0.474
10	3.47	1.09	1.00	5.00	-0.419	-0.310
11	2.86	1.16	1.00	5.00	0.228	-0.958
12	3.01	1.36	1.00	5.00	-0.030	-10.291
13	3.72	1.10	1.00	5.00	-0.863	0.231
14	3.64	1.04	1.00	5.00	-0.489	-0.256
15	3.95	.94	1.00	5.00	-0.923	0.626
16	3.60	1.11	1.00	5.00	-0.716	0.007
17	3.60	1.11	1.00	5.00	-0.716	-0.130
18	3.51	1.26	1.00	5.00	-0.678	-0.553
19	3.13	1.31	1.00	5.00	-0.246	-1.109
20	2.49	1.30	1.00	5.00	0.584	-0.796
21	3.37	1.23	1.00	5.00	-0.434	-0.939
22	3.36	1.12	1.00	5.00	-0.664	-0.351
23	3.31	1.07	1.00	5.00	-0.710	-0.315
24	2.81	1.12	1.00	5.00	-0.153	-0.998
25	3.10	1.30	1.00	5.00	-0.245	-1.074
26	3.11	1.26	1.00	5.00	0.057	-1.123
27	3.16	1.36	1.00	5.00	-0.183	-1.233

Note: the standard error of skewness is 0.21; the standard error of kurtosis is 0.43

Table III reveals that the mean of factor visual and extra-linguistic information was the highest and the mean of factor the use of Persian language was the lowest one. In addition, Table III showed the reliability coefficients of each factor as estimated by Cronbach's Alpha. The four factors had relatively high reliability coefficients of 0.69-0.87.

### C. Evaluating Students' Attitudes Regarding Their Gender

To satisfy the purpose of these question which was to examine whether the four factors differ between male and female students, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance with groups (male and female) being a between-subject factor and attitudes factors being a within-subject factor were

performed. The descriptive statistics are shown in Table IV.

TABLE II  
FACTOR ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEATURES OF TT (27-ITEMS)

No	Items	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4
B5		0.689			
B1		0.668			
B3		0.646			
B4		0.631			
B2		0.455			
B7		0.443			
B6		0.414			
D3			0.731		
D5			0.703		
D6			0.696		
D7			0.646		
D9			0.631		
D4			0.614		
D2			0.562		
D8			0.445		
D1			0.408		
A4				0.631	
A1				0.561	
A5				0.559	
A3				0.475	
A2				0.425	
C1					0.768
C2					0.725
C4					0.684
C6					0.623
C5					0.556
C3					0.468

TABLE III  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND RELIABILITY COEFFICIENTS FOR EACH FACTOR

Factor	Mean	SD	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Speed of speech	3.39	0.77	0.740
Lexical and syntactic familiarity	3.42	0.66	0.731
Visual and extra-linguistic information	3.67	0.71	0.771
The use of Persian language	3.08	0.61	0.696

TABLE IV  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE FOUR ATTITUDE FACTORS IN TWO GROUPS

Attitudes to features of TT	Groups	Number	Mean	SD
Speed of speech	Male	60	3.19	0.92
	Female	60	3.58	0.51
Lexical and syntactic familiarity	Male	60	3.26	0.73
	Female	60	3.59	0.54
Visual and extra-linguistic information	Male	60	3.56	0.81
	Female	60	3.78	0.59
The use of Persian language	Male	60	3.08	0.66
	Female	60	3.09	0.56

As Table IV shows, there were differences in mean scores of attitudes factors in male and female students.

The results of one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) are shown in Table V. As Table V reveals, there were statistically significant difference for the main effect of groups ( $F(1,115) = 2.74, p = 0.02, \text{Partial eta squared} = 0.10$ ). In other words, the results show that there were significant differences in the attitude factors existing between the groups.

Four independent t-tests were performed to evaluate the differences between two groups for each factor. With a Bonferroni adjustment, the alpha level was set at 0.0125 for each test. The results are presented in Table VI.

TABLE V  
MANOVA RESULTS FOR COMPARING FACTORS IN MALE AND FEMALE

Value	F	Hypothesis Df	Error Df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
0.91	2.74	4	115	0.02	0.10

TABLE VI  
INDEPENDENT T TEST FOR ATTITUDE FACTORS IN MALE AND FEMALE GROUPS

Dependent Variables	t	Df	Sig	Mean Dif	Std. E. Dif
Speed of speech	-2.85	188	0.006	-0.38	0.136
Lexical and syntactic familiarity	-2.76	188	0.007	-0.32	0.117
Visual and extra-linguistic information	-1.68	188	0.095	-0.21	0.130
The use of Persian language	-0.04	188	0.96	0.005	0.112

Table VI shows that there were statistically significant difference between the two groups for speed of speech ( $t(188) = 2.85, p=0.006, p<0.05$ ), and lexical and syntactic familiarity ( $t(188) = 2.76, p=0.006, p<0.05$ ), whereas there were not any statistically significant differences between the two groups in visual and extra-linguistic information ( $t(188) = 1.68, p=0.095, p>0.05$ ), and the use of Persian language ( $t(188) = 0.04, p=0.96, p>0.05$ ). According to Table IV, female students, rather than their male counterparts, had higher mean scores in speed of speech and lexical and syntactic familiarity.

## V. DISCUSSION

This study set out to investigate medical students' attitudes towards some features of TT in the EFL context at UMSU. The study had three separate but related aims. The first aim of the study was to find out male and female medical students' attitudes towards some features of TT in the EFL context. The second aim of the study was to investigate whether the attitudes of male and female medical students toward some features of TT differ or not.

### A. Students Attitudes toward Some Features of TT

Regarding the evaluation of main factors in medical students' attitudes toward some features of TT, the results of the present study showed that factors such as: speed of speech, lexical and syntactic familiarity, visual and extra-linguistic information, and the use of Persian language, are related to their attitudes toward the special features of TT. Comparing this result with those of other studies, it should be mentioned that this result is consistent with the findings of Henzl [22] who presented the characteristics of TT as: 1) with regard to lexical items, teachers select vocabulary that the students already know; 2) With regard to grammar, they attempt to communicate with the students by using the structures that students know; 3) With regard to phonology, they speak with the rate of speech that is adaptable for the linguistic ability of the students; and 4) With regard to speech features, they talk

more slowly, and they use more gestures.

### B. Male vs. Female Medical Students' Attitudes toward Some Features of TT

Regarding the differences between male and female medical students' attitudes towards some features of TT in the EFL context, statistical analyses revealed that female students in comparison to male students had higher mean scores in speed of speech and lexical and syntactic familiarity. Furthermore, the results of the present study demonstrated that the female students' strongly desired for getting TT natural speed of speech, and also expressed their willingness to be exposed to already known lexical and syntactic items through TT. It seems that female medical students in UMSU more than male students are open to somewhat slowed-down (not too fast) TT. Regarding the lexical and syntactic familiarity, female students more than male students were in favor of lexically and syntactically TT that comprises some words and grammatical rules which were studied before. That is to say, there was a significant difference between male and female participants' attitudes toward the speed of speech and lexical and syntactic familiarity of TT. This result of study matches with the findings of Chaudron [23] demonstrating the instructor's utilization of a more common, high frequency vocabulary when talking to non-native speakers. The result of the study was consistent with the result obtained by Kleifgen [24], who found that the teacher's lexical items were less various when addressing non-native speakers, while the teacher's lexical items were more various when addressing native speakers. Henzl [25] discovered that when addressing non-native speakers, native speakers had a tendency to adopt a slower rate of speech and utilize high frequency vocabularies. Larsen-Freeman and Long [26] found that in the case of phonology, the rate of TT when addressing children is slower and new and difficult vocabularies are avoided. However, the result is in contrast with the findings of Blau [27] who conducted a study and measured the effect of speed of speech and syntactic complexity on learner comprehension. Contrary to Kelch [28], it was revealed that slowing the rate of speech and simplifying syntax did not help learner comprehension significantly. Furthermore, the result was in contrast with the findings of Kawaguchi [29] and Kozaki [30], who conducted their studies to examine students' attitudes toward Japanese as second language teachers' use of various rates of speech. The results of both studies revealed that many students did not feel negative about fast speech rates.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study was concerned with the attitudes of medical students toward some features of the TT phenomenon and the possible role of gender in this regard. As Walsh [6] states, since TT is a crucial part of language teaching in an EFL context, and as it is also considered by communicative approaches as an effective factor that can lead to the reduction of students' active participation if not appropriately adjusted to the context of teaching, it can be concluded that the results of this study can be of great importance in demonstrating their

attitudes.

Based on the findings of the study, it was revealed that the most and least important factors for the students regarding TT are the visual and extra-linguistic information and the use of Persian language, respectively. The item analysis showed that item 15 (i.e. visual and extra-linguistic information in TT can make class interesting ) was the most important perspective and had the highest score, indicating that students believe adding visual and extra-linguistic information to TT can facilitate and improve the process of learning and ultimately enhance comprehension and learning. Additionally, evaluating medical students' perspectives toward four main factors regarding the features of TT behavior in the EFL context, it was shown that the visual and extra-linguistic information factor had the highest mean score, while the use of Persian language was in the lowest mean score level. About two other factors, including lexical and syntactic familiarity and speed of speech, which were in second and third ranking regarding their mean scores, respectively, they were mainly preferred by female students rather than their male counterparts.

Accordingly, it can be concluded that teachers should adjust their TT according to the context and gender of their learners. This implication can be supported by the claims of Gaies [31] and Chaudron [23] who state that successful teachers regularly make changes in their rate of speech, lexicon, and syntax classroom speech, and make some adjustments in order to augment and increase learners' comprehension. Comprehension will be hindered if the TT does not undergo these modifications and adjustments. Effective TT is a challenge for FL teachers, so the results of the study can help FL teachers manage this difficulty. Teachers need to pay special attention to learners' beliefs if they want to encourage better learning for their students. They can provide their students with helpful TT to help them promote their ability in language learning.

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