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“EFL Teachers’ Evaluation of Gender-Specific
Teaching and Learning Processes in Austrian
Secondary EFL Classrooms”

A small-case study

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Declaration of Authenticity

I confirm to have conceived and written this paper in English all by myself. Quotations from sources are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references either in the footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are truthfully acknowledged and identified in the text and/or in footnotes.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Research interest

The matter of sex and gender appears to have raised animated discussions from the past to the present time and has influenced the life of many generations up to the 21st century. One can hardly escape both public and private discussions concerning this topic, since debates about unequal payment, unequal rights and unequal opportunities seem to be on the daily agenda, just as terms like “gender stereotypes”, “emancipation”, “gender-gap” and “gendered language” keep being repeated and debated in our societies. *What does it mean to be a man or a woman and how does that influence everyday life? What constitutes ‘real’ masculinity and femininity? Are gender-specific differences something innate or are they merely social constructs and therefore subjects to change?* An enormous number of researchers has made it their major task to find answers to a whole range of similar questions. Indeed, some findings appear to be striking; books focusing on gender-specific traits seem to enjoy ever-increasing popularity. However, in spite of the vast amount of studies that have centred on the various differences between the sexes – including men’s and women’s conversational and interactional behaviour – research still seems to lack an extensive empirical analysis of how these differences are reflected in EFL classrooms. Given the fact that one can hardly deny the existing gender-specific distinctness in some areas, it is probably unnecessary to mention that dissimilarities are likely to appear in EFL education as well.

Due to the fact that I am a student of English and Spanish, my personal experiences as well as my research interests have always focused on the observation and the analysis of foreign language classrooms. I believe that it is of paramount importance for language teachers to be aware of inequalities in their classrooms that are caused – amongst other things – by the different conversational and interactional behaviour of their pupils; pedagogues need to know how to balance their teaching and which material and topics to provide in order to avoid gender-dependent treatment. Given that modern communicative language teaching considers a foreign language to be most effectively acquired

through its active use (cf. Sunderland 1998: 52, Julé 2005: 34), in my work I was concerned with analysing differences in the treatment of boys and girls as well as with the differences and/or similarities in girls' and boys' communicative and interactional behaviour in EFL classrooms.

According to a considerable number of researchers (cf. Coates, Julé 2004, Sadker and Sadker 1995, Swann 1992, Talbot 2010, etc.), girls and boys seem to greatly differ as far as their speaking styles, their reading preferences, their choices of topics and the like are concerned. Teachers – often being unaware of their unequal treatment towards boys and girls – are said to allow their male students to dominate most educational settings and thereby almost force their female classmates to the margins of the classrooms. For my diploma thesis and research project, I wanted to find answers to the following main research question: *(How) Does gender-specific communicational and interactional behaviour influence the teaching and learning processes in the EFL classroom?* In order to be able to answer this rather general and broad question, the following aspects will be addressed in the course of this diploma thesis: *(How) Is gender-specific interaction reflected in Austrian foreign language classrooms? (How) Do boys and girls differ regarding their communicative and interactional behaviour in their English lessons? (On which levels) Does gender influence the teaching and learning processes in the EFL classroom?*

Given that I myself will be a teacher of two foreign languages in the near future and therefore intend to avoid treating students differently depending on their gender-specific behaviour, it was one of my main interests to find out if and, above all, how it is possible to fulfil the following demand (Shehadeh 1999: 261):

[...] that the ESL/EFL teacher, equipped with a good syllabus and a good methodology, should be able to engineer situations that create and provide equal opportunities for both males and females in all aspects of classroom interaction.

1.2 Structure of Diploma Thesis

The following diploma thesis will be structured into two parts: The first chapters will focus on the theoretical background as far as the research topic is concerned: on the one hand, they will deal with some important historical aspects as far as language, gender and education are concerned, as well as with common theories and concepts related to the educational context. On the other hand, it is the aim of this first part to establish an overview of the most decisive studies and research findings regarding gender in the classroom and, more specific, in the foreign language classroom. Part II then will present a detailed description of the empirical project that was undertaken in order to find answers to the theoretical research questions, i.e. with regard to its setting, the process of the classroom observations, the teacher interviews and a few problems that arose during the course of the study. This second part will not only dwell on the theory regarding the selected research topic, but will above all try to establish the necessary link with the practice. The aim is to exemplify and illustrate theoretical issues via focusing on the empirical data that was collected, i.e. classroom observations and teacher interviews. It will therefore present a detailed insight into the English language classroom itself and will discuss the extent of how students' gender influences and affects the foreign language lessons, i.e. both learning and teaching processes, based on the perception of the teachers that were interviewed and on the classroom observations. The final section will consist of a summary of the most essential findings, a discussion of both theoretical background and practical analysis, as well as a conclusion and some suggestions for future research. As the extent of this diploma thesis is limited, one has to bear in mind that its contribution to the larger field of gender and education has its limitations as well. However, even a small contribution may help to raise both students' and teachers' awareness towards important (gender) processes that are going on in their classrooms, or to put it in Julé's words (2004: 3):

There has never been, nor will there ever be, a final conclusion to the matter of gender and education, which is exactly why we seek further understanding about it. A little more helps a little more.

Part I – Theoretical Background

2 Language, Gender and Education

2.1 Theoretical Approaches to Language and Gender

Throughout their lives, people keep being influenced by ideas and beliefs about the “correct” and “appropriate” masculine and feminine behaviour in various contexts and situations; even before children are born, their parents (un)consciously expect them to develop not only into a certain direction but also a particular “boyish” or “girlish” behaviour (cf. Eckert, McConnell-Ginet 2003: 15-17). These expectations seem to be kept alive throughout the entire childhood and even beyond and thereby hugely influence the interpretation of and interaction with male and female children (cf. *ibid*).

According to a variety of researchers, it seems to be an undisputable fact that boys and girls are not only being treated differently but consequently also respond in distinct ways to this unlike treatment (cf. *ibid*). As has already been mentioned in the introductory part of this diploma thesis, the list of theories and studies concerning the differences between the sexes seems to be endless, as is the list of researchers who have dedicated themselves to the investigation of the specific behaviour of men and women in various domains of life. One of the most popular topics among these linguists seems to be sex, gender and their relation to, above all, spoken language use. Some evidence for this overwhelming interest already dates back to the seventeenth century: In her work “Language and Gender”, Coates (1998: 7) reports about anthropological documentations which testify the occurrence of male and female ways of using language approximately four centuries ago. The linguist argues that the descriptions therein exceed today’s attitudes and ideas, since they mainly report on “*gender-exclusive differences*” and therefore on codifying men’s and women’s speech in an obvious manner (cf. *ibid*). The term “gender-exclusive differences” seems to refer to the fact that people could easily differentiate between male and female speakers through their distinct use of linguistic forms, i.e. their speech patterns clearly differed on the phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical level, and every violation of these rules could even have

certain consequences (cf. *ibid*). In contrast, nowadays, language use related to people's gender tends to be analysed through "*gender-preferential differences*"; this term points to the fact that while there are no linguistic forms that are "associated exclusively with one gender", there appear to exist certain preferred ways of male and female language and a "tendency to use a certain form more frequently" (*ibid*).

One of the earliest works on gender-specific language use that has been frequently mentioned – albeit highly criticised for its sexist representation – is Otto Jespersen's monograph (1922) "Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin". The Danish grammarian dedicated a whole chapter – "The Woman" – to the linguistic peculiarities of above all women's language; therein he claimed that women lack extensive vocabulary, that their everyday language is mainly dominated by particular adverbs and adjectives and that their overall sentence production is less sophisticated than men's (cf. Sunderland 2006: 5). Moreover, he (1922: 251) argued that women "more often than men break off without finishing their sentences, because they start talking without having thought out what they are going to say". Jespersen has been highly criticised for his strong sexist representation of male and female talking and, even more, for his obviously unquestioned acceptance of the same (cf. Coates 1993: 19). Interestingly, despite the fact that Lakoff seems to show some important parallels with Jespersen's findings, her landmark work "Language and Woman's Place" (1975) has been met with significantly less criticism by feminists (cf. *ibid*: 20), but instead perceived as one of the pioneer works in feminist linguistics (cf. Wodak 1997: 25f.). According to Lakoff (1975 summarised in Julé 2004: 32), women's language tends to be composed of the following main elements:

- 1) Women have more words that relate to their specific interests, like sewing;
- 2) Women use 'empty' adjectives like 'divine' or 'charming';
- 3) Women use rising intonation in declarative sentences;
- 4) Women use more hedges, like 'kind of', 'sort of' and 'I guess';
- 5) Women use the intensifier 'so' more than men do, speaking in italics for emphasis;
- 6) Women use hypercorrect grammar and pronunciation (men drop their g's – such as 'gonna' while women tend to stay more correct);
- 7) Women use super-polite forms or euphemisms and are the 'repositories of tact';

- 8) Women do not tell jokes, nor do they understand them. Women have no sense of humour;
- 9) Women use direct quotes when describing speech;
- 10) Women use more tag questions

Deducing from this list of characteristic elements in women's language, one might conclude that females' talking is not only significantly different from males' on various levels, but also somewhat inferior. Although Lakoff (1975 in Bucholtz 2004: 81f.) herself points out that neither every woman necessarily fulfils each of the above mentioned items, nor that no single man could make use of some of them, she speaks of "general tendencies" for both women and men to talk in a specific manner. Drawing from Lakoff's descriptions, women are said to "lack authority and seriousness, they lack conviction and confidence [and] in comparison with the (ostensibly) forceful and effective language of men, women are tentative, hesitant, even trivial, and [...] therefore 'deficient'" (Spender 1980: 8).

A similar list of males' and females' particular way of talking was provided by Cheri Kramarae (1977 referred to in Swann 1992: 16) after her research in some US high schools and one university. In her study, Kramarae presented a list of 51 speech traits to the students and required them to identify and assign these traits to different types of speakers, including the two categories "male speaker" and "female speaker" (cf. *ibid*). Apparently, there was a rather high consensus among the participants as far as male and female speech traits were concerned: Male speakers were not only reported to have "deep and demanding voices" but also to employ speech that was "louder and more confident, militant, authoritarian, aggressive, forceful, and dominating" (*ibid*). Unlike women, men did not conceal any of their anger, they did not talk around issues but came quite straight to their points and they showed a more pretentious behaviour; moreover, male speakers "tended to lounge and lean back while talking, [they] used slang, and had a sense of humour in speech" (*ibid*). Female speakers, on the contrary, employed a quite distinct speaking style: Apart from having a higher speaking pitch than their male counterparts, their speech was also said to be "fast, gentle, and smooth" (*ibid*). Moreover, women were reported as putting on a more friendly, smiling and concerned face while talking and listening and "were open and self-revealing, enthusiastic and

emotional” (ibid). According to the participants of the study, female speakers articulated themselves very clearly, they were said to use good grammar and a polite way of speaking; apart from that, gestures and facial expressions were observed in a significantly higher proportion in women’s than in men’s speech (cf. ibid). Lastly, female speakers were reported to give a lot of details when talking, “they tended to talk a lot, to gossip, to talk about trivial topics, and to talk gibberish” (ibid).

Mainly following Lakoff’s characterisation of women’s language as “deficient” – which was introduced earlier in this chapter – three models of describing males’ and females’ ways of speaking seem to have been established, i.e. the “deficit” model, the “dominance” model and the “difference” model (cf. Talbot 2010: 98f., Coates 1993: 12f., Bucholtz 2004: 125f., Hall 2005: 353). In the first model, deficit, women appear to be inferior and disadvantaged users of language compared to men, as “uncertain, as lacking in authority” (Talbot 2010: 98f.; also cf. Cameron 1995: 205). In her work “Man Made Language” Spender (1980: 7) attributes this assumed deficiency of women’s language primarily to the approach that is frequently adopted in research:

[...] as with so many other research areas in the social sciences, when the assumptions on which this knowledge has been constructed are examined, it becomes increasingly clear that this female deficiency often has its origins in the research premises and procedures themselves. By beginning with the initial assumption that there is something *wrong* with women’s language, research procedures have frequently been biased in favour of men.

The second framework, dominance, ascribes gender-specific “language patterns” to the patriarchal order in our societies; therefore, “asymmetries in the language use of men and women are interpreted as enactments of male privilege” (Talbot 2010: 98f.). While it sets men as the dominant sex in society, it presents women as inferior and subordinate and, consequently, perceives males’ and females’ talking as representations of their respective status (cf. Coates 1993: 12f.). The third approach, difference, seems to be based on the belief that the two sexes belong to and grow up in two different subcultures, or even in two separate worlds (cf. Maltz and Borker 1982, Goodwin 2005: 229, Leman, Ahmed, Ozarow 2005: 65). Following this model, children are said to “grow up in and maintain gender-specific cultures” (Talbot 2010: 98f.; cf. Coates

1993: 13) which are characterised by distinct social organizations (cf. *ibid*). Borker's and Maltz' (1982 quoted in Coates 1993: 157f.) analysis of these two gender-specific subcultures revealed the following:

[...] girls learn to do three things with words:

1. to create and maintain relationships of closeness and equality
2. to criticise others in acceptable ways
3. to interpret accurately the speech of other girls.

Boys, on the other hand, learn to do the following when they speak:

1. to assert a position of dominance
2. to attract and maintain an audience
3. to assert themselves when another speaker has the floor.

According to these two researchers, the main differences between females' and males' talk might be summarised as being either more "collaboration-oriented" or "competition-oriented", respectively (cf. *ibid*, Swann 2005: 626, Coates 1993: 194, Tannen, Kendall, Adger 1997: 79). Maltz and Borker argue that while girls tend to play in smaller groups, i.e. frequently in pairs, boys are used to playing in companies that are larger and more hierarchical (cf. *ibid*). Moreover, girls' friendships appear to be grounded in talk, whereas boys' friendships are likely to be based on "joint activity" (cf. *ibid*). It is exactly this tremendously different interaction in all-girls and all-boys groups that the two researchers name as the main reason for the development of gender-specific styles of talking (cf. *ibid*).

Although there might be elements and arguments in each of the above analysed models regarding men's and women's specific language (use) that are valid to a certain extent, these approaches have been harshly criticised by various researchers in the last years (cf. Freed 2005: 702). According to Johnson (1997: 10), this criticism largely stems from the fact that every single framework, i.e. deficit, difference and dominance, is not only "characterized by almost exclusive problematization of women", but also uses "a concept of gender based on binary opposition". Given the flaws and shortcomings of these three models, postmodern feminism seems to have heavily influenced the established gender perceptions and has placed particular importance to the impact of discourse and contextuality on – not only – linguistic gender concepts

(cf. Freed 2005: 702, Bucholtz 2004: 126; for a more detailed discussion see chapter 4.4.).

Although there are many different approaches available concerning men, women and language, there seems to be one major issue that is repeatedly discussed in the majority of them, namely the emergence of gender-specific language – as forming one essential part of one’s gender identity – due to a process of socialisation (cf. Wodak 1997: 25f., Coates 1993: 144, 166, Swann 1992: 4). According to various studies, boys and girls learn to behave and to be “proper” members of their respective group during their childhood (cf. *ibid.*). When growing up – or, perhaps more appropriate: when being raised – children come to identify themselves with either the male or female group and “demonstrate their membership of the group by their use of gender-appropriate behaviour, and this includes gender-appropriate linguistic behaviour” (Coates 1993: 144):

[...] it is reasonable to assume that when children learn to speak, one of the things they learn is the cultural role assigned to them on the basis of their sex. This is a two-way process: in becoming linguistically competent, the child learns to be a fully fledged male or female member of the speech community; conversely, when children adopt linguistic behaviour considered appropriate to their gender they perpetuate the social order which creates gender distinctions.

As far as children’s language acquisition is concerned socialisation seems to happen on many different levels (cf. Coates 1993: 166): firstly, by explicitly making aware of particular linguistic elements (such as taboo language, politeness and swearing); secondly, due to adults serving as distinct linguistic models for boys and girls; thirdly, because adults interact differently with their children depending on the sex of the same (for instance, they tend to interrupt girls more than boys, or lisp more when talking to baby girls); fourthly, due to adults’ different preconceptions of both male and female infants (for example, they expect male children to be verbally inferior to female); fifthly, through grown-ups’ distinct responding to boys and girls, although they make use of the same linguistic strategy (for instance, girls are less likely to receive a positive answer when they argue or talk assertively than their male counterparts when doing likewise); lastly – and probably most important – “through children’s

participation in gender-specific subcultures which create and maintain distinct male and female styles of interaction” (ibid).

2.2 Gender and Language Learning

The following analysis will focus on boys’ and girls’ gender-specific learning and language learning behaviour, differences regarding their abilities and achievement, and will discuss the most common theories and beliefs as far as their emergence and development are concerned.

Regarding the justification of male and female behaviour and abilities within educational contexts, there seem to be mainly two competing theories (cf. Swann 1992: 5, 9f., 14, Talbot 2005: 468): while some researchers see the origins of boys’ and girls’ unlike language learning behaviour and abilities as exclusively biologically determined and therefore innate, others totally neglect this “natural” explanation and instead ascribe their existence as having emerged from society and culture. However, not all scientists and researchers treat the matter according to these black-and-white categories, but adopt a view that takes into account both biological and socio-cultural factors and their interplay. In the following discussion, models of all three theories will be presented.

Representatives of the first theory ascribe the divergence between girls’ and boys’ learning behaviour and abilities to particular ingrained biological differences (cf. Swann 1992: 5f.). Following this view, biological factors are frequently related to differences regarding not only certain aspects of language behaviour but also to girls’ and boys’ distinct cognitive abilities: while girls are said to have a greater ‘verbal ability’, boys seem to possess a greater ‘spatial ability’ (cf. ibid). These differences regarding certain cognitive abilities are commonly explained via referring to the “natural” basis of men and women and, although these explanations tend to be rather inconsistent (cf. ibid: 5-7). More specifically, these gender-specific differences are said to stem from boys’ and girls’ distinct hormone systems and brain organisations: the former focuses on the biological fact that men and women have different levels of the hormone testosterone; although a certain amount of testosterone exists in both sexes, it is found in higher levels in men and very often made responsible for their rather

aggressive and assertive behaviour (cf. *ibid*, McCarthy 2010: 96f.). The latter refers to the differences in the functional organization of men's and women's brains and might be explained as follows (Gur, Bockow and Gur 2010: 75f.):

These differences were attributed to variation in hemispheric specialization of cortical function. While the left hemisphere is generally dominant in verbal and the right in spatial processing, some neuropsychological studies have suggested less hemispheric specialization in women compared to men.

As has already been mentioned, girls and women are said to perform better in verbal tasks and apparently do so due to their less specialized brains: according to neuropsychology, neither of their brain hemispheres seems to be exclusively responsible for language, but instead females are said to use both hemispheres for linguistic production; boys and men, for their part, seem to surpass their female counterparts as far as spatial and motoric abilities are concerned because of their brains being stronger specialized: while one of their hemispheres is said to be in charge of language only, the other one appears to be used for other activities (cf. *ibid*).

Adopting such a natural deterministic view, differences between boys' and girls' language and learning behaviour and abilities are considered as purely innate and therefore implying that one can hardly do anything to change them (cf. Swann 1992: 5). This resistance to change might be met with certain problems within educational settings, especially when teachers try to bring more gender balance and equality into their classrooms (*ibid*):

Teachers who wish to introduce equal opportunities may be faced with assertions about girls and boys that assume a biological explanation of difference, such as the idea that differences are 'only natural'.

Parents who consider the gender differences in learning behaviour and abilities to be exclusively rooted in their children's biology seem to totally neglect any other justification when it comes to explaining their daughter's or son's demeanour (cf. Swann 1992: 8-10). Apart from the fact that there are findings which evidence this natural deterministic view, some people seem to simply prefer the 'easier way' and thus take these issues as "naturally given" without further questioning them; blaming nature for their child's – or any child's –

behaviour appears to be a lot more comfortable than challenging and maybe even criticizing their own or society's values and ideals that have been passed on from generation to generation and thus have been constantly conveyed to their daughters and sons (cf. *ibid*).

It is exactly the critical analysis of these same values and ideals that representatives of the second theory engage in, i.e. finding reasons and explanations for boys' and girls' different language learning behaviour and abilities in our society and culture. According to Swann (cf. *ibid*: 10), male and female children begin to experience life in a very distinct manner from the very moment they are born; even before birth, mothers and fathers tend to develop different expectations depending on the sex of their baby. Swann (*ibid*) argues that from this time onwards, "girls and boys will have different names, different selections of toys, and different clothes" and one can hardly deny her assumption that hence "[t]hey will also be responded differently by adults". Girls and boys will develop into a certain direction, and therefore also certain language learning behaviour and abilities, not because it is a natural matter of fact but because they are permanently exposed to "correct" masculinity and femininity. Parents, relatives, peers, figures in the media and the like seem to serve as role models for children and constantly perpetuate already existing values and ideals as far as gender-specific language learning behaviour and abilities are concerned (cf. *ibid*). Swann (*ibid*: 14) – for her part mainly focusing on the linguistic level – assumes certain aspects of "gender-differentiated language" as already present when children enter classrooms:

By the time they come to school, girls and boys have already begun to learn gender-differentiated language; they have begun to learn how to speak differently as a girl or a boy, how to speak *to* other girls and boys, and how to speak *about* them. Such learning continues throughout the school years and afterwards. [...] The way people speak and write is important, both socially and educationally. It affects how they are perceived and evaluated.

Girls and boys seem to come to school already "equipped" with a certain amount of ideas and values that have been conveyed to them and that they have been internalizing for quite a long time (cf. *ibid*). Amongst other things, children get used to the way of speaking that adults employ and usually imitate their role models to a certain degree. However, unlike the afore discussed

natural deterministic theory, the socio-cultural explanation of gender-dependent differences as far as learning behaviour and abilities are concerned seems to imply a huge potential to promote changes within – not only – the educational setting (cf. *ibid*).

As has already been mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, not all scientists and researchers judge boys' and girls' differences in language learning behaviour and abilities along these two categories, i.e. ascribing gender differences in achievement to results of either nature or nurture (cf. Whyte 1986: 57). Instead, some people have come to the conclusion that finding an explanation for these gender-dependent differences does exclude neither nature nor nurture, but rather involves essential processes of both. In their "interactionist" model, Archer and Lloyd (1982; 1985: 272f. referred to in Swann 1992: 9) offer an analysis that takes into account both theories, although they seem to place greater emphasis on socio-cultural factors:

They suggest that the human infant is born with the potential to make classifications and to act on the basis of categories such as female and male. This much is biologically given. The child constructs an 'internal system of gender rules' on the basis of his or her experiences. The actual content of the gender rule system depends on the social representations of gender that are available in the child's culture.

In fact, the only thing that seems to be innate in every human being is the ability to make classifications and categorisations of the world. During the process of growing up, children constantly find categories on the basis of their daily experiences and establish appropriate schemata in their heads (cf. *ibid*, DiMaggio 1997: 269f., 273): these classifications might entail "simple, highly abstract concepts", such as good or bad animals, "concrete activities", such as eating an apple, or "complex social phenomena", such as "group stereotypes or social roles" (DiMaggio 1997: 269f.). One of the most important categories that children, by nature, are able to form appears to be the classification of these complex social phenomena to which the distinction of "female and male" probably belongs. As Archer and Lloyd (cf. 1982; 1985: 272f. referred to in Swann 1992: 9) found out, boys and girls "construct an internal system of gender rules on the basis of [their] experiences"; however, what they actually

ascribe to these two categories strongly depends on representations, ideas and values that they encounter in their environment, i.e. in society and culture.

Drawing from these theories and everyday experience, there seem to exist certain differences as far as language learning behaviour and abilities between the two sexes are concerned; these differences – whether they are biologically determined or socio-culturally constructed – appear in a variety of different contexts. Boys and girls, men and women seem to grow up facing the constant demonstration of differences between the sexes, including their language use, their language learning abilities and their achievement at school. However, it seems to remain questionable and an issue much discussed whether it is boys or girls who achieve better, whether it is the one or the other sex which learns more effectively and whether it is males or females, who are advantaged or disadvantaged in education.

According to Sunderland (1992: 89), in “educational folklore” girls are commonly referred to as the better learners – a claim apparently being hardly supported by research; instead, “research into classroom processes, materials, and the English language itself suggests females to be at least potentially *disadvantaged*”. Similarly, Shehadeh (1999: 260) – for his part focusing on ESL/EFL classrooms – argues that, although there is no ultimate result as far as the impact of gender differences on “classroom situations, progress, and final achievement in the L2” is concerned, the evidence that is available tends to demonstrate “that in mixed-sex tasks men appear to take greater advantage than females of opportunities to communicate, promote their productive skills, and progress in the L2”. Since the majority of classrooms tends to be composed of mixed-sex groups and is hence dominated by mixed-sex tasks, Shehadeh’s claim seems to be of importance when it comes to girls’ less positive position at school.

However, despite the fact that women are said to be disadvantaged to a certain extent, it is boys’ underachievement that seems to have been on the agenda of many international policy contexts since the early 1990’s (cf. Swann 2005: 632, Davies 2003: 116). This male underachievement perceives boys’ performance as relative to girls’ in national tests – Swann thereby mainly referring to England and Wales – and also in other forms of examination, such as the General

Certificate of Secondary Examination (GCSE) (cf. Swann 2005: 632). According to her (ibid: 633), these concerns about boys' weaker achievement seem to be "a potential reversal of the kinds of equal opportunities initiatives [...] that were carried out particularly during the 1980's". In contrast to these earlier initiatives, the later implied a variety of different government interventions that obviously marginalized girls, such as increasing the number of male teachers by improving both their financial situation as well as the profession's prestige, or changing school readings in favour of boys' interests and wishes (cf. ibid). One of the most important publications as far as boys' underachievement in the English classroom is concerned seems to have been the one released in 1998 by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), namely "Can Do Better" (Swann 2005: 634):

Can do Better attributes boys' "underachievement" to several factors, such as an anti-academic "male culture", but also to certain features of the English curriculum: English is seen as a girls' subject, for instance; English is sedentary, whereas boys prefer more active participation; and boys have limited tolerance of ambiguity: they need more well-defined tasks. English teaching, therefore, needs to appeal to boys' interests as well as extending them.

According to Swann (2005: 235), literature on the subject of underachievement seems to have totally shifted its focus from females to males – "there is a sense that girls have had their day – it's now the boys' turn". However, although boys' underachievement initiatives might be justified to a certain degree, researchers seem to agree upon the fact that further investigation is needed in order to provide more profound analyses of "male and female achievement rates, incorporating factors such as social class, classroom interaction patterns, language competences and school settings, and different types of assessment" (cf. Epstein et al 1998, Lynch 2000, Gorard, Rees, and Salisbury 1999, Elwood 1999, Jones and Myhill 2004 referred to in Drudy 2011: 9f.).

2.3 Language Learning Styles and Strategies

Due to the fact that girls and boys, women and men are often said to differ from each other on various levels, research has also focused on their distinct general learning styles and strategies, as well as on those specific to language learning.

However, although some studies have identified certain gender-specific tendencies as far as this topic is concerned, the findings still seem to be rather restricted and sometimes inconsistent (cf. Oxford 1995: 34-38). Moreover, apart from the fact that both sexes may have their own specific learning and language learning styles and strategies, one needs to be aware of the fact that preferences regarding these styles and strategies are not clear-cut but rather likely to change depending on the learning situation and context (cf. *ibid.*, Felder and Henriques 1995: 21, 28). Individual students may adopt various styles and strategies and hence a “multistyle approach to [foreign language] learning” (Felder and Henriques 1995: 28) and they often do so independent from their gender (cf. Oxford 1995: Preface, 34, Montgomery and Groat 1998: 1f.).

The term “learning style” in general describes “an individual’s natural, habitual, and preferred way(s) of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills” and seems to continue throughout people’s lives independent from different methods of teaching and subject matters (cf. Reid 1995: Preface). “Language learning styles”, more specifically, refer to the “general approaches” that are used in order to learn a language; however, they tend to be very similar to the styles applied in general learning situations (cf. Oxford 1995: 34). These language learning styles – and learning styles on the whole – do not only involve “cognitive styles” of learning, but also “a whole range of social and affective factors”; therefore, apart from the essential cognitive elements of an individual’s learning style, social and affective factors, i.e. attitudes, emotions and motivation, are very likely to have a certain influence (cf. *ibid.*). Since different researchers appear to have worked with quite distinct dimensions of language learning styles, only a selection of those will be presented. The dimensions that will be under discussion – most of them will primarily focus on the ESL/EFL classroom – comprise the following: sensory preferences, field-independence or field-dependence, and reflection or impulsivity (cf. *ibid.*: 35).

As far as sensory preferences are concerned, Oxford (1995: 35f.) identifies three main categories of students, namely visual, tactile and kinesthetic, and auditory. The first group of students, representing the visual type, learns most effectively through visual representation, for example, through movies, through videos and through any kind of illustrations; they need to receive written

instructions in order to be successful members of the classroom (cf. *ibid*). Hardly any research concerning visual language learning and gender differences seems to exist and if there was, the results available appear to be highly contradictory (cf. *ibid*, Willing 1988, Reid 1987).

According to Oxford (1995: 35f.), tactile and kinesthetic language learning preferences, for their part, seem to include two very similar types of learners and thus are frequently mentioned as being one group. Students employing a tactile and kinesthetic language learning style are likely to achieve best when they are engaged in some kind of physical action, i.e. when involved in touching and handling objects, and a certain amount of movement (cf. *ibid*). Unlike the visual learning style, certain gender-specific tendencies on the tactile and kinesthetic level seem to exist; given that this tactile and kinesthetic preferences are commonly related to the spatial ability – and that the spatial ability is frequently ascribed to men (cf. Swann 1992: 5, Feingold 1992) – “language teachers might expect that their tactile and kinesthetic students would more often be males than females” (Oxford 1995: 36).

Auditory learners, representing the third group as far as sensory preferences are concerned, appear to prefer the “oral-aural learning channel” (cf. *ibid*). These students are likely to learn most effectively when being exposed to a lot of discussions, group work and conversations, and also to a huge amount of oral directions (cf. *ibid*). According to certain studies, auditory learners tend to make use of “memory strategies”, “strategies for authentic language use”, and also “self-management strategies like planning and evaluating” (cf. *ibid*). Similar to research on tactile and kinesthetic learners, the results regarding the link between gender and oral-aural learners are inconsistent; nevertheless, it might be deduced from the studies available that “auditory ability in a foreign language might be greater in females than in males” (*ibid*; cf. Eisenstein 1982).

In contrast to the rather limited research findings as far as gender-specific language learning and sensory preferences are concerned, a somewhat more detailed and profound analysis of gender differences seems to have been made for “field-independence/field-dependence (cf. Oxford 1995: 36). The term “field-independence” describes a rather analytic and structured form of learning and the capacity to “separate easily the key details from an ambiguous context

through the use of analysis” (ibid: 37). Field-independent learners are often said to have a stronger developed sense for space, kinetics and spatial relationships than do field-dependent learners (cf. ibid). Since men and boys are commonly known as having a greater spatial ability than women and girls, field-independent learning approaches tend to be associated with the male sex (cf. ibid). In comparison, the term “field-dependence”, also termed “field-sensitivity”, seems to be more frequently ascribed to women (cf. ibid: 36f.). On the one hand, these learners are less able to “separate details from the background easily” and have “the greater tendency toward forming *global* impressions”; on the other hand, field-dependent/field-sensitive students are very likely to take into account the social context and the social interaction of a learning situation (cf. ibid: 37). Despite the fact that there is no straightforward relationship between field-independent/field-dependent learners and L2 verbal learning, a variety of different researchers (cf. Good and Brophy 1986, Shipman and Shipman 1985; et al.) has suggested the following:

Field-independent L2 learners, often males, may have an advantage in analytic reasoning tasks. Field-dependent individuals, often females, may have an edge in non-analytic aspects of communicative competence, such as sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Oxford 1994: 141f.).

Apart from analysing learning styles from the perspective of sensory preferences and field-independence/field-dependence, students are frequently observed as differing from one another as far as accurate speech production is concerned; the scientific terms related to this phenomenon are “reflection” and “impulsivity” (cf. Oxford 1995: 37f.). While the former refers to the learner’s “tendency to stop and consider options before responding” and hence is able to achieve higher accuracy, the latter describes the learner’s “tendency to respond immediately, more fluently, and often inaccurately” (ibid). Similar to research on field-independency/field-dependency, findings regarding gender and reflection/impulsivity cannot be generalised; however, according to Oxford (1995: 38), the following results might serve as a rough orientation in terms of boys’ and girls’ impulsive and reflective behaviour in the language classroom:

[T]he reflective learner (often female) considers different angles and the social context before responding and is often devoted to

answering correctly. The impulsive learner (frequently a male) jumps in with a quick response and may want to dominate, regardless of the correctness of the response.

As has already been mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, research seems to focus on both language learning styles as well as language learning strategies of men and women, of boys and girls. In contrast to language learning styles, which refer to learners' broad approaches used to learn a language, "language learning strategies are specific actions or techniques that students use, often intentionally, to improve their progress in developing L2 skills" (cf. Green, Oxford 1995: 262). While learners seem to be often unaware of their individual language learning styles, knowledge about their language learning strategies is likely to be much more conscious; students seem to frequently choose certain strategies, i.e. specific behaviour, that might help to develop their language competence (cf. *ibid*).

Most of the research done within the field of language learning strategies – primarily concerned with second language acquisition – appears to have used the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) as its main research instrument; in general, SILL can be described as a "self-scoring, paper-and-pencil survey" that has been employed in more than 40 studies and that has involved roughly 8,000 students all around the globe (cf. *ibid*: 264). When taking part in a SILL survey, students have to provide information about their individual language learning strategies ("I do such-and-such") through evaluating themselves on a 1-5 point scale (ranging from "Never or almost never true of me" to "Always or almost always true of me") (cf. *ibid*). SILL surveys tend to comprise the following six categories (Green, Oxford 1995: 264f.):

1. *affective* strategies for anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, and self-award
2. *social strategies* such as asking questions, cooperating with native speakers, and becoming culturally aware
3. *metacognitive* strategies for evaluating one's progress, planning for language tasks, consciously searching for practice opportunities, paying attention, and monitoring errors
4. *memory-related* strategies, such as grouping, imagery, rhyming, moving physically, and reviewing in a structured way
5. general *cognitive* strategies, such as reasoning, analysing, summarizing, and practicing (including but not limited active use of the language) and

6. *compensatory* strategies (to make up for limited knowledge), such as guessing meaning from the context and using synonyms and gestures to convey meaning

The SILL has been employed in various countries around the world and studies based on this instrument have reported – amongst other things – about gender differences as far as the use of language learning strategies is concerned (cf. *ibid* 265f.). Generally speaking, female students are more likely to use certain strategies than their male counterparts (cf. *ibid*; cf. Sunderland 1992: 7). Despite the fact that not only gender is said to have an influence on these differences and that there may be variation within each gender-group, “there might be some consistent differences in the ways that females as a group learn a language, compared with males as a group” (Green, Oxford 1995: 265f). SILL studies conducted in Europe and Asia (cf. Ehrman and Oxford 1980, Watanabe 1990, Sy 1994) have found that females notably surpassed males on a variety of different strategy-levels, including general study strategies, strategies for authentic language use, strategies for searching for and communicative meaning, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, self-management and social strategies (cf. *ibid*). However, apart from the fact that men and women, boys and girls might show certain differences as far as their language learning styles and strategies are concerned, it seems to be important to stress that neither males nor females can be seen as homogeneous groups; there might be variation within each of the two, since individuals can definitely differ from the rest (cf. Green, Oxford 1995: 292). In order to cater for a successful (language) learning environment, teachers need to be aware of the different learning styles and strategies of their students (*ibid*):

Many factors exist to explain individual differences in strategy choice. [...] Students with different learning styles (e.g. visual, auditory, and hands-on; reflective and impulsive; analytic and global; extroverted and introverted) often choose strategies that reflect their style preferences. The more that teachers know about such factors, the more readily the teacher can come to grips with the nature of individual differences in the classroom. Such knowledge is power – the power to plan lessons so that students with many different characteristics, including varied strategies, can receive what they need.

3 Gender and Learning Resources

3.1 Imbalances and Stereotypical Representations in School

Material

Within the field of gender and education, researchers appear to have put a particular focus on the use and, above all, the composition of classroom resources, i.e. on reading and writing material, textbooks, information books and the like. Given that learners are confronted with this material in various school subjects nearly every day, it seems to be hardly surprising that they can be greatly influenced by its content (cf. Sadker, Sadker and Klein 1991: 272). Particular concern has been raised about the existing gender stereotypes and imbalanced representations in school material, since – according to Swann (1992: 96) – “female and male images conveyed to pupils contribute to their sense of what is normal for girls and boys and women and men in our society”. It is partly because of the unequal depiction of male and female characters in classroom material that the perception of gender as a social division is reinforced and inequalities between the sexes are perpetuated (cf. *ibid.*). When it comes to the analysis of imbalances and stereotypical representations of men and women, and boys and girls in books and other printed material, it seems to be essential to be aware of the different levels on which these biased depictions might be conveyed to the students (cf. *ibid.*: 95). The evaluation of a story, for example, does not merely include counting the number of both male and female characters that appear, but also involves considering and judging the type of characters that was selected for each sex, as well as how both men and women are portrayed on the visual and written level (cf. *ibid.*).

The majority of the studies that have analysed the commonly used school material have come to the conclusion that the message that has been conveyed to the learners could be seen as a mirror reflecting all the things that are deemed appropriate for men and women, and boys and girls in our society (cf. Subrahmanian 2005: 403). While males tend to be perceived as the “dominant male actor[s] [...] in the world of work and in public decision-making” and hence are depicted just like that in books and other material, the suitable place for

females tends to be in the kitchen, staying at home and taking “primary responsibility for household chores” (ibid).

In the 1970s and 1980s, various analyses were carried out and aimed at investigating the persisting representations of men and women in different school material. In fact, these analyses did not only focus on the portrayal of male and female characters, but also on the distinct roles that were ascribed to these characters in children’s stories, reading schemes, textbooks and information books (cf. Swann 1992: 98). Since the researchers did not focus on one single subject in particular, the following results do not only provide information about the EFL classroom, but about more general interdisciplinary patterns that were found (cf. ibid): On the whole, male characters appeared considerably more often than female characters in stories and as pictures and exemplifications in textbooks; apart from the fact that there was this tendency for men and boys to feature more often than women and girls, research during the 1970s and 1980s showed that there even occurred less female than male animals. Furthermore, while there obviously existed stories which did not include any female character at all, there seemed to be rarely a story without any male character (cf. ibid). Apart from differences as far as the appearance of men and women, boys and girls was concerned, males and females tended to take on quite distinct roles in their depictions: While men and boys were very likely to fulfil rather active and leading roles, women and girls appeared to only play quite passive and secondary roles (cf. ibid). The former were presented as doing more things, as featuring in many different activities, as having more adventurous lives and as daring to go further away from their homes, whereas the latter tended to be conveyed as dependent beings, who frequently found themselves in need and thus had to be rescued by men (cf. ibid). What is more, several studies revealed that male figures in textbooks were characterised “as creative, brave, persevering, achieving, and capable of solving problems”; female figures, on the other hand, were depicted as “dependent, passive, incompetent, fearful, and concerned about their physical appearance” (Sadker, Sadker and Klein 1991: 272f.). “Female characters in stories [were] often restricted to traditional, stereotyped roles: playing at home, doing the housework, helping with the housework” and in information books, “women’s

experiences and their contributions to society [were] often unacknowledged or undervalued” (Swann 1992: 98).

Similarly, Sunderland (cf. 2000: 151f.) – for her part mainly focusing on EFL textbooks – reports about considerable evidence for gender bias found by studies of the 1970s and 1980s on both the content and the linguistic level. According to her (cf. *ibid*: 151), gender bias on the content level was mainly disavouring females and could be categorised into three main areas, i.e. “exclusion”, “subordination and distortion”, and “degradation”. The first sense of bias, exclusion, refers to the fact that women and girls seemed to be frequently excluded from the foreign language textbooks – a fact which, in turn, resulted in men’s and boys’ domination and over-representation in the material (cf. *ibid*). The consequences of the second sense of bias, subordination and distortion, were twofold: firstly, they concern males’ and females’ rather rigid classification into superior and inferior roles, respectively; while men and boys were portrayed as occupying “both more powerful and a greater range of occupational roles” (*ibid*), women’s and girls’ roles tended to be much more restricted (cf. *ibid*). Secondly, both sexes were represented as being engaged in rather stereotypical activities corresponding to their respective gender (cf. *ibid*). The third and last sense of bias according to Sunderland’s classification, degradation, refers to the emotional aspect of the gender representations: Females were inclined to be portrayed as “stereotypically emotional” and tended to be “the butt of jokes” and victims of “implied slurs” more often than their male counterparts (cf. Hartman and Judd 1978, Talansky 1986 in Sunderland 2000: 151, Sadker, Sadker and Klein 1991: 275f.).

As far as the linguistic level of gender bias in language textbooks is concerned, Sunderland (cf. 2000: 152) reports on findings that reveal quite subtle, sometimes even harmful, effects for women and girls: For example, it has been argued that verbs that are commonly associated with female characters reflect “some of the traditional stereotypic female behavioural patterns” (Hellinger 1980: 272 quoted in Sunderland 2000: 152). Moreover, when engaged in dialogues, women and girls did not only speak less, but also fulfilled a more limited range of discourse roles and started off a conversation less often than their male counterparts (cf. Sunderland 2000: 152).

However, although one can hardly deny the imbalanced and highly stereotypical depictions of men and women in various EFL and other resources in the 1970s and 1980s, more recent investigations of classroom material seem to report about a more positive and contemporary image of girls and women (cf. Swann 1992: 112).

3.2 Gender-typical Preferences: Reading and Writing Choices

Apart from focusing on gender bias and stereotypical representations of men and women, boys and girls in school books, research has also analysed the reading and writing choices of both male and female students, and whether textbooks and other school material corresponded to their respective interests (cf. Julé 2004: 35, Swann 1992: 133f.). In addition, particular concern seems to have been raised about a possible connection between gender biased depictions in the printed resources available in classrooms and the future life and work of both male and female learners (cf. Swann 2005: 625, Swann 1992: 111f.).

According to a variety of scholars, boys and girls are said to tackle both reading and writing in a very specific way. Apparently, they do not only select different topics for their reading and writing tasks, but also differ in terms of writing types and their attitudes towards the two skills (cf. *ibid*): While women and girls tend to select rather personal topics, i.e. family and emotions, men and boys are reported to give preference to more impersonal themes, i.e. “often based on factual or technical knowledge, such as sports or cars” (Julé 2004: 35; cf. Chavez 2000: 1021). Moreover, a larger number of boys than girls is said to prefer non-fiction over fiction; male students appear to favour another sort of reading than is available in most schools, whereas “girls’ reading preferences are more consistent with school books” (Swann 1992: 133f.). Besides, in contrast to boys, who appear to appreciate more factual writing, female learners seem to prefer producing rather imaginative writing; even though they might be engaged in very similar writing tasks, the subject-matter of their writing frequently differs (cf. *ibid*). As far as their attitude towards reading and writing is concerned, boys and girls tend to show certain differences as well: While the former tend to “express negative views of reading and writing” more often, the

latter seem to generally like the reading and writing activities related to school (cf. *ibid*). When it comes to the selection of topics and also other material, teachers apparently ground their choices mainly on the preferences of their male students in order to maintain their specific interests (cf. *ibid*: 52). Apart from that, teachers often anticipate a text's or a topic's likely target audience in that they call it a "boys' topic" or a topic that will "mainly appeal to the girls" and therefore almost evoke a self-fulfilling prophecy (cf. Swann 1998: 186). Furthermore, several studies found out that it is not only the teachers who often select rather "male topics" for their lessons, but that it seems to be also the content of the printed materials itself that takes into account boys' interests rather than girls' (cf. Swann 1992: 111f.).

Gender imbalances and stereotypical representations of the kinds mentioned in the course of this chapter appear to have concerned various researchers not only because these issues push students into preferring one topic over the other, but above all because they certainly influence boys' and girls' perception and judgment of different subjects at school (cf. *ibid*: 4f.). In fact, some studies (cf. *ibid*: 111f.) have suggested that misrepresentations of males and females in textbooks (and also in other print and non-print media outside the school setting) might have an enormous impact on the learners' choice of career. Given that children are confronted with biased depictions and portrayals on a daily basis and hence with a certain perpetuation of existing beliefs regarding men and women, i.e. how to behave appropriately as a boy or a girl, it seems to be hardly surprising that they are almost forced into a particular direction (cf. *ibid*, 134f.). There has been particular concern about certain curricular imbalances, i.e. about the fact that boys more often opt for scientific activities and technological subjects, whereas girls tend to frequently opt for those activities and subjects that are related to language (cf. *ibid*: 134f.). In order to counteract this development, it is deemed necessary to expose children to a maximum range of activities in order to enable them to choose their area of interest and their individual preferences in both school and work contexts as independent from their sex as possible (*ibid*):

There is a belief that younger children need experience of a wide range of activities in order to make an 'informed choice' of subjects at a later stage in their school careers and that in language work they

should be encouraged to read a wide variety of books and engage in a wide variety of writing tasks, rather than being restricted to the forms of writing or subject-matter associated with their sex (Swann 1992: 134f.).

3.3 An Alternative Approach to Language Learning Material

As far as the biased representation of men and women, and boys and girls in language textbooks is concerned, there seem to be mainly two conflicting points of view among teachers: While some are of the opinion that the content of the commonly used textbooks portrays reality – and hence society – just as it should be portrayed, others strongly disagree and instead favour the representation of “a more progressive situation than actually exists, since while the same books continue to be used, things move on” (Sunderland 2000: 151f.). From the 1990s onwards, analyses of both the content and the linguistic level of gender bias in language textbooks have decreased, presumably due to two main reasons: firstly, because – according to Sunderland (cf. *ibid*) – the gender bias has become less obvious compared to former times and, secondly, because theoretical studies seem to have gradually shifted their focus from the text itself to other possible sources for bias to be found. In her detailed account of modern gender perceptions, Sunderland (cf. *ibid*: 152-156) raises some interesting questions regarding the issue of gender bias in and outside language textbooks. Although she does by no means deny the importance of being aware of biased depictions in a textbook, she suggests a somewhat alternative approach to the whole issue, since “to focus on gender bias in a text may be to miss the point as far as learners and learning are concerned” (*ibid*: 152f.). While there might be some evidence for the effect that gender bias has on the students, its actual impact on them can hardly be proven, since the reaction and response of each individual learner can never be predicted (cf. 153f.):

While some students may indeed be alienated from the text, others may accept the bias and even enjoy it, and still others may recognize it for what it is and become ‘resistant readers’, rejecting both the gender representation and any implicitly gendered assumptions. And others may have a completely different reading from that which the author intended, just as three people watching the same film come away with three different interpretations of what it was ‘about’.

Given that although reading is commonly perceived as a receptive rather than a productive skill, it should not be seen as a passive activity, but instead as an activity in which learners are engaged both “cognitively and affectively with a text” (ibid: 153). In contrast to former perceptions which assumed readers to extract meaning from a text in a rather straightforward procedure, nowadays it appears to be accepted that the reading audience does not tackle a text as a *tabula rasa*, but instead brings own background knowledge, attitudes and ideas to it and thus actively constructs own meaning (cf. Peterson and Lach 1990: 193 referred to in Sunderland 2000: 153).

Therefore, in order to be able to analyse the topic of gender and language textbooks satisfactorily, Sunderland (cf. ibid: 154) suggests to not only look at the text itself, but rather and above all to focus on how this text is actually used in the language classroom. Despite the fact that this “use” involves both teachers and students, she primarily concentrates on the role and the importance of the former. As has already been mentioned, we cannot predict what learners will get out of a particular text; similarly, it is hardly possible to foresee what individual teachers will make of a certain text (cf. ibid: 255). According to Sunderland (ibid), “[a] text is arguably as good or as bad as the treatment it receives from the teacher who is using it” and, therefore, the most gender biased text may be turned into a useful resource if it was “put to good effect, pedagogic and otherwise” (ibid).

4 Gender in the Classroom

4.1 Gendered Classroom Talk and Interaction

As has already been discussed in detail, research interest in gender-specific differences as far as language use is concerned has grown fundamentally since the mid 1970's and appears to still be a popular field of research for today's linguists (cf. Coates 1998: 2). Approximately at the same time, i.e. in the 1970's and 1980's, researchers have started to establish the important link between gender, language and education, since gender-specific differences in language use are very likely to be reflected in classrooms – and educational settings in general (cf. Swann 1992: 1, 4). The main concern of research on gender and education seems to have primarily been girls' disadvantageous and subordinated position in schools (cf. Davies 2003: 116), probably due to the emergence of the Modern Women's Movement (cf. Sunderland 1998: 48). It was mainly the boys who dominated classroom discourse and who, according to Mahony (1985: 70 referred to in Davies 2003: 116), enjoyed a monopoly of both linguistic and geographical space.

There appears to be ample evidence available for male and female students' different linguistic and also general behaviour in the classroom (cf. Swann 1992: 68). However, since less work seems to have been done in the foreign language classroom concerning the matter, most findings are primarily based on studies in various subject areas (cf. Sunderland 1998: 48f., Swann 1992: 68):

Studies of classroom life have found many ways, linguistic and nonlinguistic [sic], in which girls and boys are treated differently. For instance, pupils are often segregated by gender as an aid to classroom administration, or told to do things as boys or as girls as a form of motivation [...]; [...] boys insist on, and are given, greater attention by the teacher; in practical subjects such as science boys tend to hog the resources; boys are more disruptive; and boys, in various ways, dominate classroom talk (Swann 1998: 186).

This quote seems to summarise quite concisely the status quo of girls' and boys' differences not only on the linguistic level; independent from the subject, male students are said to dominate classroom discourse in more than one way (cf. *ibid*).

According to various researchers, it appears to be a matter of fact that a classroom is one of the many places in which social behaviour and social roles are learned and perpetuated (cf. Swann 1998: 186, Talbot 2005: 472f., Howe 1997: 1): Boys and girls come to school and already seem to have quite precise perceptions of appropriate male and female behaviour in the classroom, including the adequate use of language (cf. Spender referred to in Julé 2004: 24). Delamont (1990: 3) analysed the presence of gender in the general educational setting and identified five principal ways in which gender distinctions are perpetuated in school contexts, namely through “school organization, teachers’ strategies for controlling and motivating pupils, lesson organization and content, informal conversations between pupils and teachers, and letting pupils’ stereotyping of activities go unchallenged”. However, although schools certainly contribute to and further develop the gender-specific perceptions of boys and girls, it appears to be important to be aware of the fact that male and female students already come to their classrooms equipped with certain ideas and beliefs of what constitutes appropriate behaviour for men and women (Swann 1992: 3, 10). Therefore, educational settings alone cannot be made responsible for gender-specific behaviour and inequalities, but rather these differences should be seen as being the product of the interrelation of various factors, i.e. of parents, the media, peers, etc. (cf. *ibid.*).

As has already been mentioned earlier, language is commonly referred to as one important way in which people differentiate between boys and girls, and men and women, and it is through language that the common attitudes and beliefs associated with males and females are transmitted (cf. Swann 1992: 1, 4). According to Swann (2005: 624), “insofar as gender is ‘done’ in educational settings it is done, to a large extent, through language”. On the one hand, it is teachers who “use language as a means of differentiating between girls and boys”, and, on the other hand, it is “girls and boys themselves who use ‘gender-typed’ language in the classroom and other contexts” (1992: 1). Children obviously are exposed to constant differentiation in school contexts and they themselves tend to respond distinctively to the unlike treatment they experience, for example through the use of “gender-typed” language. Swann (*ibid.*: 78) argues that “children come to school with certain language varieties

and ways of speaking at their disposal[, some of which] will be further encouraged and extended in school, while others will be discouraged, or at least disregarded”.

Since the 1960s and 1970s the number of researchers who have placed particular emphasis on the value of talk in education appears to have increased enormously (cf. Swann and Graddol 1995: 137). With the coinage of the term “oracy”, the educationalist Andrew Wilkinson (1965) apparently triggered off a whole movement, i.e. the so-called “Oracy Movement”, which placed spoken language into the centre of education’s attention (cf. *ibid.*). Since “oracy is a condition of learning in all subjects”, his argument (*ibid.*: 58) was that children – independent from the school subject – should be motivated to “develop a wider repertoire and become familiar with a range of (spoken) registers and styles” (Swann and Graddol 1995: 137).

Although research related to the distinct speaking styles of boys and girls has been carried out in many different countries and cultures, investigators seem to have come to similar results as far as male and female students’ language use is concerned: “[...] boys’ speaking styles allowed them to dominate classroom interaction, so that girls had limited opportunities to contribute” (Swann 2005: 625; cf. Eckert 1998: 66). In their internationally known book “Failing at fairness: How Our Schools Cheat Girls” the two linguists David and Myra Sadker (1994 referred to in Arms 2011: 47) formulate boys’ dominance in US-classrooms even more drastically:

[...] girls are marginalised in the classroom. Girls are overshadowed by the more assertive, more disruptive behaviour of the boys. [...] boys are praised for taking risks, and for their intellectual endeavours, while girls are praised for behaving properly and remaining submissive to authority.

Even though their representation of boys and girls in classrooms might appear exaggerated and too drastic considered from other countries’ perspectives or today’s situation, a considerable amount of researchers would partly agree upon the shocking picture the two linguists drew. According to Swann (2005: 631), “[these] concerns about ‘male dominance’ of talk gave rise to a number of ‘equal opportunities’ initiatives designed to rectify perceived imbalances in classroom interaction” and “‘equal opportunities’ reminders [are] dotted about in

the curriculum documents” (1992: 1). However, many of these initiatives have primarily focused on classrooms in general; in the majority of the studies done so far the language classroom has not been the centre of attention (cf. Julé 2004: 1, Sunderland 1998: 50, 53).

4.1.1 Whole-Class Interaction

Considering the majority of the research available on gender, language and education, the studies focusing on boys’ and girls’ classroom talk seem to largely coincide with the more general investigation of men’s and women’s language (cf. Swann 1998: 186). According to Sunderland (1998: 54), “underlying most if not all contemporary classroom research is a recognition that (language) learning has a clear social dimension” owing to the primary focus on interaction between the various members of a (language) classroom, i.e. firstly, between the class as a whole and the teacher; secondly, between the individual students and their teacher, and, thirdly, “on-task and off-task interaction between students” (ibid). In her book “Girls, Boys & Language” (1992: 51f.), Swann summarises the most important findings as far as research on gender-differentiation in secondary schools is concerned; the main results include the following: Despite the fact that there are rather quiet and shy students of both sexes, boys – on average – tend to be more outspoken; teachers are likely to give more attention to their male students and seem to tolerate particular behaviour (for instance, calling out instead of raising one’s hand) from boys rather than from girls; male students are generally described as being more assertive than their female counterparts; moreover, boys and girls are reported to sit separately, preferring single-sex groups over mixed-sex groups.

David and Myra Sadker (1995 quoted in Swann 1998: 186), after having observed and analysed over 100 American classrooms, found that “boys spoke on average three times as much as girls, that boys were eight times more likely than girls to call out answers, and that teachers accepted such answers from boys but reprimanded girls for calling out.” Studies conducted by Mahony (1985 quoted in Julé 2004: 27), for instance, came to a similar conclusion. In fact, her research revealed that “there is a disproportionate amount of linguistic space

allotted to males in classrooms”; this male predominance, consequently, is said to have a huge impact on students’ experience in the classroom – especially on girls’ (cf. *ibid*). While girls have been frequently presented as being more quiet, submissive and thoughtful listeners, boys are said to dominate classroom talk, to tend to interrupt their female classmates more often than their male classmates and to show considerably higher control over talk (cf. Spender in Julé 2004: 24f., 34f.). In her meta-analysis of 81 studies on gender differences in classroom interaction, Kelly (1988 referred to in Rashidi and Naderi 2012: 30) revealed that teachers were far more likely to interact more with boys than with girls not only in teacher-initiated interaction, but also in interaction that was initiated by a student. In fact, Kelly (1988: 13, 20) reported about female learners to receive an average ratio of 44 per cent of their teacher’s attention, while their male peers were obviously presented with a higher amount of any kind of classroom interaction.

In her research review, Howe (1997: 9-11) revealed the following results as far as studies on gender-specific whole-class interaction in Australasia, the United Kingdom and Great Britain are concerned: Boys have been found to “chip in” classroom discourse more frequently than girls in situations when the teacher did not explicitly select a student; moreover, it has been argued that teachers often tend to call on the first student who raised his/her hand and that this particular student is quite likely to be male. However, according to some studies, male students often seem to be in the centre of attention even before a question was asked (cf. Swann and Graddol 1988, Bousted 1989, Sadker and Sadker 1985).

Nevertheless, apart from the fact that male students might demand and receive a greater amount of attention in the classroom – and it is important for teachers to be aware of that – the mere quantity of attention might not necessarily matter for effective learning (cf. Sunderland 2000: 160f., Howe 1997: 10). According to Sunderland (*ibid*), “[a] distinction must be made between amount of attention and *kind* of attention”, since “[t]eacher attention in *itself* may not be useful [and] some attention, like being told off, could [even] *hinder* learning”. She therefore argues that teachers and researchers need to take into account that a “more” in attention does not automatically mean a “better” in learning – rather they should

focus on the things that are done and achieved in the talk (cf. *ibid*: 163, 2004: 224f., Howe 1997: 10).

4.1.2 Small-group Interaction

In order to demonstrate and discuss gender-specific classroom behaviour, not only whole-class interaction but also interaction in smaller groups has been investigated. In her empirical study of the 1990s, Davies (2003: 117), for example, observed and taped 14-year old adolescents from three comprehensive schools in Northern England while engaged in various speaking and listening activities in their English lessons. The classes were divided into both single-sex as well as mixed-sex groups, however, the majority of her findings are based on the former. From this research project, Davies reported that during her observations the girls were primarily engaged in co-operative working situations; they “consistently produced friendly talk [and] comfortably [fulfilled] both social and educational work” (*ibid*: 118). Interestingly, she observed that in the all-girls’ discussions the emphasis clearly was on similarities among the individual group members, whereas the differences tended to be largely ignored (cf. *ibid*). Apart from the fact that “[t]he girls worked in a supportive climate in which they could experiment with words and struggle ideas together” (*ibid*: 119), their gender as such seemed to never play a crucial role within their groups, since they neither questioned their own membership nor that of other girls (cf. *ibid*). The group work of girls tended to be dominated by friendship, collaboration and cooperation, and by a strong sense of, on the one hand, forming one group and, on the other, of “unity through their language creating texts in which individuals formed learning allegiances” (cf. *ibid*: 128)

In contrast to that,

Many boys’ perpetual attention to matters concerning membership of the ‘male culture’ required them to repeatedly define that culture and demonstrate their worthiness to belong. [...] Boys frequently had to choose whether to be accepted by their peer group and join in ‘macho discourse’ or to work hard and become ostracized and have their behaviour and language derided (*ibid*: 124).

All-boys' group work – according to Davies' observations (ibid: 124) – can apparently develop into two different directions for each single member: Boys either decide to present themselves as “machos” and therefore achieve to be accepted by their male peers, or they choose a more assiduous and hard-working way and hence risk being victims of ridicule and mockery. Unlike girls in their single-sex groups, boys seem to permanently feel the need to “demonstrate that they deserve to be part of the male group” (ibid: 126). Although in our society and culture it seems to be commonly assumed that there is one “fixed, true masculinity”, not every single boy and man does necessarily show exactly the same sort of masculinity – just like not every single girl and woman shows exactly the same sort of femininity – and, what is more, not each male perceives and experiences “maleness” in an equivalent way (cf. Nilan 2010: 53, Davies 2003: 129).

A similar cooperative/competitive distinction was made by Whyte (1983 referred to in Corson 1997: 156): He found that girls act in a cooperative manner in single-sex groups and switch to a more competitive mode when working in a mixed-sex group; boys, on the other hand, behave competitively independent from the context. Moreover, female learners seem to have a much greater interest in working in peer and group constellations: Studies in New Zealand and Great Britain revealed that girls did not only enjoy group work more than their male counterparts, but that they are also more likely “to go along with the suggestions of others in the group” (Burns et al. 1991, Reay 1991 referred to in Corson 1997: 156): While female students appear to give priority to achieving consensus, male students tend to work under more hierarchical circumstances, i.e. “using hierarchies of control, direct imperatives, and direct questions that challenge each other's ideas”.

Having reviewed various studies on gender differences in small group interaction, Howe (1997: 27) reported about the following findings: In group work, girls tend to ask for help more often than boys, especially questions regarding “general strategic work”. Both sexes seem to prefer to ask male students for help, however, given that boys are more likely to provide their male peers with answers, “this can lead to girls' requests being ignored”. Moreover, although girls appear to be approached less often than boys, it is female

learners who tend to actually answer the requests for help independent from the sex of the requester (cf. Webb 1984, Conwell, Griffin and Algozzine 1993 referred to in Howe 1997: 24). Furthermore, Rennie and Parker (1987 referred to in Howe 1997: 25) found girls in mixed-sex pairs to be more likely to simply listen, watch and to be generally less actively involved than in single-sex pairs, while boys seemed to be not affected at all by group composition.

As far as gender-specific interaction in smaller groups is concerned, there seem to be a few studies which exclusively focused on girls' and boys' specific behaviour in oral assessment tasks (cf. Cheshire and Jenkins 1990 referred to in Howe 1997: 39f.) – the findings include the following: On average, male students tended to interrupt more often than their female counterparts, even though this might primarily stem from an “extreme intrusiveness of a single individual” (ibid); girls, on the other hand, seemed to engage in back-channelling more frequently, and also raised more questions in order to encourage and involve their partners (cf. ibid).

Reconsidering the majority of the studies discussed so far, male students seem to be potentially advantaged regarding many aspects of classroom interaction. However, the female students' overall tendency to prefer a cooperative and non-hierarchical classroom setting might actually make them “more suitable to the communicative approach” than their male peers (Chavez 2001: 93):

[T]he facilitative environment of the communicative classroom, in which learning ideally results from close cooperation with the teacher and peers and from negotiations of meaning often centered on personal knowledge and opinions, appears to correspond well with the preferences of female students.

4.2 The Teacher's Role and the Overall Classroom Climate

Despite the fact that we can obviously hardly deny a certain dominant behaviour of boys in classrooms, one has to be aware that male students are only able to occupy the majority of the linguistic space because of the particular situation and the circumstances created at school (Swann 1998: 187):

If boys are to attempt to dominate classroom talk (relative to girls), such dominance must fit with the context and with the behaviour of

other participants – in this case chiefly the teacher, who is meant to be in control, overall, of what is going on.

The majority of the studies focusing on classroom talk seem to take into account both the teacher's role as well as the individual students', since certain communicative and interactional behaviour will obviously only be as distinctive as the circumstances allow. Girls' and boys' behaviour is likely to be different in different contexts and will also depend on the teacher's attitude and behaviour to a considerable extent (cf. Swann 1992: 68, Julé 2004: 43). If boys dominate classroom discourse and, consequently, force girls to the margins of the classroom, they achieve that and "must do so with the teacher's assistance or at least tacit acceptance" (Swann 1998: 186). Apart from the fact that teachers in general are said to greatly influence and decide on their students' behaviour, some researchers seem to have placed particular importance on the teacher's own sex and its impact on the classroom events as well. Although the existing findings on the topic are rather limited and can by no means be generalised, "the question of whether the teacher's sex makes a difference to the gendering of the classroom is not as conclusive as many people expect" (Sunderland 1998: 51). Researchers like Good et al. (1973) found out that the overall behaviour of male and female teachers does not notably differ. Analysing American Mathematics and Social Science Classes, they came to the conclusion that even though "male and female teachers behave differently in some ways [...] they show similar patterns in the treatment of boys and girls" (ibid: 74). Similarly, a meta-analysis done by Kelly (1988: 12) revealed that the sex of a teacher did not influence the number of "instructional contacts" with both male and female students; however, the researcher found out that "in the studies where the teacher was male, the girls received less praise and less criticism than the boys than when the teacher was female" (quoted in Sunderland 1998: 51). Research done within an American high school context revealed that, although some studies reported that the interaction with male students was higher than with female students by both female and male teachers, other findings include remarks about especially the male teachers' equitable treatment in almost all interactions (cf. Smith 1992, Omvig 1989, Smith 1991 referred to in Duffy, Warren, and Walsh 2001: 580). An area in which both male and female teachers apparently act in a comparable manner

concerns criticism, since both sexes seem to direct more critical comments towards their male than towards their female learners (cf. Omvig 1989, Smith 1991 referred to in Duffy, Warren, and Walsh 2001: 580f.). Reviewing various studies regarding this issue, Howe reports about findings that reveal a certain impact of the teacher's sex on classroom interaction patterns; according to Stake and Katz (1982 referred to in Howe 1997: 13), for example, male teachers were found to use more "blunt negatives" such as "No, that's wrong", whereas their female colleagues tended to offer more sympathy and encouragement. However, according to Howe (ibid), "there is little evidence of boys and girls being treated *differently* by male or female teachers". Although it seems to be commonly assumed that teachers either tend to prefer and favour pupils of their own sex or, on the contrary, pupils of the opposite sex, the incomplete findings regarding this issue appear to be hardly surprising; the teacher "often does not make autonomous choices in his or her selection of which student to call on, but rather responds to the students' own talk, both to him or her and to other students" (Duffy, Warren, and Walsh 2001: 580f.; also cf. Marsh, Martin, Cheng 2008: 78).

Furthermore, the overall classroom climate and atmosphere are said to play a crucial role as far as the students' behaviour is concerned (cf. Drudy, Úi Chatháin 2002: 43). If girls – and also boys – are daily confronted with a classroom climate in which they neither feel part nor are motivated "to actively participate at an appropriate cognitive level", it seems to be hardly surprising "that the cumulative effect of such experience could result in 'passivity' or lack of confidence to initiate contact or discourse" (ibid). According to Drudy's and Úi Chatháin's study (ibid), "a good classroom climate for both boys and girls enables the pupils to feel positively about themselves as learners [and] their self-concept, self-image, self-esteem is crucial to performance."

4.3 The Foreign/Second Language Classroom

As has already been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, studies on language, gender and education have not exclusively focused on foreign or second language classes, and research regarding gender and interaction in SL/FL language education is rather limited (cf. Sunderland 1998: 53). However,

even though some of the research findings on the topic will be valuable for any classroom, foreign or second language classrooms seem to have an exceptional position when it comes to the analysis of gender-specific talk: Apart from the fact that there are at least two languages used in FL/SL classrooms, i.e. the target language and one (or even several) first language(s), “a further characteristic of language classrooms may be proportionately more speaking than in other classrooms” (Sunderland 1998: 52):

One of the consequences of ‘communicative’ modern language teaching has been a decreasing emphasis on the ‘transmission of information’ about the language, and the increasing importance of *using* the language, and of speaking as a skill in its own right.

In her own study (1996 referred to in 2000: 161) Sunderland investigated differential teacher-treatment and its statistical significance in a British comprehensive school. The students she observed, 13 girls and 14 boys, were between 11 and 12 years old and in their first year of learning German as a foreign language (cf. *ibid*). During her observations and recordings, Sunderland was interested in finding out, on the one hand, “what the teacher asked the boys and girls to do and say” and, on the other hand, “whether this varied with gender” (*ibid*). Interestingly, she revealed that the teacher’s questions to boys and girls were of a very different kind: While the former were primarily addressed for “non-academic” purposes, e.g. for disciplinary and organisational measures, and things which did not have anything to do with the lesson as such, the latter were obviously perceived and treated as the more “academic” students (cf. *ibid*: 161f., 1998: 61) – the girls were not only asked questions that required longer answers, i.e. more than one word, and that had to do with the actual content of the lesson, but their answers were also “more likely to be expected to be in German” (2000: 162; cf. 1998: 61-63). According to Sunderland (2000: 163), one may not deny the tendency for boys “to dominate the classroom in one sense”, but she draws the attention to the fact that “girls may dominate it in another”.

A similar study was done by Chavez (2000) within an American context at a large Midwestern university, although the participants were students already in their first, second, third and fourth semester of German (cf. *ibid*: 1031). A total of 201 students responded to a multitude of different questions focusing on

various aspects of gender and classroom discourse. The most important research findings could be summarised as follows (cf. *ibid*: 1033-1039, 1044): Female students reported in a significantly higher proportion than male students that they are self-conscious when using the German language; both sexes agreed upon the fact that male students generally use a more adequate dose of humour during their German lessons than females; moreover, women were reported to be a lot more anxious about pleasing their teacher or meeting his or her expectations; as far as accuracy is concerned, female students seem to only respond when they are sure of providing the correct answer, whereas male students reported that they frequently contribute to the lesson without being convinced of knowing the right answer; furthermore, female students described themselves as “taking shorter (more fragmentary) turns”, but as being “addressed in complete (and perhaps thus more authentic or even ‘difficult’) sentences by the teacher” (*ibid*: 1044). Generally speaking, “teachers and female students seem to form stronger cooperative units than teachers and male students” (*ibid*). However, Chavez (*ibid*: 1037) asks to consider that the gender composition of a classroom could have an enormous impact on the interactive behaviour and the discourse patterns, since distinct gender distribution might yield distinct results.

Another study done by Batters (1987 referred to in Sunderland 1998: 53) during which she accompanied 58 students in more than 100 foreign language lessons, i.e. in French, German, Spanish and Italian (cf. Sunderland 1998: 53) revealed interesting findings regarding the different activities boys and girls are likely to engage in: Batters (*ibid*: 78) found out that female students were engaged in higher proportions in “attentive activities” (such as “listening to the teacher, to the tape, to other pupils, observing and reading”), while their male counterparts dominated in “oral and participatory activities” (such as “speaking to the teacher and to other pupils in the foreign or native language, taking part in groupwork [sic] or demonstration and showing spontaneity”).

As far as the EFL/ESL classroom is concerned, according to Sunderland (1992: 81), gender seems to operate on various levels, that is, regarding “the English language itself; and classroom processes, including learning processes, teacher-learner interaction, and learner-learner interaction”. The division into

these three areas seems to be quite helpful when it comes to investigating EFL/ESL classrooms, since they cover the most important aspects that can be analysed, i.e. the English language itself, common resources that are used in and outside schools as well as both teaching and learning processes (cf. *ibid*). However, as the analysis of the English language as such would go beyond the purpose of this diploma thesis and would rather require an investigation in its own right, the focus of the following discussion will be on classroom processes.

Deducing from various research findings in general educational settings, Sunderland (cf. 1992: 88) reports about possible consequences for the EFL/ESL classroom: According to her, the available data could favour boys over girls not only as far as their speaking practice is concerned, but also regarding the feedback they receive on their contributions. In her analysis of Australian and New Zealand ESL classrooms, Holmes (1989 referred to in Sunderland 1992: 88) reported about male students who

[...] both responded more to the teachers' questions and asked more questions themselves – thus getting more speaking practice, presumably answers to their own questions (i.e. feedback), quite possibly feedback in response to their answers, and more practice in question-related language functions.

When it comes to learner-learner interaction, which – according to Sunderland (1992: 89) might be defined as “pair work or group work involving all the students in the class at the same time” – a similar picture becomes apparent, since “in pair and group work male students have been found to speak more frequently and take longer turns than female students, who provide more feedback”. The female learners that were included in these pair and/or group works tended to provide their male classmates with a “good supportive environment for [their] language practice”, but consequently did not receive as much “conversational encouragement” themselves (cf. *ibid*).

In her analysis of “discoursal differences” between male and female adult ESL learners, Holmes (1994 referred to in Sunderland 2000b: 209; cf. Holmes 1994 referred to in Chavez 2001: 107) found male learners to be more likely to challenge and overtly disagree in group work than their female counterparts, who sometimes even felt inhibited by this behaviour. Moreover, she reported on the general tendency for men to ask the most questions; although both sexes

appeared to ask more “response-restricting questions” than “response-facilitating questions, these response-restricting questions made up a higher proportion of the men’s questions and thus resulted in a tendency for male students to receive a very brief answer (cf. *ibid*). Working in a similar adult context in Japan, Gass and Varonis (1986 referred to in Sunderland 2000b: 209) found male learners to not only dominate mixed-sex dyads as far as the amount of talk is concerned, but also to “win” most instances of overlapping speech between men and women. In same-sex dyads, in contrast, the talk was distributed rather evenly (cf. *ibid*). Similarly, Alcón (1994 referred to in Sunderland 2000b: 209) analysed pair work of Spanish EFL learners and found boys to not only interrupt girls, but also their male peers more often than female students interrupted each other.

Similarly, Shehadeh’s (cf. 1999: 259) discussion of gender differences in the ESL/EFL classroom revealed that men and women adopt quite distinct roles in conversation. Given that conversation is said to be of particular importance for the development and progress in a second/foreign language, these different roles seem to be of enormous interest (cf. *ibid*): “in mixed-gender conversations, males seem to take more opportunities to talk, to dominate the conversation, to make a greater number of self- and other-initiated repairs, and to produce comprehensible output”; females, on the other hand, tend to “utilize the conversation to obtain a greater amount of comprehensible input” (*ibid*).

In her study in a private Punjabi Sikh ESL school in British Columbia, Julé (2005) intended to investigate these different roles in conversation of men and women. More specifically, she aimed at analysing the amount of talk of both male and female students by drawing on Mahony’s concept of “linguistic space” (1985 referred to in Julé 2005: 25). Julé accompanied a class of 20 students (eleven boys, nine girls) – all of which were of Punjabi background – in their English lessons over the course of ten months. Apart from reporting about an incredibly high amount of teacher-talking time (about 80 per cent on average), she also revealed a rather unequal result as far as boys’ and girls’ use of linguistic space is concerned (cf. Julé 2005: 29-32). The whole classroom interaction seemed to be dominated by conversations between the teacher and the male students, and thus resulted in a disproportionate amount of talk, which

quite apparently disfavoured the female learners (cf. *ibid*). Although Julé (cf. *ibid*: 33) assumes the girls' silence to be a result of different factors, i.e. specific behaviour of their teacher and variables such as age or cultural norms, she tries to make people aware of the fact that

[I]earning and language learning happen through talk. It is, therefore, crucial if some students (often boys) have opportunities to talk in classrooms, while other students (often girls) display a disproportionate use of the linguistic space. [...] To shift the use of linguistic space so as to provide ESL girls with more time to produce talk will take more than awareness on the part of ESL educators: it will take teaching strategy (*ibid*: 34).

In their study of teacher and student interaction in Iranian EFL classrooms, Rashidi and Naderi (2012) mainly concentrated on patterns of student-teacher talk and on the extent to which these patterns were affected by the gender of the students (cf. *ibid*: 30). They observed 358 students and 24 teachers in 24 EFL classes and came to the following conclusions (cf. *ibid*: 34f.): While both male and female students were rather similar as far as eliciting confirmation or clarification from their teacher is concerned, boys seemed to have a leading position regarding the elicitation of information. Furthermore, boys were more likely to give short answers, whereas their female peers did not only provide the teacher with longer responses, but also tended to use more sophisticated vocabulary and grammar (cf. *ibid*: 34). Similar to Chavez' findings in her study of German foreign language classrooms, this research in an Iranian EFL context also revealed the boys to be more humorous than girls, which resulted in the teacher's more humorous behaviour towards their male students (cf. *ibid*: 35). Apart from that, the topics of the textbooks that were used more often corresponded to the interests of the female learners, whereas male students seemed to prefer talking about topics independent from the school context, such as current political or social issues (cf. *ibid*).

In a pilot questionnaire study conducted by Sunderland at the Institute for English Language Education at Lancaster University in 1991 (referred to in Chavez 2001: 110), thirty-nine Greek and eighteen Austrian (almost exclusively female) EFL teachers-in-training were asked about their individual experiences as language learners. Both Greek and Austrian participants reported about the fact that they were expected to produce better written work; moreover, they

indicated that they were not only expected to behave in a more polite manner than their male peers but that, as a consequence, they were also treated more politely by their teachers (cf. *ibid*). Furthermore, both groups argued that teachers tended to call on a female student when nobody else volunteered for answering a question, and that they received considerably more praise and encouragement regarding studying the English language (cf. *ibid*). Lastly, the participants reported about male students being asked less difficult questions and that female students tended to be ignored more often than their male peers (cf. *ibid*). Similar to that, Sunderland's survey of eighteen Japanese EFL teachers (almost exclusively male) revealed that they frequently treated their female students in a more polite manner than their male students and that they rather asked a female learner "when someone was needed to do a classroom job" (*ibid*). However, in contrast to the Austrian teachers-in-training, the Japanese teachers would favour a female student in a situation in which a female and a male student talked at the same time (cf. *ibid*).

4.4 Postmodern Notions of Gender and Other Variables in the Classroom

Given the enormous amount of studies that have focused on gender-specific differences and imbalances in the educational context, teachers and also other educationists seem to have started intervening in order to "counteract gender inequalities in schools and classrooms" (Swann 1992: 234). These interventions appear to have happened on various levels, including the following (cf. *ibid*: 234f.):

- Selecting reading material and other resources so as to counteract gender imbalances, and as a means of providing positive encouragement for girls and boys to engage in non-traditional activities.
- [...]
- Tackling spoken language directly: for instance, using techniques that might encourage quiet girls to participate in discussion or boys and girls to collaborate together.
- Tackling pupils' reading and writing choices, by encouraging girls and boys to explore a range of genres and subject-matter and using pupils' writing for the exploration of gender issues.

- Discussing differences and inequalities in spoken language with pupils, perhaps as part of language awareness and encouraging pupils to observe and monitor their own language use.
- Encouraging pupils to read critically: to explore gender stereotyping in visual images, magazines, books, and other printed material. [...]

However, although one certainly cannot deny the existence of certain gender-specific differences and inequalities in the educational setting, the concept of gender and its consequences for schools and classroom discourse have undergone various changes in the course of the last five decades. According to Swann (cf. 2005: 625), the research findings as far as gender-specific behaviour is concerned that have been dominant since the 1970's seem to be hugely challenged by what the linguist refers to as "the postmodern shift". This postmodern shift appears to have involved remarkable changes as far as the research on language and gender is concerned, especially regarding the dynamics of "language" and "gender" as well as their interrelation:

Recent research on language and gender has tended to focus on diversity (prioritizing differences amongst women/girls and amongst men/boys rather than seeing gender as a "binary" distinction); on context and performativity (seeing gender as something that is "done" in context rather than as a social attribute, and also seeing language as inherently context-dependent); and on uncertainty and ambiguity (in terms of the meanings of what language users say and do) (ibid).

As far as more recent research is concerned, the focus of gender and language seems to have shifted from a two-pole distinction – from perceiving gender as representing two opposite categories – to a differentiation based on the distinctness of either category, i.e. concentrating on differences within the group of women and girls and within the group of men and boys (cf. Talbot 2005: 468, Swann 2005: 625). People have tended to view gender from a rather rigid "bipolar" perspective and hence have perceived others as being members of "natural categories", that is, of either the "pole" of men or the "pole" of women, and hence have forced them into "internally homogeneous groups" (cf. Talbot 2005: 468, Freed 1996: 54). The result of this quite restricted assignment seems to have enormous consequences for the life of an individual, since certain beliefs and expectations are entailed and imposed upon men and women, boys and girls (cf. ibid). One of the consequences that the

establishment of these “binary dichotomous categories” might imply seems to be placing significantly more importance on one of the groups and therefore automatically subordinating the other (cf. Freed 2005: 703):

Establishing one group as “different” from another situates one of the two groups as the standard or norm by which the second is judged; the second group can then be characterized as deviant, deficient, or just slightly on the margin. In the case of sex or gender, the masculine norm has defined activities in the arts, in education, [...]. Accordingly, women are measured and their nature determined based on how they differ from men.

Furthermore, the postmodern shift in research appears to view gender and language from a more contextual angle, since both are said to be performed and applied under certain circumstances (Swann 2005: 625). Given this focus on “context and performativity”, a boy/a man and a girl/a woman might talk, behave and act totally different depending on the particular situation that he/she is confronted with (cf. *ibid*, Swann 1998: 194). Sociolinguistic analyses focusing on different talking styles and interaction have come to the conclusion that “people [do not] only speak differently in different social contexts, [...], but, more radically, talk itself actively creates different styles and constructs different social contexts and social identities as it proceeds” (Holmes and Meyerhoff 2005: 11). People seem to have become aware that the concept of gender is not as fixed as it has been claimed for a long time, but rather “performed” to a certain extent and hence subject to variability (cf. Freed 2008: 714, Bergvall 1996: 175). Postmodern linguists seem to take into consideration the often ambiguous and uncertain meanings of “what language users say and do” (cf. Swann 2005: 625) and thus refer to the often discourse-dependent appearance of language and gender. According to Butler (1990: 139), “[gender is] an ‘act’, as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where ‘*performative*’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning”.

In her article “New Understandings of Gender and Language Classroom Research: Texts, Teacher Talk and Student Talk”, Sunderland (cf. 2000: 149f., 164) argues that the commonly assumed “gender-binary” of men and women, boys and girls, i.e. perceiving them as being two exclusively homogeneous groups, does not only result in an inaccurate representation, but may also be highly counter-productive, since it neither helps girls in the classroom nor does

it support teachers in any way. People should be aware of the fact that male and female students – with all their differences and similarities – do not neatly fit into either of the two groups:

[...] even within any one classroom, even when students are the same age and of comparable socio-economic and educational backgrounds, gender will not be a straightforward masculine-feminine binary. There will always be *diversity* within each gender group and in all probability overlap between them.

According to her (cf. *ibid*: 149f., 166), traditional research on gender and education seems to have largely oversimplified and generalized the matters, since the main focus used to be on presenting women and girls mainly as “passive victims of gender bias” and, therefore, avoid the possible occurrence of “flux, agency, diversity and individuality”. Similar to Butler’s representation (cf. 1990: 139), Sunderland (cf. 1998: 49, 2000: 150) refuses to perceive gender as something exclusively determined and, thus, static and unchangeable, but prefers to see “gender itself as [being] a matter of tendencies rather than absolutes”. However, despite the fact that Sunderland appeals to both researchers working in the domain of gender and language education, as well as to teachers to adopt a less deterministic view of gender, she does by no means neglect the complexity and possible difficulties of the topic under discussion (cf. 2000: 149f).

What is more, it seems to be frequently stressed that gender should not be considered as an isolated independent category in educational contexts, but seen as one of many aspects interrelating and interplaying in classroom discourse. According to various researchers, one cannot talk about gender and gender-related patterns totally independent from other variables, such as ethnicity, age, culture and social status, as well as other influences like learners’ individual personality, professional training and sexual orientation (cf. Tannen 1996: 341, Eckert 1998: 73). Many of the studies that have been analysed and discussed so far appear to have mainly focused on gender differences – however small they might have been – and tended to forget about men’s and women’s, boys’ and girls’ sometimes striking similarities (cf. Marsh, Martin, Cheng 2008: 79, Sunderland 2004: 226).

According to Sunderland (2004: 226), there are three main problems as far as the majority of the studies conducted in foreign language classrooms are concerned: Firstly, as has already been mentioned, due to the widespread belief in a gender differences paradigm, only differences between males and females were made salient, whereas many studies simply overlooked their similarities. Secondly, she describes them as frequently having downplayed “the possible role of gendered *individuals*” and thus heterogeneity (cf. *ibid*). Lastly, Sunderland criticises the research questions used in most language classroom studies, since they tended to be suitable for general classroom settings rather than language-classroom specific (cf. *ibid*).

Part II – Empirical Study

Before I will go into greater detail as far as my empirical small-case study is concerned, the following introductory paragraph aims at, on the one hand, explaining how my research interest derived from the literature that was reviewed and, on the other hand, at restating and specifying my research questions: After an in-depth study on the topic of “Language, Gender and Education”, I became aware of the fact that gender – amongst other variables – can play a crucial role not only in the everyday context, but also in the educational setting. Since I will be a teacher of two foreign languages in the future, it was one of my main interests to find out about on-going gender-processes in the classroom. More specifically, since the vast majority of studies carried out so far have mainly focused on classroom observations and students’ perspectives, I decided to concentrate on the teachers’ views of these gender-processes as well as on their individual evaluation of male and female students’ behaviour. Therefore, my main research question was the following: *According to EFL teachers, how does gender-specific behaviour manifest itself in the EFL classroom and how does it influence teaching and learning?* In order to be able to thoroughly cover as many aspects as possible, this general question was subdivided: *According to EFL teachers’ views, how is gender-specific communicative and interactional behaviour reflected in Austrian EFL classrooms? On which levels do male and female students differ in their English lessons? How do teachers act and react to students’ gender-specific behaviour? Which factors contribute to the emergence and perpetuation of gender stereotypes in the classroom?*

1 Design of the Study and Methodology

1.1 Description of Research Project

For my research project, I concentrated on the investigation of two Austrian upper secondary English language classrooms and intended to provide an empirical analysis of how gender differences in communication and interaction were reflected therein. I aimed at analysing in how far David and Myra Sadker’s

claim (1995: 1) that “[s]itting in the same classroom, reading the same textbook, listening to the same teacher, boys and girls receive very different educations” was true and could be justified within an Austrian context. Over a period of two weeks, I regularly observed the English lessons of two classes in a grammar school in Korneuburg (Lower Austria) in October 2012. As there seem to be more studies focusing on younger children and their gender-specific behaviour at school (elementary school, lower secondary, etc.), I decided to concentrate on more mature students and upper secondary English language classrooms. More specifically, I accompanied a sixth and a seventh form for about two weeks (10 observed lessons in total) and tried to focus on both the students’ and their teacher’s behaviour. In order to be able to compare my findings and to keep the variables as limited as possible, one particular English teacher was observed. Neither the teacher nor the students were informed beforehand about the topic of the diploma thesis or the focus of observation. As my major intention was to find out about students’ gender-specific language and general behaviour in the EFL classroom viewed from a teacher’s perspective, I decided to do a qualitative analysis of teachers’ views and opinions on gender-specific teaching and learning processes with the help of guided interviews. All names and dates of both students and teachers will be kept anonymous throughout; if necessary, the participants will be given pseudonyms/codes or only their sex and age will be mentioned.

Before proceeding to the detailed discussion of the findings of this empirical project, the following subchapters will briefly present the methodological procedure as well as the participants of the study and its setting.

1.2 Classroom Observation

As far as classroom observation is concerned, there seem to be various possibilities and methods to gather different kinds of information. For the purpose of the present empirical study, two main means to collect classroom data were used, since the combination of several observation methods allows for a more complete picture of the classroom situation (cf. Lindow et al. 1985: 13). The first observational instrument that was employed is called INTERSECT (Interactions for Sex Equity in Classroom Teaching), which is one of the most

frequently used coding systems for classroom observation (cf. Jones and Dindia 2004: 445). This instrument was originally developed by Sadker, Sadker and Bauchner (1984) and specifically designed for the observation of gender differences in classrooms (cf. *ibid.*). Generally speaking, the INTERSECT observational instrument can be used as an aid to convert classroom interactions into “organized, measurable elements” (cf. Duffy, Warren, Walsh 2001: 581).

More specifically,

[t]he INTERSECT instrument uses organized, measurable-elements to codify and quantify specific interaction items, such as: gender segregation or integration via classroom seating patterns; frequency and nature of teacher-student interactions; and anecdotal descriptions of tone-setting occurrences that could yield naturalistic data on behaviour and activities that encourage or impede gender equity in the classroom (Sadker et al. 1982 referred to in Yeppez 1994: 125).

Users of the INTERSECT instrument are able to provide information regarding the circumstances of teacher-student interaction on six different levels (cf. *ibid.*, Jones and Dindia 2004: 445, Duffy, Warren, Walsh 2001: 584): Firstly, concerning the initiation of interactions, i.e. whether a teacher or a student himself/herself initiates an interaction; secondly, regarding the receiver of an interaction, i.e. whether a student, the teacher, the whole class or a specific group receives an interaction; thirdly, concerning the sex of both teacher and students; and fourthly, regarding the way and the method through which an interaction is initiated, i.e. via calling out, raising hands or moving towards the student. Moreover, this observational instrument allows its users to provide information about the evaluative type of an interaction, i.e. concerning the four types of behaviour that teachers are most likely to employ in classroom interactions, i.e. praise, acceptance, remediation and criticism (cf. Sadker et al. 1982 referred to in Yeppez 1994: 125, Jones and Dindia 2004: 445, Duffy, Warren, Walsh 2001: 584): Praise refers to the positive reaction and reinforcement of a student’s answer, statement or work; acceptance concerns the acknowledgement of a response via word chunks such as “okay” or “uh-huh”; remediation regards the way in which a student’s statement or work is corrected, and criticism refers to the explicit indication and statement that an

answer or comment is not correct. Lastly, users of the INTERSECT observational instrument can make judgements as far as the evaluative content of an interaction is concerned, i.e. whether an interaction dealt with intellectual content, conduct, etc. (cf. *ibid*).

Given that the main focus of this empirical small-case study was on the teacher interviews and not on classroom observation, a modified and limited version of the INTERSECT instrument was used. In fact, it was adapted to the purpose, the extent and the context of the research project. The modifications mainly concerned the quantitative part of the instrument, since my major intention was not to count interactions that were initiated by the teacher or the students, but to analyse these interactions regarding their quality, i.e. the method in which they were initiated as well as their evaluative type and content (for a more detailed description of my observation procedure see Part II: chapter 1.2.2.).

Apart from using the INTERSECT instrument, an additional method was employed, namely so-called field notes, since these allow for the observation of both verbal and non-verbal information, contextual facts and for providing “an overall picture of classroom life” (Swann 1992: 67). In order to be as informative as possible, field notes should be kept in a systematic way, i.e. following a consistent format which includes information about the date and time of the observation and any relevant information regarding the context such as the type of the lesson, the teacher and the students that were involved (cf. *ibid*: 170). According to Swann (*ibid*), the big advantage of doing classroom observation via taking field notes is that observers “can note down anything of interest as it occurs”. However, given that this method is rather open-ended, observers might run the risk of focusing on isolated events and ascribe too much importance to them (cf. *ibid*: 67). In order to avoid such a situation, researchers frequently count a particular observation only if it has taken place more than a specific number of times, in various contexts, or if it has been recorded by more than one person (cf. *ibid*). Nevertheless, sometimes researchers can hardly avoid a certain tendency to “see what they want to see” (*ibid*). Since it is impossible to note down everything that occurs in the classroom, observers will have to focus on certain issues and select the most important information according to their

opinion. This selection, however, could be biased in one or the other way, especially when dealing with a gender-related topic:

There is a danger of bias, of systematically distorting observations. Bias can be introduced at the point of making observations, by observers noting points that support their preconceptions about girls and boys. Bias is also a danger when analysing and interpreting information; evidence may (quite unconsciously) be selected so as to favour a particular interpretation (Swann 1992: 170).

A good way of avoiding, or at least minimising, bias is to constantly make oneself aware of it and its consequences; therefore, it seems to be highly recommended to not only look for evidence that supports one's preliminary hypotheses or beliefs, but to also look out for "counter evidence", i.e. for evidence that does not support a point one wants to make (cf. *ibid.*). Apart from the fact that classroom observation per se can be a quite demanding task, one has to be aware that there is a huge difference between observing whole-class talk and students' talk in small groups or pairs. One of the main differences between these two interaction formats seems to be that whole-class talk is mainly guided by the teacher, while talk in small groups or pairs is not led by anyone in particular (cf. *ibid.*: 173-175). Observing whole-class talk is commonly considered to be the more straightforward procedure, since "[i]t is usual [...] for one person to speak at a time, and pupils are often nominated by the teacher to speak" (*ibid.*: 173). Observing group work or pair work, in contrast, appears to be more complicated, given that "talk in groups is often informal[,] it is more rapid[,] speaking turns are less clearly delineated [and] there is more overlapping speech" (*ibid.*: 175).

1.2.1 Sample Sheet Classroom Observation

Class/Level:

Date + time of day:

Topic of Lesson:

Number of male students:

Materials used:

Number of female students:

- **Seating arrangement indicating boys' and girls' seating preferences**
(always drawn on extra sheet)
- **Participation + Initiator and receiver of interaction** – is participation teacher- or student initiated; who initiates, who receives?
- **Method of participation/Turn-taking** – how are interactions initiated; which strategies are mostly used? (e.g. *calling out, raising hands, etc.*)
- **Teacher's behaviour/Evaluative type and content** – differences in treatment?
 - ways of disciplining, ways of praising, correcting, etc.
 - content of interactions, i.e. intellectual, conduct, etc.
- **Interaction between students** – i.e. male-male, female-female, male-female – differences, similarities, anything noticeable, etc.?
- **Interaction formats** – differences in behaviour when whole-class teaching, group work, pair work?
- **“Gender-typical” language, male/female (conversational) behaviour** – e.g. boys interrupting, more assertive, etc. → dominate classroom discourse; girls more silent, passive, more hedges, more tag questions, etc. → marginalised in classroom, etc.?
- **Topic/Material/Media** – influence on boys'/girls' behaviour; teacher's reaction, aware of gender bias, conscious treatment of topic?

1.2.2 Observation Procedure

The following section aims at discussing and explaining in greater detail the individual aspects and points that were selected for the classroom observation (see observation grid Part II: chapter 1.2.1.) as well as at clarifying the exact observation procedure that was employed.

As has already been mentioned in the introductory paragraph to this empirical part, my research interest and research questions mainly resulted from an in-depth study of the available literature on the topic. In addition to becoming aware of gender as one of many crucial variables that play a role in the educational setting, I gradually found out which elements of classroom interaction were most interesting viewed from this gender perspective and thus worth observing in a classroom. Apart from concentrating on the basic information regarding the general setting and circumstances, i.e. the students' level, the date and time of the day, the number of male/female learners, the topic of the lesson and the material that was used, I mainly focused on those areas in which gender-specific behaviour was most likely to be noticeable – according to previous studies (cf. Kelly 1988, Corson 1997, Howe 1997, Sunderland 1992, 1998 and 2000, Swann 1992, 1998 and 2005, Chavez 2000 and 2001, Davies 2003, Julé 2004 and 2005). As has already been explained at an earlier stage, the classroom observation only focused on qualitative aspects of classroom discourse and did not include any quantitative measures or analyses.

In fact, the first aspect of the observation grid dealt with seating arrangement, since seating preferences of male and female students are said to contribute to the understanding of gender processes in a classroom (cf. Sadker et al. 1982 referred to in Yopez 1994: 125). In order to have a complete picture of the whole classroom, I used the first five minutes of every lesson to draw a seating chart and also noted down any changes in the seating arrangement of the students (see Part II: chapter 1.4.). Occasionally, I also indicated the movement of the teacher in the classroom.

The second and third part focused on participation and turn-taking of the students: On the one hand, I aimed at finding out whether an interaction was rather teacher- or student-initiated and, on the other hand, how the learners and also the teacher initiate interactions, i.e. via calling-out, raising hands, moving towards the students, etc. (cf. cf. Sadker et al. 1982 referred to in Yepez 1994: 125, Jones and Dindia 2004: 445, Duffy, Warren, Walsh 2001: 584). In order to cover these two aspects I used a double-columned table to fill in the information – one side focusing on the initiator of the interaction, the second on the means of the initiation and participation.

The next aspect covered the teacher's treatment of male and female students and aimed at finding out whether the teacher's behaviour varied with learners' gender. Moreover, it focused on both the evaluative type and the evaluative content of the teacher's (re)actions, i.e. how male and female students' contributions were praised, remediated, accepted and criticised, and whether an interaction actually dealt with the content of the lesson, or disciplinary measures, and so forth (cf. Sadker et al. 1982 referred to in Yepez 1994: 125, Jones and Dindia 2004: 445, Duffy, Warren, Walsh 2001: 584). Again I used several double- or three-columned tables in order to note down the learner's gender, the teacher's reaction and the content of the interaction. However, since most of the exchanges happened quite rapidly, I could not record every single interaction, but concentrated on those that – according to my opinion – were most interesting and productive. Moreover, it has to be stressed that sometimes the boundaries regarding the content of an evaluation were rather fuzzy, given that not every interaction dealt with intellectual content or disciplinary measures only.

The subsequent two categories mainly concentrated on the interactive patterns between the students as well as on differences in the learners' behaviour when the interaction format was alternated, e.g. from whole-class teaching to pair/group work. Given that these two aspects proved rather difficult to observe in a structural way, I decided to mainly jot down my personal impressions and to describe noticeable issues and changes in the students' behaviour. Since I could not observe every group or pair, I always focused on one to three students in particular – most frequently the ones that were sitting closest to me.

The penultimate category aimed at providing information regarding gender-typical language, and male and female students' conversational behaviour. Since I had already gained a detailed insight into boys' and girls' "typical" demeanour from my literature review, I expected the former to be much more prominent in the classroom. I tried to find evidence for both male and female learners' behavioural patterns and mainly intended to examine whether boys' conversational behaviour allowed them to dominate classroom discourse and, consequently, forced girls into a rather marginalised position.

My intention concerning the last category was again twofold: On the one hand, I wanted to find out whether the topic of a lesson, the material and the media that were selected, had an influence on the learners' behaviour. On the other hand, I aimed at investigating if and how the teacher reacted to certain topics or resources, i.e. does she make aware of bias, does she comment the material, etc.? As with the previous two categories, I did not observe that in a structural way, but again simply noted down my impressions and any relevant situations.

As has already been mentioned at an earlier stage, my two main means for classroom observation were a modified version of the INTERSECT observational instrument and field notes. Both methods proved very helpful for the documentation of different things, since the former allowed for a structural and organised observation, whereas the latter provided me with a more general and overall picture of the classrooms (cf. Duffy, Warren, Walsh 2001: 581, Swann 1992: 67). Generally speaking, I would agree with Swann's warning regarding classroom observation, as I sometimes tended to only focus on those things that I wanted to see in order to confirm what has been suggested by previous research and ascribed too much significance to isolated situations (cf. Swann 1992: 67). However, since I was aware of the potential "dangers" that classroom observation can imply, I intended to not only look for evidence that supported my preconceptions, but also for instances that might contradict or not totally confirm my expectations (cf. *ibid*: 170).

1.3 Teacher Interviews

As has already been mentioned, the major focus of my empirical research was on teachers' views of students' gender-specific conversational and general behavioural patterns in their English lessons. Moreover, I wanted to find out about teachers' opinions on gender-processes in the EFL classroom as well as about the evaluation of their individual gender-specific treatment.

As far as the preparation and formulation of the interview questions are concerned, I proceeded very similar to the way in which I compiled the individual categories of the classroom observation grid. After having consulted a variety of topic-related literature, I gradually became aware of the different levels on which gender is likely to appear and in how far gender-specific behaviour might manifest itself in a classroom. I formulated sixteen questions that were divided into different sections, since they covered different aspects of classroom life. In fact, I subdivided the interview into the following four blocks: (1) questions focusing on preparation; (2) questions concentrating on the EFL classroom itself; (3) questions concerning the achievement of boys and girls in the EFL classroom, and (4) questions referring to general aspects of EFL teaching and learning processes.

The first section of the interview focused on issues concerning the preparation and organisation of the English lessons before teachers actually enter their classrooms for the first time. More specifically, this introductory part aimed at finding out if information about the number of male and female students is of relevance before going into a class and, even more interesting, in how far this particular information influences the choice of topics, material and media.

The second and most extensive part of the interview focused on the EFL classroom itself: On the one hand, the intention was to find out whether boys or girls participated more during the lessons and whether there was a clearly dominating gender in the classroom. On the other hand, this second section aimed at analysing gender-specific and "gender-typical" conversational and also general behaviour. It not only concentrated on different interaction patterns in the EFL classroom, i.e. on teacher-student and student-student interaction, but it also investigated if and in how far changes regarding the interaction format

(whole-class, group work, pair work) had an influence on male and female students' behaviour. Furthermore, a final question focused on the reading and writing choices of boys and girls, and thus intended to find out about "gender-typical" preferences.

The third part of the interview referred to gender-specific achievement in the EFL classroom: Firstly, it aimed at finding out whether there was a higher-achieving gender in the EFL classrooms of the four teachers, and whether the widespread belief that girls are the better language learners could be confirmed within an Austrian context. Secondly, it was the intention of this penultimate section to investigate whether there were certain fields in which either boys or girls clearly achieve better results, i.e. regarding oral performance, grammar, vocabulary and writing.

The last part of the interview consisted of rather general questions, which were not exclusively focusing on the EFL classroom, but also on certain interdisciplinary gender-specific patterns and issues. On the one hand, the intention was to find out about boys' and girls' attitudes towards foreign language acquisition and, more specifically, towards the English language. On the other hand, this last section aimed at analysing gender-specific learning styles and strategies, and – connected to that – at investigating the composition of modern EFL material and textbooks. In fact, it focused on whether and, even more interesting, in how far these resources have undergone changes in the last years as far as gender stereotypes and imbalanced representations of male and female characters are concerned. Lastly, this final part of the interview concentrated on the process of women's emancipation in general and on the question whether the more or less strongly noticeable female emancipation movement in society is reflected in today's classrooms as well.

In order to be provided with sufficient data, my intention was to cover every single aspect of this questionnaire. However, given that the interviewees anticipated and connected some of the questions themselves, the sixteen questions mainly served as the central theme and occasionally varied in terms of their order. Moreover, also the extent of the individual answers as well as the length of the four interviews sometimes differed, as the teachers reacted in distinct ways to certain questions and provided unequal amounts of information.

For the analysis of the teacher interviews, the answers were divided into several sub-categories in order to illustrate the teachers' similar ideas, stories and experiences regarding classroom discourse and gender-specific issues as clearly as possible (cf. Rubin 1995: 238).

1.3.1 Interview Questions

(1) Before entering the EFL classroom:

1. How important is information about the number of male/female students for you before entering a classroom?
2. When you choose topics, material, media for your lessons, does it make a difference if there are many girls/boys in a class?

(2) In the EFL classroom:

3. Who participates more during the lessons, i.e. who contributes more to classroom discourse, boys or girls? Who dominates, who is marginalised?
4. Do you think that "gender-typical" behaviour exists in your classrooms? If so, can you think of some examples?
5. How do male/female students interact with you as the teacher?
6. How do you as a teacher (re)act? Do you think you treat male/female students differently?
7. How do students interact with each other, i.e. boy-boy, girl-girl, boy-girl?
8. Does the interaction format influence the students' behaviour, i.e. do they behave differently when it comes to group work, pair work, etc.? If so, which differences are there?
9. If students are allowed to choose topics themselves, i.e. for a reading or writing task, which topics do boys/girls typically choose?

(3) With regard to achievement:

10. Is there a "better-achieving" gender in your English classes? Do you agree with the quite common belief that girls are the better language learners? Why/why not?
11. By tendency, in which fields do boys/girls achieve the better grades? Do "male" or "female" fields exist, i.e. grammar, vocabulary, speaking, writing etc.?

(4) General questions:

12. How would you describe the general attitude of male/female students towards acquiring a foreign language?
13. Do boys and girls learn differently?
14. Do they apply different learning strategies?
15. Do you think that gender stereotypes and gender imbalances still exist in the material used today? How do you react? Have you noticed any differences in the last years?
16. Is the emancipation movement that is taking place within society reflected in today's classrooms? If so, how? Have you noticed any differences in the last years?

1.3.2 Interviewees

Since the four teachers that were interviewed came from different age groups, they did not only represent distinct generations but also allowed for a comparison regarding their teaching experience. Given that the school did not have any male English teachers, the interviewees were exclusively female; all four came from an Austrian background. Since the interviews took place within this Austrian context and all participants shared a common mother tongue, they were conducted in German. However, every direct quotation in the following sections will be translated into English by keeping to the original wording as closely as possible. The interviewees will be kept anonymous throughout the whole diploma thesis and will only be referred to as teachers A, B, C and D.

However, the following brief biographical information aims at familiarising the readers with the interviewees and their background as much as possible:

Teacher A is the one that was also observed in her English lessons in upper secondary for two weeks. She has taught both the sixth and the seventh form for a longer time and hence knows her students quite well; she is also the form teacher of the sixth form. Teacher A is 37 years old, mother of a daughter and has got fifteen years of teaching experience, which is the longest of all interviewees. Her second subject is German and she has always been teaching in AHS; additionally she taught one year in a new secondary school (=kooperative Mittelschule).

Teacher B is 35 years old, mother of one daughter and has got nine years of teaching experience. Her second subject is Psychology/Philosophy, she has always been teaching in AHS. Teacher B herself attended a grammar school for girls only.

Teacher C is the oldest of the interviewees, she is 47 years old and mother of two sons. Due to personal reasons she had to interrupt her teaching for nine years; all in all, she has got fourteen years of teaching experience (nine years, break for nine years, another 5 years). Her second subject is French, however, this is not among the subjects offered at that school. Teacher C has always been teaching in AHS and spent one year in England in order to teach French and German.

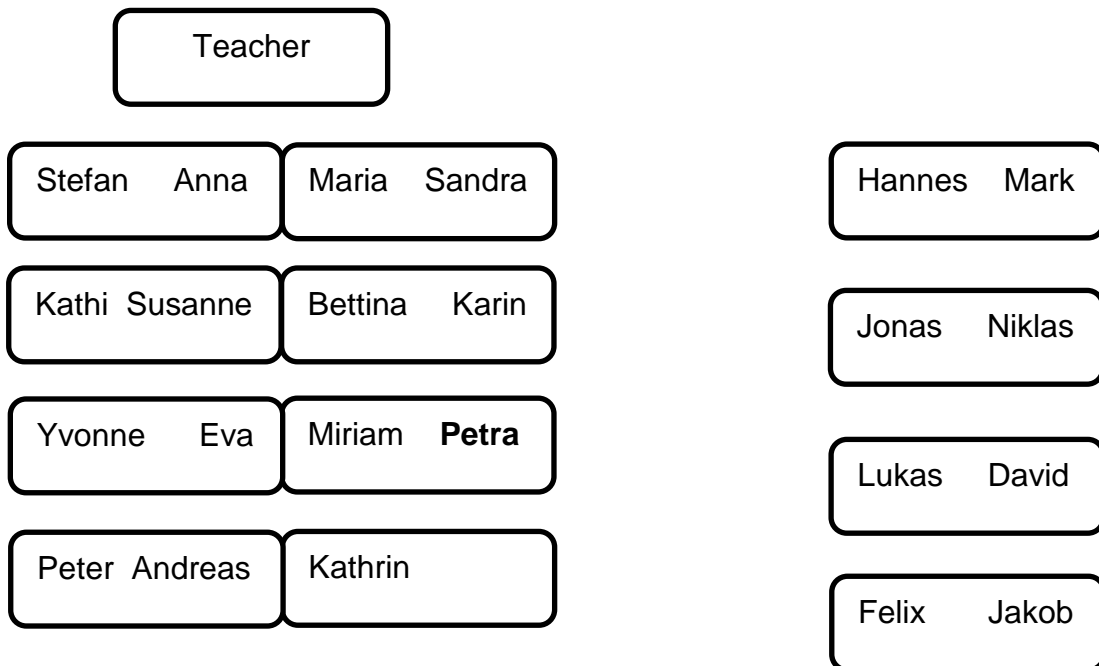
Teacher D is the youngest interviewee, she is 26 years old. She has got three years of teaching experience and her second subject is Russian. Teacher D has only taught lower secondary AHS classes so far, except for the elective subject Russian in upper secondary.

1.4 Setting

As has already been mentioned, the empirical study was carried out in a grammar school in Korneuburg (Lower Austria). Generally speaking, given that the school building itself was only constructed approximately two years ago, both classes and the entire school are equipped with the latest and most modern technological devices. In addition to a computer on the teacher's desk, a projector and speakers, every single student of upper secondary disposes of a portable notebook which can be used for online homework (the so-called "cyber-homework") and reading comprehensions during the lessons. Both teachers and students make use of specific school software, i.e. LMS (Learning Management System), through which they can save, share and keep record of their teaching and learning resources.

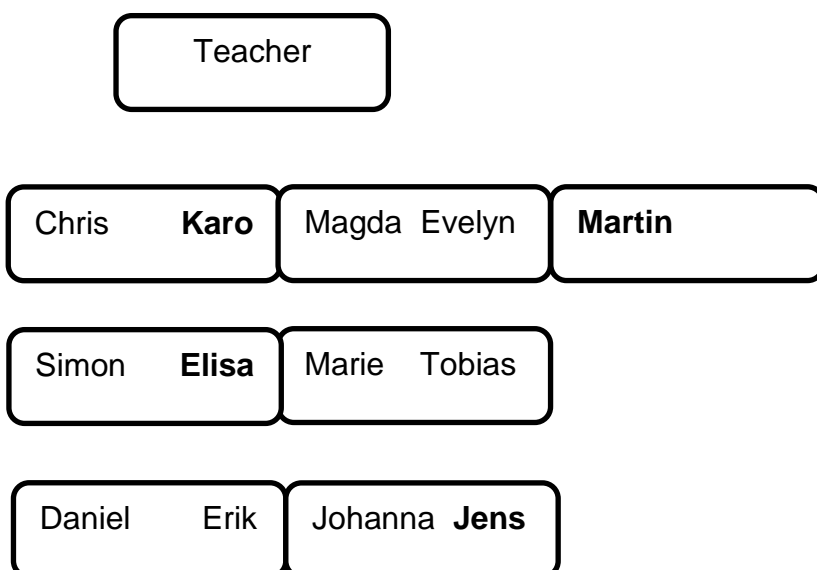
In the course of the observation, it became obvious that in both classes the teaching and learning atmosphere was rather relaxed and that the students have already known each other and also their English teacher for quite a long time. According to the teacher, the majority of the students has spent half their lives together, given that some of them have already attended the same kindergarten and primary school. As far as the gender composition is concerned, the two classes were almost even: The sixth form consisted of 23 students, eleven boys and twelve girls. The seventh form comprised 13 students, seven boys and six girls. The charts on the next page illustrate the seating arrangement, which only slightly changed in the course of the 10 lessons. A name in bold either indicates that this member of the class changed his/her place and/or that this particular person was absent in one or more of the lessons observed. As has already been mentioned, all participants will be kept anonymous in this diploma thesis; therefore, in the following charts the students were given pseudonyms.

Seating arrangement 6th form:



As far as the seating pattern of the sixth form is concerned, there seem to be hardly any mixed-gender desks, i.e. all but one boy in the front row (Stefan) and one girl in the back row (Kathrin) preferred single-sex desks. Almost all members of the class were present in every lesson except for one girl who was absent twice (Petra).

Seating arrangement 7th form:



Regarding the seating pattern of the seventh form, a somewhat different picture is conveyed: unlike the students of the sixth form, the members of the seventh form seem to favour a rather mixed-gender seating arrangement, since there was hardly any single-sex desk. Again, almost all students were present in every lesson that was observed, except for two girls (Karo and Elisa) who were both absent twice. Due to their absence the seating arrangement slightly changed, since one boy (Martin) decided to take one of their seats meanwhile.

According to David and Myra Sadker (cf. Sadker et al. 1982 referred to in Yeppez 1994: 125), information about the seating arrangement of a classroom can contribute to the understanding of gender processes. As far as the two classes that were observed are concerned, it might be argued that they differ enormously regarding their respective seating patterns: As has already been mentioned, the majority of the students of the 6th form preferred sharing their desks with a partner from the same sex, except for two students (Stefan and Kathrin), who obviously favoured a mixed-sex setting. Therefore – employing INTERSECT terminology – the seating arrangement of the sixth form could be characterised by segregation rather than integration (cf. *ibid*). The seating pattern of the seventh form, on the other hand, may be described as rather integrative and thus reflects the opposite situation, since the majority of the students apparently preferred sitting in a mixed-sex arrangement.

2 In an Austrian EFL Classroom: Findings

The following part will deal with the evaluation of both teacher interviews and classroom observations, although the main focus will be on the former. Firstly, it aims at presenting the four teachers' views and opinions on different aspects of gender and classroom life: The analysis will start with more general elements of the classroom setting and then proceed to more specific categories of actual classroom discourse. Secondly, this analytical section intends to provide an insight into the data that was collected during the classroom observations and should mainly serve as a support of the teachers' evaluation – especially of teacher A, who was the one that was observed. Therefore, representative examples of the observations were selected and will be included and discussed whenever necessary and appropriate.

2.1 Findings of the Teacher Interviews

2.1.1 Preparation and Organisation of Lesson and Topics

Generally speaking, three of the four teachers (A, C, D) come to the conclusion that information about the amount of male and female students is of no relevance at all before entering a classroom for the first time. Each of these three teachers prefers going into a classroom without having any knowledge about its composition, since they only start planning their lessons once they have got to know the whole class. In contrast, teacher B judges the information about the number of boys and girls in her classrooms as very important, as this pre-knowledge has an immediate consequence for her choice of material and topics at the beginning of the school year – especially in lower secondary. According to her, the gender composition of a classroom does not only influence her selection of classroom resources, but also the events and the general atmosphere of the lessons. Accordingly, she would rather choose a “boys' topic” if there was a clear majority of boys and would likewise deal with “girls' topics” if the larger part of the class was female. She mentions the example of the elective subject English in upper secondary, which is usually attended by fewer students than a regular class, and in which she frequently adapts the topics to the specific groups:

Especially in elective subjects I have experienced that [=gender-specific choices of topics]. Usually there are about ten participants and I have had all-girls groups in which one can do Jane Austen or topics like that, which I would never do with boys, with boys I would never read such a novel. Or I remember doing “The Devil Wears Prada”, these are typical girls’ topics, but they really enjoyed it because they wanted to do it. And with boys who are interested in English or who are very good we did something like “Star Wars” and E.T. stories.

However, given that teacher B herself attended a school for girls only and thus never dealt with “typical boys’ topics” in her own school career, she admits that she might be influenced by this experience when it comes to her selection of material.

Similarly, teacher C grounds her choice of topics on the gender composition of her classes, although only after she has seen the students and got to know their specific interests. In fact, like teacher B, she would choose a “boys’ topic”, such as football, if the class consisted of more male students and if those expressed a wish to do so. In order to cater for balance, she would then deal with girls’ topics as well, although she would spend less time on those. Interestingly, if the class mainly consists of female students, the group is usually allowed to vote for a topic of their choice. Nevertheless, if the boys obviously lose their interest and do not seem to take part in the “girls’ lessons”, teacher C tries to reach a compromise with the boys regarding certain topics. Moreover, she comments that this conscious selection only happens when she uses additional material, since on most occasions she sticks to the content of the textbook.

Unlike teachers B and C, teachers A and D adapt their choice of topics neither to the gender composition of a classroom nor to the specific interests of their students. According to teacher A, since in upper secondary the majority of the topics are pre-selected in order to cover all the relevant topics for the A-levels („Themenpool”), teachers have to mainly stay with these:

With the older students I have to ignore it [=gender-specific interest], because we have a restricted selection of topics which have to be covered – totally independent from the gender composition of the class.

However, she argues that in lower secondary her choice of topics and material is more likely to be adapted to the gender composition and the particular interests of the younger learners. Teacher D admits that she never consciously takes into account the gender composition or the gender-specific interests of her students, but rather tries to stay on a more neutral level. However, she has got the impression that sometimes her lessons are not as neutral as she assumes them to be, but that they tend to appeal to boys more than to girls, since her own interests seem to be more compatible with those of the male students – especially in lower secondary.

2.1.2 Male and Female Students' Attitudes towards Learning Foreign Languages

Regarding the students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language, all four teachers would generally judge both males' and females' point of view as very positive. Teachers A, B and C perceive the attitude of boys and girls towards English in a similar way. According to them, both sexes learn the language with great ambition and consider English as very important not only for their present, but above all for their future lives and work. Moreover, given that today's young people are confronted with all kinds of foreign-language media, such as movies, TV series, newspapers and YouTube on a daily basis, they seem to be highly motivated and enthusiastic about learning English:

Teacher B: I believe that both sexes are aware that English is very very important and that they are going to need it later on. I always tell my students, 'You'll probably never find yourself in a situation in which you have to fill in such exercises, but it is important to have basic competences, namely writing, reading and speaking', since this is what is needed in their working life.

Teacher B adds that there certainly are individual students who feel reluctant to learn this language, just as there are students who have an aversion to other subjects. However, these individual negative attitudes cannot be ascribed to boys or girls only. Teacher A, for her part, additionally sees a connection between the learners' own attitudes towards foreign languages and their parents' expectations. She would assume a certain attitude to be a question of

education. According to her, both sexes know that they need to learn English and that they have to achieve positive results in order to pass their A-levels in upper-secondary. However, she describes her female learners to be more likely to learn more foreign languages, since they generally seem to consider them more important than their male classmates do and can, except for one or two girls, imagine living abroad for some time. The boys, on the other hand, appear to be less interested in learning many foreign languages, since they often do not see them as essential requirements for particular jobs. Moreover, especially the male students of the seventh form cannot imagine leaving for the wide world, but rather prefer to stay at home.

In contrast to the evaluation of her three colleagues, teacher D perceives a certain tendency for older girls to be more interested in language than boys, since they express a greater wish to actually do something with it in their future lives. Boys, on the other hand, appear to consider English mainly as a means to an end and less frequently mention an intention to keep using the language in their jobs. However, according to teacher D, the younger the learners, the less noticeable and pronounced these differences are, since she could not report about a similar situation in her first form.

2.1.3 Classroom Material and Gender-Specific Choice of Topics

Regarding the composition of the modern EFL material and textbooks, all four teachers seem to agree upon the fact that nowadays' English teaching resources have improved enormously as far as gender stereotypes and imbalanced representations of male and female characters are concerned. Teacher A, for example, has got the impression that modern EFL textbooks such as "More!" for lower secondary and "Laser" for upper secondary classes try hard to not use any clichés or gender stereotypes, and she assumes the books to be carefully checked regarding these issues. According to her, it is not unusual for today's textbooks to include stories about male figures who stay at home and do some of the household chores and about female characters who go to work.

Teachers B and C remember their own school time and briefly refer to the textbooks used back then: As has already been mentioned before, teacher B attended a school for girls only and, according to her own evaluation, seems to have been confronted with highly stereotypical and imbalanced representations of men and women. While very traditional pictures of women appear to have been on the agenda in earlier material, teacher B assumes the modern resources to be checked carefully in order to avoid biased portrayals:

There are no longer these clear images of a woman being dressed in an apron and when her husband comes home she is holding his slippers out to him. I remember being confronted with such images in English.

She tells about one unit in particular, which was called “The Ideal Husband” and which she would consider as totally absurd and highly questionable in retrospect. Apart from having to deal with biased material like that, teacher B reports about being taught by a male English teacher, who seemed to enjoy and almost celebrate these specific topics and men’s and women’s assigned roles in society. In contrast to that, she would judge today’s EFL textbooks as having been revised and adapted to contemporary society not only as far as gender stereotypes are concerned, but also regarding the vocabulary that is used. Teacher C reports about a similar experience in her own school time, given that her English textbook “Ann and Pat” was very likely to depict male and female characters in a highly biased manner. In comparison, she would judge the modern lower and upper secondary EFL resources as excellent. In order to support this evaluation, she provides an example of the unit “Employment and Jobs” – usually covered in the fourth form – and in which a boy, contrary to many expectations, applies for a job as an au-pair.

A somewhat different viewpoint seems to be expressed by teacher D, since she has got the impression that the modern EFL material consciously tries to counteract common gender stereotypes:

I have got the impression that the new learning material has developed into the exact opposite direction. It deliberately tries to NOT mention the stereotypes, but sometimes in a too intense manner.

Like her colleague C, she mentions the topic that usually students of the fourth form are confronted with, namely “Working Life”, and reports about the following task: The unit starts with a listening activity in which two young people, one male and one female, talk about their future jobs. Contrary to common expectations, the teenage boy wants to become a professional dancer, whereas the young girl intends to join the army, and both report about the reactions of their friends towards their rather “untypical” choices. The former mentions that some of his friends looked rather sceptical when they first heard about his future job, but seem to have gradually accepted his decision. Similarly, the latter tells about many people who had not believed in her capacity to work for the army, while others seem to greatly appreciate and support her choice. Furthermore, these two young people are asked whether they are of the opinion that there are certain jobs which should better not be done by women. Both obviously respond that there is hardly any job that cannot be done by both men and woman, except for heavy physical work, which might be rather suitable for a male person. However, the students’ reaction to this last question seemed to really surprise teacher D:

I have to say that the reaction to this was rather shocking for me. The students themselves, the male students were of the opinion that this and that should not be done by a woman or cannot be done by a woman.

As has already been mentioned, teacher D has got the impression that the modern resources aim at counteracting widespread gender representations through activities and tasks like this. However, despite the fact that today’s students seem to be confronted with significantly less biased depictions and are also deliberately made to think about the portrayals, teachers A and D assume them to sometimes still think and act in a rather “classical stereotypical way” – independent from their gender. Both girls and boys are still very likely to imagine either male or female figures when being confronted with certain expressions or jobs:

Teacher A: Especially in English, when there is the word “doctor” nowadays it sometimes is a woman. However, I notice that for the children, for the students it is always a “he”, for the children it is a man.

Teacher D: At the same time I was rather puzzled after an exercise in which the students had to assign images to any jobs. And this typical secretary was, of course, a woman. This made me think, but well, this simply is reality.

According to teacher D, especially in their puberty, boys and girls do not really know who they are and have to gradually construct their gender identities (cf. Butler 1990). Therefore, as a starting point, they tend to first of all identify themselves with the more “common” gender stereotypes of men and women and only later on start to question and criticise these.

In strong connection with the issue of school material per se is the male and female students’ personal selection and preference of topics for reading and writing tasks, since a textbook’s offer might not necessarily correspond to the boys’ and girls’ tastes. The evaluation of the four teachers regarding gender-specific topic preferences seems to be quite varied: Although there might be a certain gender-specific reaction to particular topics, teachers A and C could not identify gender-specific tendencies as far as reading and writing preferences are concerned. However, the former would generally judge both male and female students’ choices to be a matter of calculation and of trying to go the easier way, i.e. somehow following the principle of least effort. In order to support her argument, she provides an example of an English lesson in which the students of an upper secondary EFL class had to deal with the topic “Extreme Sports”. According to her evaluation, neither the boys nor the girls chose to write and talk about those kinds of extreme sports one might suspect them to choose:

For example, I did this [=letting students choose what to write] with extreme sports and it wasn’t noticeable that the boys tended to choose the wilder things such as base jumping and the girls rather the more harmless things. That was totally mixed.

In contrast to that, teacher D mentions a homework task in one of her lower secondary classes, in which the students had to write a story corresponding to the title “Terror Teacher”. According to teacher D, boys tended to produce the more bloody and cruel stories, whereas the average girl was likely to write about something more harmless. Nevertheless, she admits that one cannot make a general judgment about this issue, since the choice and the preference

of reading and writing activities would rather depend on how childish students still are or to which extent they already perceive themselves as teenagers – childish narrations tend to be ascribed to girls, while tougher and less harmless stories might commonly be associated with boys. Generally speaking, however, teacher D does not leave many choices to her students regarding writing tasks, since she mainly adapts her lessons to the textbook and tries to meet the requirements of standardised tests.

Teacher B seems to represent a somewhat opposite position to the evaluation of teachers A, C and D. Unlike her colleagues, she would clearly identify specific themes to appeal a lot more to girls than to boys and vice versa. She again refers to the elective subject English in upper secondary, in which students usually decide upon some of the topics themselves. According to teacher B's experience, some of the female students frequently choose very "typical" women's novels, historical novels and movies, which might commonly be referred to as sentimental and emotional. Moreover, she reports about the distinct reaction of the boys and girls attending her two fourth forms when they were confronted with the unit "Superheroes":

Teacher B: The boys know a lot about it, they are interested, they know what it is about and the girls sometimes say, 'Well, ok, let's do that.' but are glad when it's over again – that's what is noticeable.

Alternatively, teacher B proposes to select less polarising topics such as "body talk" or information about a certain country, especially for exams, and warns against choosing themes that clearly favour either boys' or girls' interests.

2.1.4 Gender-Specific Learning Styles and Strategies

The questions concerning gender-specific learning styles and strategies turned out to be rather difficult to answer from a teacher's perspective, since teachers primarily see the students' outcome, i.e. results in the exams, homework assignments and the like, but do not really gain deeper insight into their individual ways of learning and preparation. Teacher C, for her part, could not identify gender-specific differences as far as learning styles and strategies are concerned at all, since she assumes this to be a matter of students' individual personality. According to her experience, all three learner types, i.e. auditory,

visual and kinaesthetic, might be found in both sexes and, therefore, cannot be ascribed to boys or girls exclusively. However, the other three teachers (A, B and D) seem to be able to identify certain learning tendencies or rather appear to have their own assumptions and ideas of how male and female students tackle certain issues: For example, these three teachers would ascribe girls a more structured and organised way of learning and preparing things, since they tend to keep folders, to-do-lists and are more likely to use highlighters. Moreover, female students are assumed to be more precise in their learning, for example regarding copying vocabulary, and might involve their parents in their preparation more often than boys do, for example by having them check on what they have done. Furthermore, girls are assumed to be the more exact and careful learners, whereas boys are often perceived as the quicker ones.

Apart from this evaluation on a more general level, each of these three teachers provided an additional example regarding gender-specific learning: Teacher A emphasised the special behaviour of her male upper secondary students, since she would generally assume the boys of the sixth and seventh form to often follow the least-effort principle, i.e. they let their female classmates do the work, copy their homework and the like. Teacher D sees a connection between female students' more structured approach to learning and their often better achievements in the language:

I do think that girls sometimes achieve better results in English, even though they might be less talented than a boy in the same class who, for his part, does not learn in a comparable strategic manner and who does not deem it that important. Girls' higher ambition might compensate that [=lesser aptitude for the language]; 'I have to do this and that' and their self-reflection.

Lastly, teacher B reports about interesting differences as far as the perception and selection of information of male and female students is concerned:

It just comes to my mind that boys sometimes remember different pieces of information than girls. When I ask, 'What did we do in the last lesson?' they somehow have a different perception and recall things that I – as a woman – would not have deemed that important.

2.1.5 Female Students' Emancipation

All four teachers seem to strongly perceive a more emancipated behaviour of their female students compared to earlier times, although not all the interviewees consider this development as having advantages only. Generally speaking, teachers A and B perceive the girls' stronger emancipation as something positive and describe today's female students as more open and self-confident, more courageous and more willing to express their own opinion not only during the lessons, but also regarding the general interpersonal interaction with their classmates. In former times, boys tended to receive significantly more talking time and teacher attention, for example due to disciplinary measures, whereas today's girls have caught up and sometimes even participate more than their male classmates. Nowadays, according to teacher B, female learners tend to stand up for their own rights and make themselves heard instead of letting their mothers come to school and solve their problems. Teacher A assumes this more emancipated behaviour to also be a consequence of the girls following the example set by their mothers, who nowadays, for the most part, chose to make a career instead of staying at home.

Unlike their colleagues, teachers C and D appear to notice some potential disadvantages that the female learners' emancipation implies: Despite the fact that teacher C basically judges the girls' will and fight for emancipation and for becoming independent as something positive and important – viewed from the girls' position – she personally misses some of the behavioural patterns that used to be characteristic of boys. However, since this kind of behaviour is not reflected in society any longer, today's girls seem to be used to their rather independent status and do not expect the boys to do things like that:

Well, what I maybe miss a little bit – despite all emancipation – is the boys' gentleman-like behaviour towards teachers and also towards girls that they used to have ten years ago. And I have to admit that as an older teacher I miss that there is someone who stands by the door, opens and closes it, that there is a boy who carries the belongings, that he picks up things for a girl if something has fallen down.

Teacher D, for her part, discerns the following problems related to female learners' emancipation: Firstly, given that the majority of, above all, language teachers are female, students seem to be mainly confronted with female perceptions. According to teacher D, this one-sided school situation would often result in boys' annoyance, due to the fact that especially older female teachers sometimes put an exaggerated focus on emancipation. Secondly, although she would ascribe the female upper secondary students of this particular school a rather self-confident and tough behaviour, she generally judges both male and female students to be satiated with the whole issue of emancipation. Therefore, teacher D argues that she tries to counteract this situation by sometimes deliberately selecting topics which might be more interesting for boys than for girls:

A student in lower secondary once told me about some other teachers [...], "They always do girls' topics" and "They only concentrate on the girls" and so on and I think that this is the reason why I often think that they do not have male teachers, so I have to do boys' topics. [...] I have to admit that I sometimes pity the boys.

2.1.6 Participation

As far as participation in the EFL classroom is concerned, there seems to be a general consensus among the four teachers that various factors interplay and that boys' and girls' share of participation does not necessarily depend on their respective gender. More specifically, teachers A, C and D highly agree upon the fact that the decision of a male or a female student to participate in a lesson largely depends on his or her individual personality rather than on them being a boy or a girl:

Teacher A: I think that this strongly depends on the class. It is totally different whether the girls or the boys are more dominant, but generally speaking, I would argue that more or less participation depends on the type of personality rather than on gender.

According to these three teachers, there is no immediate connection between students' gender and their share of participation, since more than one factor has to be taken into consideration. Teacher D provides a concrete example of an experience she made in an upper secondary Russian elective subject, in which two girls clearly dominated the classroom. According to teacher D, this

domination did not only stem from the two girls' aptitude for the language, but also from them being two very strong characters per se. However, teacher D reports about a clear male dominance regarding participation in her lower secondary classrooms and a resulting marginalised position of female students, although she stresses the fact that one cannot equate quantitative superiority in participation with qualitative:

Of course, participation concerning the content of the lessons is not the same as attracting attention on a different level. Probably boys attract more attention on another level, for example through establishing contact in any way, making a funny comment or things like that.

According to her, while boys frequently contribute to the lesson other than on the content level, girls prefer to be involved in the actual content of the lesson and rather search for acknowledgement and praise for their achievements.

Teacher B, for her part, mainly ascribes a certain dominance of one of the sexes to the overall gender composition of a classroom. According to her experience, boys' and girls' participation in a classroom strongly depends on whether the former or the latter are in the majority. The fact that she teaches two fourth forms this school year, which both consist of a highly uneven number of male and female students, allows for a direct comparison: in one of the classes, the girls are outnumbered by the boys (ratio ~ 8:12), which obviously results in boys' greater dominance during the lessons. The other class, by contrast, mainly consists of female learners (ratio ~ 17:6), which apparently leads to a girls' larger share of participation.

2.1.7 Gender-Typical Behavioural Patterns

As far as gender-specific and "gender-typical" conversational and general behaviour in the EFL classroom is concerned, three of the four teachers (B, C and D) identify certain tendencies regarding boys' and girls' specific behaviour in their English classes. Teacher B, for example, would describe her male and female students in the following way:

I would say that boys are more courageous regarding speaking, since they do not demand perfection from themselves like the girls

do. They [=the boys] try out things and if an error occurs, they do not immediately take it personally. With some girls I have the impression that they take it [=error correction] very personally and need two weeks for relaxation before they dare to direct another sentence at me.

While girls tend to be perfectionist and search for a lot of affirmation and acknowledgement for their achievements, boys dare to participate in a more relaxed manner. Resulting from this behaviour, teacher B assumes male learners to take errors less seriously than girls usually do. While both teachers B and D identify the boys as calling out more frequently during the lessons, teacher C, in contrast, would ascribe both sexes a certain potential to call out in order to contribute rather than raise their hands and wait for their turns.

Teacher D makes two additional remarks as far as male and female students' behavioural patterns are concerned: Firstly, she has got the impression that male students tend to feel as if they are allowed and deserve to be loud and dominant, simply because they are male, and thus sometimes fulfil a certain men's cliché. However, teacher D admits that only those boys who behave in such a way are likely to be remembered, while others who are maybe far from being dominant might be left out in teachers' perception. Secondly, according to her, boys' gender-typical behaviour appears to be shown on another level as well:

I think that boys' gender-typical behaviour shows itself in that they themselves have very concrete ideas of how a proper boy and a proper man has to behave in class. If a boy is too polite or too reserved, he may even be mocked. This seems to be a burden that they place on themselves, they feel that they have to be strong and have to call out.

According to teacher D's impression, girls, on the other hand, tend to develop into one of the following two directions during their search for gender identity: While some decide to make themselves noticed and perceived as women and also show this through their physical appearance, others choose a rather "intellectual way" and present themselves as strong and smart women who want to achieve something in their lives. This kind of behaviour might also reflect on in-class participation, since the former group of girls is likely to

present themselves as a bit stupid and foolish in order to receive attention, while the latter group prefers to show off about their intellectual achievements.

Teacher C, for her part, reports about another interesting gender-specific behaviour in her EFL classrooms:

If girls are talkative, they talk more and beat about the bush; the boys are more concrete, give shorter answers when I ask them something and the girls, if they like talking, the majority of them tends to talk very long and excessively and they have more sophisticated vocabulary.

Teacher A's evaluation concerning the topic of gender-specific behavioural patterns seems to provide a certain contrast to her three colleagues' opinions, since she again refers to the fact that a certain behaviour might not be a matter of a student's gender, but rather of a boy's or a girl's individual personality. She provides two representative examples in order to support her belief: Two students who attend the seventh form – one male (Simon) and one female (Evelyn) – seem to regularly stand out in the lessons through their rather dominant behaviour, which was also noticeable during the classroom observations (see Part II: chapter 2.2.). According to teacher A, Simon has grown up as an only child and is therefore used to getting maximum attention at home. As a consequence, presumably, he would frequently call out in order to make himself heard, either on the content-level or otherwise, i.e. through any kind of comment or joke. However, as has been previously mentioned, teacher A is not sure whether one can ascribe this dominant and rather assertive behaviour to his maleness or to the fact that he simply is the sort of person to behave like that. She supports her assumption by enumerating two other male students who – due to their rather quiet and reserved personalities – would never call out but always raise their hands in order to participate during the English lessons. Moreover, teacher A provides interesting information about a girl of the same class, Evelyn, who might be considered as the female counterpart to Simon, since she tends to behave in a similar way as the boy and just as well might call out instead of raise her hand and wait for her turn. Generally speaking, this girl seems to be a very loud and extrovert type of person, which would lead to an overall greater presence and more noticeable

behaviour during the lessons. Again, the teacher assumes this to be a consequence of Evelyn's character rather than her gender.

2.1.8 Teacher-Student Interaction and Teacher Treatment

Regarding teacher-student interaction, teacher A tells about the "leading" male upper secondary students („Alphatiere") who might behave in a rather aggressive manner towards the teacher and tend to sometimes set the wrong tone, especially when they feel attacked or ridiculed in front of the whole class and, in particular, in front of the girls. She remembers an incident from last year in which a male student from the current sixth form, who is also the class spokesperson, Jakob, arrived late at school; in addition to reprimand him for this delay, teacher A asked him about the homework that was due for that particular day. Jakob apparently interpreted this as a personal attack and reacted in an inappropriate and confrontational way. However, teacher A assumes this to never have happened in a private face-to-face conversation, but only developed the way it did because of him feeling ridiculed or even disgraced in front of, especially, his female classmates. According to teacher A, this sometimes rather aggressive behaviour is typical for male students in upper secondary, who find themselves on the verge of turning into men – however, teacher A cannot observe a similar behaviour in her female students.

Teacher D notices an interesting difference in lower secondary teacher-student interaction as far as communication inside and outside the classroom is concerned: While boys tend to show rather dominant behaviour during the lessons, they seem to be shier and more reserved when it comes to private face-to-face conversations with the teacher. Girls, on the other hand, seem to lose some of their usual in-class shyness and tell about their experiences, which would hardly ever happen during the lessons. Having one specific female student in mind, teacher D provides an interesting example in order to illustrate the huge difference in behaviour:

I notice this very strongly with one girl; whenever I ask her something in the lesson, nothing happens, she looks around with a somehow absent gaze, is never able to answer, is always startled when I ask her something, and whenever I pass in the corridor, 'Hello professor,

how are you today?’ And when they approach me in a group of girls, she suddenly starts talking to me and asks me something.

As far as the evaluation of their treatment of male and female students is concerned, teachers A and C state that they try hard to treat all their students in the same way. However, both seem to be aware of the fact that they not always manage to achieve this and tend to sometimes make certain differences. Teacher A, for her part, clearly identifies one particular boy of the sixth form, Lukas, as receiving a quite distinct treatment than the other students, which was also reflected in some of the lessons that were observed (see Part II: chapter 2.2.). According to her, given that she has known this boy and also his mother for quite a long time, she almost automatically tends to treat him in a more humorous way.

Generally speaking, teachers A, B and D report about having a very ironic and humorous relationship with their male students, which is very often based on a joking, sometimes even flirtatious level and on a rather relaxed attitude of not taking things too seriously. However, teacher B argues that this does not necessarily have to do with them being boys, but rather with the fact that some personalities may or may not fit together well, since there are also some introvert boys with whom she gets along worse. She also tends to have a good relationship with some of her female students, which again might have nothing to do with their gender but probably with the fact that certain characters get along well while others do not.

Moreover, teachers B and C prefer students who treat them in a more direct and honest manner rather than students who are devious, bad-tempered and very hard to see through. According to their evaluation, the first two behavioural traits are more likely to be found in boys, whereas the latter might be more characteristic of girls – especially when they are in puberty. Teacher B, for her part, makes an interesting additional distinction as far as her behaviour towards boys and girls is concerned: While she would judge her treatment of male and female students as equal on the content level, she is aware of the fact that she does not treat them in the same way when it comes to interpersonal relationships:

Especially, when you are the form teacher of a class, there are situations in which you treat the girls somehow softer, for example, because you know or you think you know that they take things more personally than boys. If somebody forgot something, I'd maybe say to a boy, 'Why don't you have that?' or 'Note it down.' and to a girl, 'Well, could you maybe please think of it...?' Sometimes you are not as bold to girls, because you know that they are more sensitive or, I don't know, maybe because you are a woman and can put yourself in their position better. And with boys, they don't take it to heart anyway – which is mostly true I think.

Teacher D is the only one who would describe her treatment of male and female students as highly unequal, given that both sexes often present themselves in a very different manner. However, she argues in a similar way as her colleague B, since she also believes boys to be capable of dealing with a more direct and firm treatment, given that they themselves tend to respond in a harsher way sometimes. Girls, on the other hand, often behave as rather subordinate and would probably not take "strict" teacher treatment as easily as their male classmates and, consequently, she would probably not even try to treat them like she treats the boys. However, as has been mentioned by all of the four teachers at a certain point, teacher D again assumes this to sometimes be a matter of the individual students' personality, since neither all the boys nor all the girls in her classes act in the same way.

2.1.9 Student-Student Interaction

Regarding student-student interaction, the overall consensus among the four teachers seems to be that there is a huge difference in the behavioural patterns comparing lower and upper secondary classes. Teacher B, for example, reports about lower secondary mixed-sex pairs, who appear to have enormous difficulties in working together. Especially in the first and second form girls and boys tend to feel embarrassed and unpleasant when they have to work together with a partner from the other sex. However, this attitude seems to change once they have reached the peak of their puberty, and mixed-sex pair or group work is no problem at all in upper secondary classrooms – unless there are interpersonal difficulties between individual students. Similarly, teacher A would argue that both her upper secondary EFL classes are characterised by an extremely close and friendly relationship and hence do not have any problems

working in mixed-sex pairs or groups, which could also be noticed on several occasions during the classroom observations (see Part II: chapter 2.2.).

Teachers C and D focus more on gender-typical interaction in single-sex groups and reach very similar overall conclusions: All-boys groups tend to be characterised by more direct, honest and harsher behaviour and sometimes even include short quarrels, swear words and stronger language in general. All-girls groups, on the other hand, appear to be a complicated matter sometimes – especially in puberty – given that their arguments tend to be much more subtle and often involve some kind of intrigue or the exclusion of other girls. However, teacher D argues that when girls work together and they do not have any personal problems in their groups, the overall atmosphere is likely to be more constructive and effective than in all-boys groups or mixed groups.

Moreover, regarding the question whether changes in the interaction format lead to changes in the students' behaviour, teachers A, C and D would agree upon the fact that there is a certain tendency for shy students – especially girls – to be more active and talkative when they are allowed to work in smaller groups:

Teacher C: Girls who are very shy tend to rather open their mouths in smaller groups when they work together with familiar girls than when in the plenary classroom situation. This means that with group work the shy ones may dare to come out.

However, while teacher C obviously refers to a change in the female students' behaviour when working in all-girls groups with familiar female classmates or friends, teacher A does not necessarily limit girls' greater courage to all-girls groups but to smaller groups in general. In order to support her belief, teacher A provides an interesting example of a group of female students in the sixth form: generally speaking, the first row of this class, which consists of female students only, tends to rarely participate voluntarily during the lessons and behaves rather shy. However, once they are in a smaller group or in a pair, they are likely to talk much more, independent from the sex of their group members, which could also be noticed during the classroom observations (see Part II: chapter 2.2.).

Teacher D, for her part, identifies certain general difficulties regarding small groups, especially when there is one member – more frequently a girl – who is too shy and reserved, since this would often have a negative impact on the outcome of an activity. Adding to that, teachers B and D would argue that again the individual student's personality may play a more decisive role than his or her respective gender. Therefore, certain behaviour in group and pair work cannot be ascribed to boys or girls only. For example, according to the former, both male and female lower secondary learners often try to hide themselves in smaller groups and wait for the time to pass by instead of working together and reaching a joint outcome.

2.1.10 Gender-Specific Achievement in the EFL Classroom

As far as the achievement of boys and girls in English is concerned, all four teachers would not confirm the widely-held assumption that female students are the better and more talented foreign language learners, and none of the interviewees could clearly identify a higher-achieving gender in their EFL classrooms. Contrary to the common belief, teacher A, interestingly, reports about her three current English classes in each of which the best student is a boy. However, she assumes this to be a matter of coincidence, since reconsidering last years' and also other schools' results would show a somewhat different picture. Generally speaking, teachers A, B and D would argue that girls tend to be the more assiduous, precise and perfectionist learners, which would, consequently, often lead to their quicker success in acquiring the language and enable them to perform better on average.

However, despite the fact that the best student teacher B has ever taught was female, she believes boys to be just as capable as girls to achieve brilliant results in English. Moreover, she would ascribe girls neither greater talent nor higher interest for foreign languages, but assumes them to often perform better simply because of their harder work especially regarding "the basics". Contrary to her colleague B, teacher D would identify female learners as sometimes being more interested in the subject. However, considering the list of her best

and worst students, teacher D can neither notice the girls nor the boys to stand out.

Finally, according to teacher C, while there might be a certain tendency for girls to rather choose a linguistic path and for boys to take a more mathematical direction, there seem to be a variety of exceptions and counterevidence. In order to support her belief, teacher C provides the example of her own son who is a talented and high-achieving foreign language student, but considerably less gifted in Maths.

Regarding the question whether there are certain fields in which boys or girls do better in the EFL classroom, teachers A and C would ascribe their female (upper secondary) students better results in their written work, since they seem to write in a much more creative manner, use more sophisticated vocabulary and thus express themselves in a more elaborate manner than the boys. According to the former, boys' worse, or rather less creative story writing might be explained, on the one hand, with a greater general laziness among the male students and, on the other hand, with the fact that they do not feel as comfortable as their female classmates in exposing and sharing their imaginative ideas with others. Boys, according to teacher C, appear to have an advantage as far as logical grammatical explanations are concerned, given that they understand and process these very quickly. Regarding the writing skill, teacher B assumes both sexes to be equally able to produce brilliant texts. However, girls tend to be much more precise as far as orthography and proofreading are concerned, and also seem to consider the formal aspects of their texts as well as their handwriting as much more important than their male classmates:

I don't know, the boys in my second form start an exercise, then they are not interested anymore, they do another one and add it later on and then there is the rest of the first exercise. And then sometimes I think, "Well, this is just boyish." A girl would never tackle an activity in this way, [...].

However, boys' often inappropriate or even sloppy formal structure does not necessarily mean that they also show flaws on the grammatical or the content level.

Unlike teacher C, who is of the opinion that there are no gender-specific tendencies regarding oral performance, teacher B would generally ascribe her male learners not only more courage as far as speaking is concerned, but also a certain tendency to be more adventurous and much less likely to take errors personally. Similar to her colleague B, teacher D would judge the boys' courage to speak higher than the girls', especially when it comes to engaging in dialogues. However, according to her opinion, female EFL students tend to have a greater musical gift – a fact that apparently enables them to develop a much better feeling for pronunciation and intonation, whereas their male classmates tend to sound rather German sometimes.

2.2 Findings of the Classroom Observations

The following chapter aims at presenting important findings that resulted from the two-week classroom observations. Since not every observed lesson can be discussed in detail, the most significant results will be summarised. Apart from presenting the data that has been collected in the two upper secondary classes, a connection will be drawn between the teachers' evaluation and actual classroom situations, i.e. representative examples of classroom dialogue will be included and discussed whenever necessary and appropriate. These examples were selected according to their suitability for portraying classroom situations relevant to the topic of the project and aim at supporting the claims made by, above all, the teacher that was observed.

Generally speaking, in both classrooms, interaction was mainly initiated by the teacher and thus followed a rather typical teacher-student/question-response pattern. According to my personal evaluation, teacher A tried to evenly distribute her attention to both male and female students and thus wanted all the learners to receive at least a few interactions in the English lessons. The most frequent means of initiating an interaction on behalf of the students was hand-raising; there were only a few instances in which, above all, the male learners called out. However, since I did not include any quantitative measures in my observation, the previous remarks can only be rough estimations based on my own general impression. Teacher A's main method of allocating a turn was via establishing eye contact with the respective student; whenever she

raised a question or asked the learners to participate, she tended to look around in the whole classroom and then selected a student which, according to my impression, has had fewer time to contribute to the lesson. Moreover, teacher A did not seem to make a difference as far as the evaluative type of students' contributions is concerned, since both acknowledgement and correction were directed to learners of both sexes in an equal manner. The most frequent praising reactions of teacher A were "Yes, good" and "Yeah, very good", whereas in most of her corrective responses she tried to help the students to find the correct answer on their own:

Grammar exercise on present simple and present progressive.
Question teacher A: Which tense do we have here?
One boy answers: Present.
Teacher: Which present?
Student does not know, hesitates.
Teacher: Which tense is it? Who can help him out?
Same male student (helped by neighbour): Present... present simple.
Teacher: Are you sure? (short pause) Yes, good.

As far as the evaluative content is concerned, I could only identify certain tendencies in the teacher's behaviour towards male and female students: While both sexes were addressed for intellectual contributions, the teacher seemed to direct more disciplinary comments to the boys, such as: "Boys, could you stop rocking your chairs, please?" or "Hey boys at the back, is everything ok, can we continue?" or "Lukas, are you ready with telling stories, can we start?"

Regarding changes in the interaction format, a change in the behaviour of some students could be noticed during the classroom observations, when the teacher alternated whole-class teaching with group or pair work. This should be exemplified by referring to one situation in particular: One of the topics that was dealt with in the sixth form during the two weeks of observation was "Jobs & Employment" and one of the activities the students were supposed to engage in was a role play in which they should simulate a job interview. Therefore, the class was divided into two groups: each student of the first two rows had to take on the role of an employee, whereas the students sitting in the third and fourth row pretended to be the employers. After having prepared their respective roles, the teacher let them form pairs via allocating them letters from A to F, which resulted in a total mixture of male and female students. Since I had already

noticed the rather reserved and shy behaviour of the girls in the first row, I decided to particularly concentrate on a pair which was formed by a female student from the front and tried to observe whether her behaviour changed with this alternate interaction format. In fact, I chose to focus on Maria and Felix, as they were sitting closest to me and, as discretely as possible, listened to their conversation. Surprisingly, Maria's behaviour exactly reflected what was assumed by teacher A in the interview: More specifically, the girl obviously felt much safer and more pleasant in this constellation and seemed to be quite engaged in acting out the role play with her classmate Felix. As a next step, the teacher asked me to select two pairs who should simulate the job interview in front of the whole class: After having chosen two volunteering students, I decided to ask Maria and Felix to perform their interview for the rest of the class. Although both appeared to be not very enthusiastic about my selection – especially Maria blushed when they started talking – they acted out the role play pretty well and seemed to even enjoy their performance. Generally speaking, the students of the sixth and seventh form appear to be used to working together in mixed groups and pairs, since teacher A usually tends to form the groups randomly, for example through allocating numbers and letters, or through letting them turn to their back or their front neighbours.

As far as gender-typical language and students' gender-specific conversational behaviour is concerned, I noticed a certain dominance of particular students, although this dominance did not necessarily have to do with them being male or female, but rather with their specific personalities – according to teacher A's evaluation and also my personal impression. In the interview, she provided two representative examples in order to support her belief, namely Simon and Evelyn, who both attend the seventh form and regularly stand out during the English lessons because of their rather dominant behaviour, which was also strongly noticeable during the classroom observations. As has already been analysed in chapter 2.1.7., teacher A described Simon as a very "typical" only-child, who grew up without siblings and is therefore used to getting maximum attention at home. Teacher A inferred that, as a consequence, he would more frequently call out in order to make himself heard than others, either to contribute to the lesson on the content-level or also otherwise, i.e. through any

kind of comment or joke. The following two utterances, which are taken from two different observation lessons, should serve as brief representations of Simon's previously described behaviour: The topic of both lessons was "Tourism, Transport & Travelling" and the students were supposed to deal – amongst other things – with a topic-related text called "Freedom at last". None of the students reacted to the title of the reading comprehension the way Simon did, since he immediately started singing the chorus of the famous song "I've been looking for Freedom" by David Hasselhoff. Moreover, in one of the subsequent lessons the class had to list all the advantages and disadvantages regarding tourism, as well as answer a questionnaire about their favourite holidays and their preferred way of travelling. The discussion that resulted from these two activities was frequently interrupted by Simon's comments, although his calling out was mainly ignored by the teacher:

Discussion about annoying tourist masses:

Teacher A (sharing her experience): I am often a bit annoyed by all the tourists in my hometown Salzburg, for example. You know, when you walk down Getreidemarkt and cannot even move because of all the tourists...

Simon (interrupting her): Ja, is aber in der Mariahilferstraße auch so.

Teacher A: Ja stimmt, is dort auch so. [...]

Discussion about Magic Life all-inclusive holidays:

Simon: Das is so ekelhaft diese organisierte...

Teacher A (interrupting Simon, turning to another student): Would you read out number two, please?

Student reading.

Teacher A (again turning to another student): Next one, please.

Student reading.

Simon (calling out, referring to a question which deals with the sudden appearance of a jellyfish): Warum gibts nicht einfach ausweichen?

However, as has been previously mentioned, teacher A is not sure whether one can ascribe this dominant and rather assertive behaviour to his maleness or to the fact that he simply is the sort of person to behave like that. As has already been mentioned, a similar dominant behaviour could be noticed in a female student, Evelyn. There was hardly any situation, in which this girl did not try to contribute to the lesson, either via raising her hand or via simply calling out. According to teacher A, this demeanour might not be due to Evelyn's female gender, but to her being a very loud and extrovert type of person and also

because of her strong desire to simply say something. However, apart from these two conspicuous students, no extreme gender-typical behaviour of male or female students could be noticed in either of the classes.

In the course of the classroom observations there were several occasions in which either the teacher or the students reacted to a certain representation in the material that was used in an interesting way. The following situations might exemplify some of these reactions: As has already been mentioned earlier, the major topic of the seventh form at that time was “Travelling and Tourism” and the students frequently had to express their own opinions and experiences regarding this topic. In one lesson they were confronted with two pictures that demonstrated different ways of how people might spend their holidays: One image showed grandparents enjoying their vacation with their grandchildren somewhere on the countryside, the other depicted two teenage girls at the beach, one giving the other a piggyback-ride. The class was supposed to describe and compare the two pictures and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of family holidays and holidays with friends. However, before they started the activity, teacher A made them aware of the rather one-sided representation in the second picture: “And by the way, these needn’t be girls. Could be boys as well, okay?”

As has already been stated, the sixth form mainly dealt with the topic “Jobs and Employment” at the time of the observation. In one lesson, the students were confronted with different job descriptions and supposed to find the corresponding working place. Among these descriptions was babysitting and before the class engaged in the activity, teacher A interrupted the lesson for a brief question concerning a babysitting project the students were about to start:

Teacher A (asking the whole class): What about the babysitting?

(explaining to me): They founded a babysitting company.

(again asking the whole class): Who is going to start?

One girl and one boy raise their hands.

Teacher A (raising her voice, turning more to the boys): Oh boys, babysitting!

Apart from the fact that teacher A seemed to be proud of her male students and their engagement in such a project, her voice and manner of saying the last

sentence 'Oh boys, babysitting' directed the attention to the maybe rather "untypical" male babysitter. However, the boys did not seem to feel ashamed or ridiculed, but all students appeared to be quite proud of achieving and managing this project on their own. In one of the subsequent lessons, the learners of the sixth form dealt with the unit "Hobbies and Leisure Time" and were supposed to talk about their most favourite and least favourite leisure time activities in small groups. Since I could not observe all the groups at the same time, I again decided to focus on the one sitting closest to me and overheard the following interesting discussion:

Girl: Every little girl likes riding a horse.
Boy: I don't like riding a horse.
Girl: You are not a girl.
Laughter.

This utterance might be compared to the one described by teacher A regarding students' perception of "typical" male and female jobs (such as doctor), as again it is the learners themselves who have very clear ideas about "proper" boys' and girls' leisure time activities and thus perpetuate existing stereotypes.

Although I had the impression that the relationship between teacher A and both her male and female students seemed to be very relaxed and close, I noticed a certain tendency for her to be engaged in more humorous dialogues with the boys. This was also confirmed by herself in the interview, since she reported about her relationship with male learners to be often based on a joking and sometimes even flirtatious level. The following utterance might serve as a representative example – interestingly, it was again Simon who started a funny conversation with the teacher:

Brief discussion about Spain as popular tourist destination.

Simon (complaining about Spanish policemen): When I was on holiday in Spain, a policeman showed me the wrong way to McDonalds.

Teacher A: Maybe he didn't know it himself?

Simon: Vielleicht wars ja ein Gastarbeiterpolizist.

Teacher A: Maybe he just wanted to have an eye on your diet.

General laughter.

Additionally, in the interview teacher A identified one particular boy of the sixth form, Lukas, as receiving a quite distinct treatment than the other students, which was also reflected in some of the lessons that were observed. According to her, given that she has known this boy and also his mother for quite a long time, she almost automatically tends to treat him in a more humorous way. The following short utterance might serve as a valuable representation of their specific relationship:

Headmaster enters the classroom during the lesson in order to provide information regarding a school excursion. As usual, all students stand up upon his entering, but only one student, Lukas, does likewise when the headmaster leaves again.

Headmaster (laughing, praising him for his polite gesture): Das werd ich mir merken.

Teacher A (also laughingly): Ja, I mir a. Lukas, bist du daheim a so gut erzogen?

As far as boys' and girls' achievement in the EFL classroom is concerned, teacher A's evaluation in the interview could be confirmed by what was observed in – at least – one lesson. Teacher A ascribed the female upper secondary students better results in their written work, since they seem to write in a much more creative manner. This tendency could be noticed in the sixth form and should be exemplified by the following brief extract:

After giving back homework assignments about "How cars changed the world", teacher A asks for a volunteer to read his/her text out loud.

Teacher A: Maybe we can ask Miriam to read hers out, because it was just perfect.

Miriam reads out her story.

Two other girls (envious): Why is she using so many new words?

Teacher A: Because she learns a lot more than you do.

Kathrin (comparing her own work to Miriam's): I think I did not do it right. I think Miriam did it right.

3 Summary of Findings

The following section aims at summarising the most important findings that resulted from the empirical project that was undertaken, i.e. from both teacher interviews and classroom observations. As has already been mentioned, the findings of this small-case study cannot be generalised but always have to be considered taking into account their specific purpose and context. However, even this rather small set of findings can certainly contribute to a better understanding of gender-specific processes in the EFL classroom:

- Regarding the **preparation and organisation** of their English lessons, all but one teacher do not let themselves be influenced by the number of male and female students before they enter a classroom. However, once in a classroom some of them tend to adapt their choice of topics and material to boys' and girls' specific interests. However, much of their selection seems to strongly depend on the gender composition of the classrooms, i.e. whether male or female learners form the majority.
- As far as the analysis of both the **share of participation and interaction patterns** are concerned, the overall consensus among the teachers was that more than the students' gender has to be taken into account. In fact, above all, the learners' individual personality seems to have a huge impact on classroom utterances. The significant role that the students' character can play in a classroom could also be noticed and confirmed during the classroom observations, since at least two learners – one male and one female – made themselves heard and participated differently than others. Moreover, again the gender composition of the classroom, as well as the students' age appear to play a crucial role regarding this issue.
- Despite the fact that gender cannot be considered as the only variable influencing classroom interaction, since several factors seem to interplay, some of the teachers were able to identify certain tendencies regarding **boys' and girls' specific behaviour**: Male students are more likely to call out during their lessons, their contributions tend to be shorter and more precise and they apparently are more courageous when contributing to the lessons. Although no quantitative measures were employed during the classroom observations, the

slight tendency for boys to sometimes call out rather than raise their hands could be confirmed to a certain degree. Girls, on the other hand, appear to generally be more perfectionists, their contributions tend to be longer and less concrete, and they are more likely to search for praise and acknowledgement from the teacher.

- Concerning **teacher-student interaction and teachers' general treatment of boys and girls**, all interviewees seem to admit a certain kind of bias. Generally speaking, the four teachers would judge themselves as behaving equally towards male and female students regarding the content of the English lessons. However, they obviously tend to make differences as far as interpersonal relationships are concerned, since all four report on having a rather relaxed and humorous relationship with their male students. This special kind of relationship between the teachers and their male students could also be noticed and confirmed during the classroom observation, since teacher A was more likely to be engaged in humorous dialogues with the male rather than the female learners.
- As far as **student-student interaction** is concerned, there seems to be a huge difference between lower-secondary and upper-secondary classes. While mixed-sex groups and pairs are likely to be a problematic matter in the former, they appear to work a lot better and be more productive the older the students get. Moreover, single-sex groups tend to be characterised differently as well: All-boys groups seem to show a rather direct, more honest and harsher behaviour, whereas all-girls groups are more likely to be dominated by some kind of intrigue and exclusion. Changes in the interaction format, i.e. alternating whole-class teaching and group/pair work, can lead to a more active participation of, above all, shy girls. This phenomenon could also be observed in one of the lessons, since there was at least one girl who showed greater self-confidence and who dared to contribute to the lesson when working in a more intimate context, i.e. in a pair. However, independent from their gender, both male and female students seem to sometimes hide themselves in group work and do not necessarily work together effectively.

- Regarding the **selection of topics and preferences** for reading and writing activities, there seem to be only a few gender-specific tendencies: In some classes boys' and girls' favourite topics apparently correspond to what is "typically" considered as male and female choices. However, the teachers could not identify a general tendency concerning this issue, since their learners' selection is often a matter of both calculation, i.e. picking an easier topic which is very likely to imply less hard work instead of choosing something more demanding, and their individual maturity rather than dependent on their respective gender.
- Concerning **achievement** in their EFL classes, none of the four teachers could confirm the widely-held belief that girls are the better language learners. Both sexes seem to be equally able to achieve good results in English. However, their different ways of tackling certain issues obviously influences their results: Girls, on the one hand, appear to be more assiduous, perfectionist and more precise in their learning, whereas boys, on the other hand, tend to be more courageous and more adventurous, especially in their oral performances, and also much less likely to take errors personally. Moreover, while female learners appear to write in a more creative and more sophisticated manner, and sometimes also surpass their male peers as far as pronunciation and intonation are concerned, male students obviously have an advantage regarding grammatical activities. The female students' slight superiority regarding written work could also be noticed during the classroom observations, given that there was one situation in which a girl clearly achieved better results in a written assignment; however, one has to be aware of the fact that this girl did not only surpass her male peers, but also her female.
- Both sexes seem to have a very positive **attitude** towards the language and apparently perceive English as being important for their present and future lives. However, girls tend to be more interested in learning more foreign languages, since they often consider these as being decisive and necessary requirements for their future jobs.
- As far as gender-specific **learning styles and strategies** are concerned, none of the four teachers assumes her insight into this field as detailed enough in order to make firm judgements about it. However, they would ascribe their

female students a more structured and organised way of learning, and as having a more strategic manner of tackling certain issues.

- Regarding the composition of **EFL resources**, all four interviewees highly agree upon the fact that modern textbooks and other material have undergone enormous changes and improved as far as gender stereotypes and biased representations are concerned. However, these changes do not necessarily have an advantage for the lessons, since they sometimes tend to counteract the former beliefs and depictions in an exaggerated manner. Moreover, it is sometimes the students themselves who contribute to the perpetuation of biased portrayals of men and women, given that they often keep being influenced by and conform to the traditional expectations. This perpetuation of gender stereotypes on the part of the students could also be noticed during the classroom observations, since there was a situation in which a group of learners clearly identified typical boys' and girls' activities. However, also the reverse case could be observed – although on the part of the teacher –, since she once made her learners aware of a biased portrayal in a picture.
- Concerning the **general emancipation** of female students in their classrooms, there seems to be an overall consensus among the four teachers that the girls have caught up with their male peers on all aspects of classroom and also interpersonal interaction. Nevertheless, above all male students frequently express negative feelings regarding the issue of emancipation, since they tend to be confronted with the topic too often.

4 Discussion

The following section aims at connecting the empirical data that resulted from both teacher interviews and classroom observations with the theoretical background, i.e. with the most important research findings from the last decades that were discussed and analysed in the first half of this diploma thesis. Generally speaking, most results of the empirical project are fairly consistent with those recorded in the literature that was consulted. However, some new and very interesting insights into the field of gender-specific processes in the EFL classroom have been gained. It is the intention of this penultimate chapter to present and compare the most decisive findings of the present study by referring back to theory and earlier research:

One of the most important and repeatedly mentioned issues seems to be the postmodern notion of not viewing gender as a concept that is a clear-cut masculine-feminine binary, but as something that is enormously influenced by diversity, as well as by contextual and discursive/performative circumstances (cf. Swann 1998 and 2005, Talbot 2005, Freed 1996 and 2008, Holmes and Meyerhoff 2005, Bergvall 1996, Butler 1990: 139, Sunderland 2000). This significance of diversity, context and performativity has already been thoroughly examined and discussed by various researchers: One of the earliest scholars who dealt with gender was Butler (cf. 1990), who considered gender as a highly performative act whose meaning is constantly being constructed. A similar idea was expressed by Holmes and Meyerhoff (cf. 2005) as well as by Sunderland (cf. 2000) and Freed (cf. 2008), since they also stress the fact that gender is not something strictly determined and fixed in its meaning, but rather subject to great variability, flux and individuality. Their scientific findings were also reflected in the four teachers' evaluation of gender teaching and learning processes as well as in the classroom observations: The present study revealed that neither boys nor girls fit neatly into the group of men and women, respectively; rather they should be seen as heterogeneous groups that act and behave differently in distinct situations, including classroom interaction, participation and conversational behaviour.

Moreover, gender should not be seen as a totally independent category in classroom discourse, but as strongly relating to and interplaying with other variables such as the students' age, their personality and their individual background (cf. Tannen 1996, Eckert 1998). Several times, the teachers could not clearly ascribe a particular behavioural pattern to a student's male or female gender, but they rather agreed upon the fact that more than one factor has to be taken into account, e.g. the students' character and their family background. Furthermore, both theory and practice revealed that a mere focus on gender differences does not allow for a complete picture of the classroom situation, since male and female learners might frequently behave and act in very similar ways (cf. Sunderland 2004, Marsh, Martin, Cheng 2008). More than once, the interviewees had difficulties in clearly discerning girls' and boys' distinct behavioural patterns, given that both sexes seem to show resembling behaviour on several accounts. This was also reflected in the classroom observations, as sometimes the male and female students appeared to make use of much the same strategies, e.g. to contribute, to take a turn and the like, and did not merely attract my attention through their different (re)actions.

Furthermore, there seems to be an overlap between the empirical data and the afore discussed theory as far as males' and females' contributions in the EFL lessons are concerned. It was mainly stressed by Sunderland (cf. 2000) that a mere quantitative superiority in participation does not necessarily lead to an advantaged position regarding the English lessons, since there obviously is an enormous difference between content-related/academic and other/non-academic turns (also cf. Sadker et al. 1982 referred to in Yenez 1994, Howe 1997, Duffy, Warren, Walsh 2001, Jones and Dindia 2004): Boys who are reprimanded more often or engaged in funny discourse with the teacher and, consequently, receive more teacher attention on a quantitative level, do not automatically have an advantage in learning, since the actual content of the interactions certainly plays a significant role. This was also confirmed by some of the interviewees, given that although their male students seem to frequently outnumber the girls in their interactions, e.g. by making a funny comment, by joking with the teacher, or by being disciplined, this does not necessarily make them the better or the more successful learners. Apart from that, the overall

consensus seems to be that boys and girls contribute differently to the lessons. Both earlier studies – among these the extensive meta-analytic study of Kramarae (cf. 1977 referred to in Swann 1992) – and the present findings reveal that while male students have been found to provide shorter and more precise answers, their female peers tend to talk longer and in a more detailed way, yet also slightly more sophisticated (also cf. Sunderland 1998 and 2000).

Moreover, the interviewees' evaluation seems to correspond with the results of earlier research concerning the interaction in single-sex groups, especially with the study by Davies (cf. 2003): All-girls groups seem to be characterised by more collaborative and cooperative interactive patterns, whereas all-boys groups tend to be organised in a rather hierarchical and competitive manner (cf. *ibid*). Moreover, the latter appear to place greater importance on proving their "proper" masculinity and hence their membership in the male group, than the former, who prefer working together with other girls in an effective and productive way (cf. *ibid*). Both Davies and one of the present interviewees argue that boys frequently seem to be more interested in showing "proper" male behaviour rather than deal with the content of an activity or actively engage in the lessons, given that they want to avoid the risk of being a victim of mockery or ridicule (cf. *ibid*). Since no particular attention was paid to single-sex interaction during the classroom observations, no valuable judgement can be made on these accounts. However, generally speaking, group and pair work seemed to work quite well in both classes that were observed – independent from the sex of the learners – as the students appear to have very relaxed and friendly relationships.

Regarding the gender-specific choice of topics and male and female learners' reading and writing preferences, the interviewees seem to only partly agree with the findings of other studies (compare Swann 1992 and 1998). Although they notice certain tendencies for boys and girls to choose particular topics, these selections do not necessarily have to do with their respective gender, but rather with their individual maturity and their calculation, i.e. their preference for easier tasks or less demanding homework assignments. However, the overall impression gained by both earlier and the present study shows that it is often the teachers themselves who influence and judge their male and female

learners' choices and who tend to sometimes maintain boys' interests rather than girls' (cf. *ibid*). Apart from that, students sometimes can hardly avoid the development of their specific interests into a certain direction, since they often keep being influenced by biased portrayals of men and women on a daily basis (cf. Swann 1992). This phenomenon could also be observed in some of the lessons, given that there were situations in which the learners – independent from the comment or treatment of the teacher – showed what might be called a rather “stereotypical reaction”, e.g. to the portrayal of men's and women's leisure time activities.

Comparing former and present analyses of classroom material, there seem to have been tremendous changes: While older resources, especially before the turn of the century, appear to have been dominated by highly stereotypical and imbalanced gender representations, modern EFL textbooks – *More!* and *Laser* are mentioned by the interviewees – have developed into showing a much more contemporary picture of men and women (cf. Swann 1992, Subrahmanian 2005, Sadker, Sadker and Klein 1991, Sunderland 2000). Moreover, teacher treatment of texts or other classroom material seems to play a role in the understanding and perpetuation of gender stereotypes (cf. Sunderland 2000, Peterson and Lach 1990): Both theory and, above all, the classroom observations revealed that a teacher's conscious treatment of gender bias in classroom resources might raise students' awareness and can influence their development in a positive way – even if this conscious treatment only consists of a minor hint at a one-sided image. Moreover, it is not only the teachers, who can have an impact on the perception of gender-issues in the classroom, but also the learners themselves, who tackle texts and other material being equipped with a whole range of ideas, attitudes and background knowledge (cf. *ibid*).

Similar to former research on differences in learning styles and strategies, the present small-case study could not identify clear-cut gender-specific distinctions (cf. Oxford 1995, Felder and Henriques 1995, Montgomery and Groat 1998). Nevertheless, there seems to be an agreement between earlier and the present findings concerning certain tendencies for male and female students: The former are reported to show greater field-independency and hence said to have

an advantage in analytic activities, for example grammatical exercises, while the latter appear to be more field-dependent and, therefore, oriented more globally (cf. Oxford 1994 and 1995). Moreover, both former and present research reveal that girls, on average, tend to tackle learning issues in a more strategic manner (cf. Green, Oxford 1995, Sunderland 1992, Ehrman and Oxford 1980, Watanabe 1990, Sy 1994). However, since there was no explicit focus on language learning styles and strategies in the classroom observations, no valuable judgement can be made on these accounts.

Comparing former and present results regarding gender-specific achievement in the EFL classroom, two slightly different pictures are conveyed. Neither girls nor boys were identified as the better or higher-achieving gender in the Austrian EFL context. Contrary to some earlier studies (cf. Swann 1992, McCarthy 2010, Gur, Bockow and Gur 2010), the more recent findings revealed that both male and female learners are equally talented and able to achieve good results in English – at least what can be deduced from the classes of these four teachers. Despite the fact that the latter sometimes tend to succeed earlier, since they are said to be the more assiduous and careful learners, the widespread belief that they are the better language learners could not be confirmed, but rather ascribed to what Sunderland named “educational folklore” (cf. 1992). However, the interviewees seem to agree upon the fact that there are certain fields in which either male or female students appear to show better results: Girls, on average, tend to write the more creative and sophisticated stories, since they show greater eagerness to express themselves and share their imagination with others. This slight advantage in writing could also be noticed during the classroom observations, since the girls’ written homework assignments were more likely to receive more positive feedback from the teacher. Boys, on the other hand, appear to be more courageous and self-confident regarding oral performances, given that they do not always focus on the correctness of their answers and do not demand perfection from themselves. This advantage of male learners was also discussed by Chavez in her study of American University students of German (cf. 2000).

5 Conclusion and Future Research

The overall aim of this diploma thesis was to examine and analyse gender-related teaching and learning processes in education, especially in EFL classrooms, not only on the theoretical level, but also – and above all – with the help of a small empirical study carried out in an Austrian grammar school setting.

The intention of the theoretical discussion was twofold: On the one hand, it aimed at familiarising the reader with general issues and concepts regarding language and gender, and on the other hand, it was demonstrated in how far these general approaches are reflected within the educational context. In fact, the first part of this diploma thesis concentrated on the following main topics: Firstly, theoretical approaches to gender-specific language, language learning, and language learning styles and strategies were presented. Secondly, it aimed at providing an insight into the field of gender and learning material starting with an interdisciplinary overview and proceeding to the more specific foreign language classroom. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, it focused on the educational setting itself, again beginning with issues as far as the general classroom discourse is concerned, and gradually advancing to the foreign language classroom.

The second part of this diploma thesis exclusively focused on the two-week empirical small-case study carried out at a Lower Austrian grammar school, i.e. on both classroom observations and teacher interviews. The main intention of this empirical project was to find evidence and – possibly – counterevidence for the various findings that have been reported by researchers within the field of gender, language and education. More specifically, it presented four teachers' perspectives on and experiences with gender-related processes in the EFL classroom, and also focused on the data that was collected during the classroom observations which should serve as an additional support of the interviewees' arguments and hypotheses.

Both theoretical and practical findings revealed that there are certain communicational and general behavioural patterns specific to male and female learners, which have to be taken into account when working in the teaching

profession: Boys and girls often tackle learning situations in different ways and sometimes also contribute distinctly to classroom discourse. Male and female students appear to act and interact in a certain manner and have particular preferences as far as topic selection and interests are concerned. However, when it comes to analysing the educational setting, and, more specifically, the EFL classroom, gender is obviously only one of the various factors that interrelate and interplay. In fact, the behaviour of the individual students is said to be not only a matter of gender, but strongly dependent on other variables such as age, personality, social background and ethnicity. Moreover, apart from focusing on gender-specific differences in the educational context, one has to bear in mind that male and female learners may be very similar regarding certain issues, such as the general attitude towards the English language or achievement. Furthermore, people have to be made aware of the fact that it is not only the students who influence the classroom events, but that it is often the teachers themselves who have an impact on or even perpetuate existing gender-specific behaviour.

Although this empirical project can certainly contribute to the field of gender-specific research and to the understanding of gender-related teaching and learning processes in the EFL classroom, one has to be aware of the fact that it cannot be considered as representative as other studies, since only two particular EFL classes were observed and only four teachers were interviewed. Therefore, even though a small contribution may widen the understanding of gender processes in the EFL classroom, the results cannot be claimed to have general validity, but should only be considered having in mind the limited context and purpose of this small-case study.

Reconsidering both theoretical and practical discussions, the following suggestions for future investigation might arise: Since the majority of studies within the field of gender-specific research focused on the general educational setting, further studies on the EFL classroom would be desirable. Moreover, given that gender does not necessarily imply a strictly masculine-feminine binary, future analyses could focus in depth on what learners – independent from their gender – actually have in common instead of merely emphasizing in which ways male and female students differ. Furthermore, as classroom climate

and students' individual personalities seem to have an enormous impact on learners' behaviour, it might be interesting to investigate these along with the many other variables that interplay and influence educational discourse.

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7 German Abstract

Das Ziel der vorliegenden Diplomarbeit ist es, die wichtigsten Themen und Forschungsergebnisse in Bezug auf *gender* im schulischen Kontext zu präsentieren und aufzuzeigen, inwiefern vor allem der Fremdsprachenunterricht durch gender-spezifische Verhaltensweisen beeinflusst wird. Neben der Diskussion allgemeiner Konzepte und Theorien bezüglich Sprache, *Gender* und Bildung befasst sich diese Arbeit vor allem mit dem Unterricht selbst und versucht, die möglichen Auswirkungen von *gender* auf Lehr- und Lernprozesse zu veranschaulichen. Einerseits werden theoretische Zugänge zu gender-typischer Sprache, Spracherwerb und Lernstrategien präsentiert und andererseits die Präsenz von *gender* im Lehrmaterial aufgezeigt. Der Fokus dieser Arbeit liegt auf gender-spezifischer Interaktion sowie allgemeinen Verhaltensmustern, die fächerübergreifend – vor allem aber im Fremdsprachenunterricht – eine Rolle spielen. Der Inhalt dieser Arbeit stützt sich nicht nur auf theoretisches Wissen aus dem Gebiet der Gender-Forschung, sondern auch auf die Ergebnisse eines eigens durchgeführten empirischen Projektes an einem österreichischen Gymnasium.

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