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M.A. Thesis in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

AN INVESTIGATION INTO GENDER REPRESENTATION IN *TOUCHSTONE* EFL TEXTBOOKS

By

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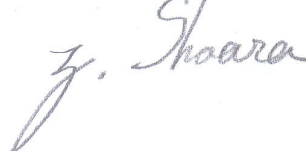
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In The Name of

God

DECLARATION

I – Zahra Shoara (888592) – an M.A. student of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at the Faculty of Literature and Humanities, hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own research, and that I have provided exact references wherever I have quoted someone. I also declare that the topic of my research is an original one and has not been worked upon before. I hereby promise not to publish the findings of this research and not to make it accessible to others without the permission of Shiraz University. Shiraz University holds the copyright on this research.

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ZAHRA SHOARA

THESIS

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Abstract

An Investigation Into Gender Representation
in *Touchstone* EFL Textbooks

By
Zahra Shoara

This study was an attempt to investigate gender representation and to explore the status of sexism in current EFL textbooks. To this end, two types of analysis were performed to examine the probable manifestations of sexist attitudes and values in Touchstone textbook series which are used to cater for and respond to the English language needs of Iranian students at a number of Institutes. With the help of Porreca's (1984) framework, first, a systematic quantitative analysis was carried out with reference to the occurrence of males and females in both texts and illustrations, firstness of each sex and order in pairs, the related occupational roles, and masculine generic construction. Secondly, a qualitative inquiry was made into sex-linked job possibilities, and female/male presentation through nouns and adjectives in conversations and visuals. Results revealed that the textbook series under investigation cannot be considered sexist since they do not present students with an unfair and inexcusable picture of women. The present research can be a hopeful step towards the development of guidelines for nonsexist design of textbooks and to make teachers and publishers aware of avoiding sexist bias in textbooks.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Introduction

This chapter aims at explaining the relationship between language and sexism, and the effects sexist linguistic has on English textbooks. To do this, first, textbook evaluation and different methods of it will be explained very briefly. Afterwards, the term "sexism" is further explained, which is the key concept within this study. Then, linguistic sexism is explained as one form of sexism. And finally some of the specific ways in which sexist attitudes are conveyed through the language in textbooks are presented. Since the focus of the present study is on investigating male-as-norm elements in the Touchstone series, Porreca's model (1984) has been chosen in order to find the pattern of representation of femininity and masculinity in these EFL textbooks. Her framework is described, and following that, the objective of the study is discussed in detail along with the research questions and the significance of doing such research.

1.1. Preliminaries

To those involved in English Language teaching (ELT), the term "textbook" is a familiar. Impacted in the miscellany of teaching materials available in the market, the task of choosing the right material seems to be a challenging one. Among all necessary qualifications of a textbook, this research picks a psycho-sociological trend and focuses on the equal treatment of the two sexes in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbook. Sexism is a controversial issue, and it is more so when it comes to educational debates. Investigating how educational material portrays the two genders can contribute to discovering the probability of gender imbalance. Removing sexism from textbooks and developing gender-neutral texts has received the attention of researchers and material designers particularly during the last couple of decades (Hartman & Judd, 1978; Jones et al., 1997; Bayyurt & Litosseliti, 2006). Any kind of studies, including qualitative and quantitative, aiming at recognizing the issue of gender bias can add to the current body of research regarding sexism.

1.2. Textbook Evaluation

Textbooks are widely considered a key component in most language programs they serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive, and the language practice that takes place in the classroom. Textbooks should be seen as teacher's servant and not his master (Cunnigsworth, 1984). Yet due to the growth of the ESL publishing market, teachers should be increasingly knowledgeable and sophisticated in sorting through the masses of books available. This stands out the need for evaluating textbooks from different angles of view. Tomlinson defines textbook evaluation as:

"The systematic appraisal of the value of materials in relation to their objectives of the learners using them."

(Tomlinson, 1998, xi)

In Littlejohn's (1998) viewpoint when comparing a description of a textbook with the description of the context in order to establish whether that textbook might be suitable for that context we are evaluating.

Textbook evaluation has been studied from different research perspectives. A popular classification is that of Ellis (1998) who identified tow broad approaches in textbook evaluation:

a) Objective method, which is concerned with determining whether the textbook has achieved its goals through quantitative methods.

b) Responsive evaluation, which tends to base its judgments of textbook value under responses of a vast amount of stakeholders learning process including the teacher, the learners, and the administrators. This approach has a close relationship with qualitative method.

1.2.1. Methods of Textbook Evaluation

In general, three basic methods are discerned in the literature on textbook evaluation. McGrath (2002) refers to them as impressionistic, the checklist, and the in-depth methods.

The impressionistic method is concerned to obtain a general impression of the material. As Cunningsworth's (1995:1) suggests, such an overview typically involves glancing at the publisher's blurb (i.e. the brief description of the book on the back cover), and at the content page (for an indication of the syllabus type and coverage), and then skimming through the book looking at organization, layout, topics, and visuals.

The checklist method: The limitations of the impressionistic method lead to the emergence of an alternative tool of assessment in which a checklist becomes the point of departure. This method, which makes good use of a checklist

to evaluate materials,

The in-depth method, as explained by McGrath (2002: 27-28),
"go beneath the publisher's and author's claims to look at, for instance, the kind of language description, underlying assumptions about learning or values   on which   the materials are based on."

In a broader sense, this method seeks to find out whether the materials are likely to live up to the claims being made for them. Specific procedures recommended include a focus on specific features (Cunningsworth, 1995), a close analysis of one or more extracts (Hutchinson, 1987), or a thorough examination of several units using predetermined questions (Johnson, 1986). This method was used in the current study to investigate whether Touchstone was qualified for the job of equal treatment of sexes.

1.3. Sexism

The Bulletin of Linguistic Society of America defines sexism as practices that "contribute to demeaning or ignoring women (or men) or to stereotyping either sex; sexism is often not a matter of intention but of effect." (LSA bulletin, 1996, p. 68)

  Sexism is manifested through gender stereotypes which are considered those judgments, feelings, comments and images ignoring the reality of individual differences and producing normative, standard values and common prejudices (Swann, Langlois, and Gilbert, 1998).

  Sexism or gender discrimination gives the belief that there are characteristics implicit to one's gender that indirectly affects one's abilities in unrelated areas. Sexism involves <u>hatred</u> of, or <u>prejudice</u> towards a gender as a whole or the blind application of gender <u>stereotypes</u> (Sugino, 1998).

  Sexism can be rooted in cultural traditions, fear, hatred, or superiority. Many sexists believe that their gender is superior, for a variety of reasons. Although many countries have designed laws to thwart sexism in places like the workplace, sexism often influences the society to the extent that sexist attitudes cannot be easily shaken off. The far-reaching effects of sexism in society, have made it a complex field to study.

  Sexism can also be rooted in parental behaviors. Some experts believe that parents play an important role in the creation of values and perceptions of their children. The fact that many girls are asked to help their mothers do housework, while many boys do technical tasks with their fathers, seems to influence their

behavior and can sometimes discourage girls from performing such tasks. Girls will then think that each gender should have a specific role and behavior.

Sexist attitudes support different forms of discrimination, most of which are against women. For instance, occupational sexism refers to any discriminatory practices, statements, actions, etc. based on a person's sex that occurs in a place of employment. One form of occupational sexism is wage discrimination. Women frequently earn significantly lower wages than their male counterparts for the same job. Surprisingly, in 1833 women working in factories earned only one-quarter of men's wages and they made up most of the less meaningful, less skillful jobs such as working in daycares, child care industries and health aide industries. Many women have been excluded from participation in a lot of professions (Parks & Roberton, 2004). The assumption of baby delivery roles by doctors and subsequent decline of midwifery is sometimes claimed to be an example (Glass, 1993). Professional discrimination continues today.

The most common form of discrimination is the basis of gender which can take a wide variety of forms. For example, some people believe that women should stay at home to focus on the upbringing of children and keeping a house, rather than pursuing professional careers. Also others may feel that men should not pursue "women's work" such as nursing, teaching, or homemaking.

Sexism also exists within a gender. In other words the criticism can be from the members of the same gender in addition to criticism from the outside, for example when women criticize each other for being too masculine. In this situation, using crude slang terms can be the manifestation of sexism in language.

according to studies done by Cornell University and others (Garrick Blalock, Jed DeVaro, Stephanie Leventhal & Daniel H. Simon, 2007), It has been hypothesized that gender bias has been influencing even the publishing of scientific research. Budden (2008) proved that almost 10 percent of female authors get their papers published when their gender is hidden.

The term sexism has many different sub-categories among which linguistic sexism is the focus of the present study.

1.3.1. Linguistic Sexism and Gender-Specific Language

Spender (1985) believed that exploring the relationship of language and reality is the only way that can help women begin to make their own world independently. Kleinman (2000) argued that this relationship is mutual. Removing women from language leads to removing them from society.

According to Henley (1987), Gomard (1995), West et al. (1997) and Romaine (1999), sexism in language in general comes in three major forms, a)language ignores women, b)it defines them as less significant than men, and c)it out rightly

deprecates the female.

Sakita (1995), Sunderland (1994) and Renner (1997) academically claimed that the English language is sexist. Possessing male-as-norm elements, it ignores or obscures women by allowing masculine terms to be used specifically to refer to males and generically to refer to human beings in general. English speakers and writers have traditionally been taught to use masculine nouns and pronouns in situations where the gender of their subject is unclear or variable, or when a group to which they are referring contains members of both sexes. Students were mostly taught that the word "men" in the context includes both males and females.

Linguistic sexism can also be expressed in a pseudo-subtle manner through the attachment of terms which have negative gender-oriented implications.

The deprecation of women has been the most important goal of linguistic sexism. For instance, Nilsen (1977) and Dundes (1976) drew their attention to the comparison of women to food through slang or terms of endearment such as "dish, cookie, tart, cheesecake, sugar and spice, cute tomato, honey and sweetie pie". As they argued, these slangs underscore the edibility of women.

Sexist language and gender stereotyping do not only disparage, but can also lower the dignity of one group of people, usually women and girls. If left unchecked, these negative norms of behavior and attitude could be institutionalized and gradually become part of our social and cultural code. (Keong, 2007)

Many studies have been done on this issue, and also a lot of efforts have been made to remove such phenomenon. According to what Porreca (1984) asserted, the sociolinguistic issue of sexism, or sexual stereotyping, first appeared in the seventies and the examination of ESL/EFL educational materials for their gender bias started in the late seventies. A committee was formed in 1971 called The National Council of Teachers of English, whose main consideration was the role and image of women in the council and the profession. This committee encouraged the use of nonsexist language, particularly through a number of publications and periodicals.

Since then, sociolinguists have fundamentally shown a great deal of interest in sex/language relationship. Many publishers and scholastic organizations, such as APA, published and revised guidelines which identified the areas of bias and suggested alternatives for authors and editors to consider when writing or approving new material. (Foresman, 1972; Hill, 1974)

Recently, much of research on language and sex relationship has been mainly concerned with the role language plays in locating and maintaining women in a disadvantageous position in society (O'Barr & Atkins, 1980; Gomm, 1981; Holmes, 1986; Guy *et al*., 1986; Cameron & Coates, 1988; Eckert, 1989; Tannen,

1990; McLemore, 1991; Macaulay & Brice, 1994, 1997). Most of these surveys especially the academic ones have been done on sexism in English textbooks (Gershuny, 1977, 1989; Worby, 1979; DeShazer, 1981; Nielsen, 1988). ESL and EFL materials have been the center of the attention regarding this issue and many studies have addressed such materials (Hartman & Judd, 1978; Hellinger, 1980; Porreca, 1984; Sunderland, 1992).

1.3.2. Sexist usage of language in textbooks

Since the textbook is one of the most prevalent educational tools used in classrooms and students gain a lot of experience through high exposures to textbooks, care should be taken to any kind of bias or possible destructive elements that might be found. One such element is sexism. Textbooks play a very important role in EFL education since it is generally through textbooks that learners get acquainted with the target language culture and values.

If sexism or gender biases are present in the learners' text, therefore, that harmful information could also be conveyed to them without their knowledge. Recent research findings indicate a strong presence of gender bias and linguistic sexism in the language and content of educational materials such as textbooks and practice books (Keong, 2007).

A clear definition of sexism in textbooks claims that "Textbooks are sexist if they omit the actions and achievements of women, if they demean women by using patronizing language or if they show women and men only in stereotyped roles with less than the full range of human interests, traits, and capabilities" (Scott, Foresman, 1972).

Obviously, students must receive adequate instruction on avoiding sexist language, particularly in textbooks intended to help them develop and refine their language skills. Many textbooks influence students by using the preferences of different organizations and in this way, they make the radical terms seem quite acceptable. Using the word "chairman" for both sexes can be an obvious example, while it has been accepted for decades that a female presiding officer may be addressed "Madam Chairman". (Nielsen, 1988) Textbooks, however, should do more than simply reflect the preferences of "many organizations".

1.3.3. Some solutions to the problem

Henley (1975) argues both that linguistic change is not only possible and desirable but can happen relatively quickly under certain types of social pressure and that asking or requiring people to avoid linguistic sexism is not equivalent to censorship.

Renshaw (2002) suggested that by avoiding sexist teachers of language

and composition, we "care more about people than about words" (1983: 227). Through this, she aims at making both writers and readers aware of the fact that sexist language in English can and does extend beyond the use of pronouns and occupational descriptors. Although the possibility for sexist language may be nearly universal, it is appropriate that sexism be eliminated in formal speech and writing.

Regarding course content and materials, some valuable tips have been pointed out to make instructors less bias. Selecting texts and readings whose language is gender-neutral and free of stereotypes can be the best solution. In fact, one of the primary goals of education is to show students different points of view and encourage them to evaluate their own beliefs. So emphasizing the importance of considering different approaches and viewpoints can be another helpful point.

1.4. Theoretical framework

Porreca's (1984) framework studies several different aspects of gender bias, namely, omission, firstness, number and diversity of occupational roles, nouns and adjectives, and masculine generic constructions, which together show how females and males are depicted in the text. Each of these categories will be briefly explained below.

Omission: All occurrences of females and males, i.e. the sex-linked nouns, proper names, titles, and non-generic pronouns in the text, and depiction of males and females in illustrations will be counted.

Firstness: The order of mentioning two nouns paired for sex, like *Mr.* and *Mrs.*, *husband* and *wife*, and *brother* and *sister* will be investigated to see if the masculine word comes first as the usual biased pattern.

Number and diversity of occupations: the total number of times where women and man were portrayed in occupational roles in both text and illustrations will be tabulated. Also the total number of different occupations for men and women will be counted.

Nouns: the total number of occurrences of every noun designating a female or a male will be recorded. Cases in which pairs or several female/male noun sets appear in sentences will be examined as well. This way, nouns which occurred most often for each sex will be noted.

Adjectives: to explore the stereotyped images of males and females with concrete data, adjectives used with each gender will be recorded along with their frequencies. Porreca categories adjectives (found in her study) under eleven

headings: Physical Appearance (e.g. tall, beautiful); Intellect/Education (e.g. bright, stupid); Emotionality/State of Mind (e.g. sad, calm); physical State/Condition (e.g. strong, tired); personality, traits (e.g. friendly, disagreeable); Age (e.g. old, young); Environmentally Descriptive (e.g. rich, poor); Rapport/Reputation (e.g. great, unpopular); normality/ Deviance (e.g. normal, strange); ability (e.g. Capable, incapable); and Environmentally Induced (e.g. lucky, restricted).

Masculine generic constructions: Constructions such as *man, mankind, everyone… he*, or *policeman* will be looked for throughout the texts.

1.5. Objectives of the study

In this study, the researcher attempts to examine some of the specific ways in which sexism is conveyed through gender stereotypes and biases in a series of EFL textbooks published under the supervision of the Iranian Ministry of Education. The present work seeks to present the pattern of representation of femininity and masculinity in Touchstone EFL textbook series with the help of Porreca's (1984) framework. The bases of analysis in the current quantitative study are all the dialogues and their accompanying visuals which are scattered in different parts of every unit through the whole series. Throughout this analysis every activity or illustration which was attributed to men or women as the norm and shaped by the traditional beliefs and false assumptions, was pinpointed.

1.6. Research Questions

The answers to the following questions are sought:
- Are there any dominant patterns for representing males and females in Touchstone textbooks?
- Does this EFL textbook series over-represent one gender role to the expense of the other?