

IN THE NAME OF GOD

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Faculty of Literature, History and Languages

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Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language
(TEFL)**

Title:

**Gender Representation in EFL Materials: An Analysis of
English Textbooks of Iranian High Schools**

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to

my father in a loving memory,

my mother with gratitude,

my husband with love,

and my daughter, Melina, who gave joy and meaning to life.

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Abstract

Gender Representation in EFL Materials: An Analysis of English Textbooks of Iranian High Schools

The issue of gender and language has been taken into consideration in EFL education for about three decades because gender plays an important role in language education. The issue of gender and language can be examined from different perspectives, the most important of which can be sexism, i.e. unfair treatment of females and males in EFL material. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to examine different areas of gender-bias(sexism) in representation of women and men in 3 volumes of English textbooks taught at high schools of Iran.

The findings revealed that the manifestation of women and men in these textbooks was not fair, i.e. the presence of men was more highlighted than women regarding nouns, names, pronouns and adjectives attributed to them. Moreover, women and men were not equally treated regarding occupational roles, i.e. women were usually represented in traditional and stereotypical occupations, but men were manifested in high-status occupations. Also, the diversity of occupational roles of men was more than those of women.

In regards to ‘firstness’ also, male-attributed terms came first more frequently than the female-attributed terms. Furthermore, there were many sentences which had male-generics in which women were often ignored.

The research is concluded by providing some guidelines to avoid gender-bias language, such as using gender-neutral(gender-inclusive, gender-free) terms, and in general giving equal space to both genders in EFL material.

Key words: gender-neutral, sexism(gender-bias), occupational roles, male-generic terms, firstness

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Abstract.....	vii
List of Tables.....	xii
List of Figures.....	xv
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1-14
1.1. Overview.....	1
1.2. Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study.....	7
1.3. Significance and Justification of the Study.....	8
1.4. Research Questions and Null Hypotheses.....	9
1.5. Operational Definition of the Key Terms.....	11
1.6. (De)Limitations of the Study.....	13
Chapter Two: Review of the Related Literature.....	15-61
2.1. Introduction.....	15
2.2. History of the Study of Gender and Language.....	20

2.3. Gender and Sex.....	24
2.4. Sexism.....	26
2.4.1. Male-Biased Words.....	30
2.4.2. Women’s and Men’s Speech.....	33
2.4.3. Male-Generic Terms.....	39
2.4.4. Titles.....	47
2.4.5. Occupational Roles.....	51
2.4.6. Firstness.....	57
2.4.7. Males as the Main Characters.....	59

Chapter Three: Method.....62-75

3.1. Introduction.....	62
3.2. Corpus.....	63
3.3. Instrumentation.....	66
3.4. Procedure.....	66
3.4.1. Names, Nouns, Pronouns, Adjectives.....	67
3.4.1.1. Names.....	67
3.4.1.2. Nouns.....	68
3.4.1.3. Pronouns.....	68
3.4.1.4. Adjectives.....	68

3.4.2. The Occupational Roles of Males and Females.....	70
3.4.3. Frequency of Each of the Occupational Roles.....	72
3.4.4. First-Place Occurrences.....	72
3.5. Design.....	74
3.6. Data Analysis.....	74

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion.....76-113

4.1. Introduction.....	76
4.2. Null Hypothesis 1.....	77
4.2.1. Null Hypothesis 1.1.....	77
4.2.2. Null Hypothesis 1.2.....	92
4.2.3. Null Hypothesis 1.3.....	101
4.2.4. Null Hypothesis 1.4.....	107
4.3. Other Areas of Gender-Bias.....	110
4.3.1. Stereotypical Occupations.....	111
4.3.2. Reading Passages.....	111
4.3.3. Male-Generics.....	112
4.3.4. Males and Females Animals.....	113

Chapter Five: Conclusion, Implications and Suggestions.....	114-121
5.1. Overview.....	114
5.2. Conclusion.....	114
5.3. Summary of Findings.....	116
5.4. Pedagogical Implications.....	118
5.5. Suggestions for Further Research.....	120
References.....	122-130
Appendixes.....	131-137

List of Tables

- Table 4.1. Number of Occurrences of Characters Referring to Males and Females for Volume 1(Birjandi et al., 2006) 79
- Table 4.2.Frequency of Words Attributed to Males and Females in Volume 1 82
- Table 4.3. Chi-Square(Vol.1) 82
- Table 4.4. Number of Occurrences of Characters Referring to Males and Females for Volume 2 83
- Table 4.5.Frequency of Words Attributed to Males and Females in Volume 2 86
- Table 4.6. Chi-Square(Vol.2) 86
- Table 4.7. Number of Occurrences of Characters Referring to Males and Females for Volume 3 87
- Table 4.8. Frequency of Words Attributed to Males and Females in Volume 3 89
- Table 4.9. Chi-Square(Vol.3) 90
- Table 4.10. Frequency of Names, Nouns, Pronouns and Adjectives Attributed to Females and Males in Volumes 1, 2 & 3 of English Textbooks of Iranian High Schools 91
- Table 4.11. Frequency of Words Attributed to Males and Females in the Three Volumes of English Textbooks of Iranian High Schools 91
- Table 4.12. Chi-Square Test of Three Volumes 91

Table 4.13. Number of Instances of Males and Females Portrayed in Occupational Roles in Volume 1	93
Table 4.14. Number of Instances of Males and Females Portrayed in Occupational Roles in Volume 2	93
Table 4.15. Number of Instances of Males and Females Portrayed in Occupational Roles in Volume 3	94
Table 4.16. Number of Instances of Males and Females Portrayed in Occupational Roles in Volumes 1,2 & 3 Collectively	95
Table 4.17. Number of Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Vol.1	97
Table 4.18. Results of Chi-Square Test of Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Vol.1	97
Table 4.19. Number of Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Vol.2	98
Table 4.20. Results of Chi-Square Test of Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Vol.2	98
Table 4.21. Number of Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Vol.3	98
Table 4.22. Results of Chi-Square Test of Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Vol.3	99
Table 4.23. Number of Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Volumes 1, 2 and 3	99
Table 4.24. Results of Chi-Square Test of Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Volumes 1, 2 and 3	99
Table 4.25. Occupational Roles in the Questionnaire	101
Table 4.26. The Frequency of Each of Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Vol.1	104

Table 4.27. Chi-Squares of Each of the Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Vol.1	104
Table 4.28. The Frequency of Each of the Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Vol.2	105
Table 4.29. Chi-Squares of Each of the Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Vol.2	105
Table 4.30. Frequency of Each of the Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Vol.3	105
Table 4.31. Chi-Squares of Each of the Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Vol.3	106
Table 4.32. Frequency of Each of the Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Volumes 1, 2, and 3 Collectively	106
Table 4.33. Chi-Squares of Each of the Occupational Roles of Females and Males in Volumes 1,2 and 3 Collectively	106
Table 4.34. The Frequency of First-Place Occurrences of Males and Females in Instructions, Exercises or Sentences	108
Table 4.35. Frequency of First-Place Occurrences of Females and Males	109
Table 4.36. Chi-Square of First-Place Occurrences of Females and Males	109
Table 4.37. First-Place Occurrences in the Questionnaire	110

List of Figures

- Figure 4.1. Distribution of the percentage of names, nouns, pronouns and adjectives in both females and males in volume 1 of English textbooks of Iranian high schools 80
- Figure 4.2. Distribution of the percentage of names, nouns, pronouns and adjectives in both females and males in volume 2 of English textbooks of Iranian high schools 85
- Figure 4.3. Distribution of the percentage of names, nouns, pronouns and adjectives in both females and males in volume 3 of English textbooks of Iranian high schools 88
- Figure 4.4. Distribution of the frequency of the occupational roles of males and females in volumes 1, 2 &3 of English textbooks of Iranian high schools 96
- Figure 4.5. Distribution of the frequency of each of the occupational roles of females and males in the volumes 1, 2, and 3 collectively 103

1.1. Overview

Textbooks play a very important role in EFL education as Hutchinson and Torres(1994, p.315) state “... textbook has a vital and positive part to play in the everyday job of teaching and learning”. It is through textbooks that learners mostly get acquainted with the target language culture and values because society is reflected in the language , and language manifests all the values and assumptions existed in society(Lakoff,1973, cited by Otlowski, 2003, p.1). Moreover, it is through textbooks that language learners get familiar with the native speakers of the target language as Prodromou (1992, quoted by Gray, 2000, p.280) believes there “... is quite a strong association in learners’ minds between learning a language and learning about the people who speak that language”.

English has been widely taught in language institutes, schools and universities in Iran. The textbooks taught in Iran are both written by native speakers of English and Iranian writers. Considering the EFL textbooks, it can be observed that males and females have not been equally treated in EFL materials and textbooks possess ‘male-as-norm elements’(Nilsen et al.,1977; Sakita,1995;Porecca,1984,cited in Farooq,1999,p.1).

This study attempts to analyze linguistic representations of men and women in English textbooks of Iranian high schools.

The issue of 'gender' is ubiquitous in textbooks. Humm(quoted by Hellinger,1998, p.1) defined 'gender' as "... a culturally-shaped group of attributes and behaviors given to the female or the male".

It is said that language is not neutral; rather, it carries with it particular set of beliefs, messages, culture, and ideology. According to Ehrlich and King (1994, p.59) "... feminist theorists have generally assumed that language is not a neutral and transparent means of representing social realities". So, females are not represented as equally as the males in textbooks. Graham(cited in Sunderland,2006, p.137) observes " Boys in the schoolbooks ran races, rode bicycles, drove fast cars, and took off in spaceships for Mars. Girls, on the other, were less concerned with doing than with being". In a research carried out by Ansary and Babaii "...women often appeared less visible than men" (quoted by Otlowski,2003, p.3).

Lakoff (1975, p.19) also states "Often a word that may be used of both men and women (and perhaps of things as well), when applied to women, assumes a special meaning that, by implication rather than outright assertion, is derogatory to women as a group". To clarify the point lets very briefly consider one of the common misconceptions about women. There is a

stereotype that women are more talkative than men; however, in the studies done by Hartman and Judd 1978, Talansky 1986 and Poulou 1997(cited by Sunderland et al., 2002, p. 224), Sunderland et al. state “In dialogues females were found to speak less, speak first less often, and perform a narrower range of discourse roles”. Pennycook(2001, p.151) observes “Forms of discrimination against women in and through language are widely attested: women are stereotyped as talkative while at the same time they are frequently silenced or ignored”.

Furthermore, research shows that there is a difference between the speech of males and females as Rason, Leech and Hodges(cited in Sunderland, 2006,p.138) state women talk more about family issues.

Another point to consider in EFL textbooks is the traditional roles represented by men and women. Most textbooks show gender stereotypes in which women are considered as having subordinate status doing household chores or looking after children as Otlowski (2003, p.3)states “... the roles assigned to women in some textbooks are the stereotypical roles of mother and homemaker”.

Therefore, EFL textbooks can be one of the most important influences causing personal prejudices and cultural biases that language learners might absorb in their learning. As Graham (cited in Sunderland,2006, p.139)

argues :“Most schoolbooks still reflect the assumptions of our sexist society”.

Moreover, representation of women in stereotypical roles in EFL textbooks, I believe, also has considerable impact on learners and strengthens the stereotypical beliefs as Otlowski (2003, p.2) declares “This depiction of women in such stereotypical roles only helps to reinforce the outdated notion that ‘women stay at home and men go out to work’”.

Another point to reflect on in EFL textbooks is the issue that men are represented with ‘a greater range of occupational roles’(Hellinger,1998,p.1), that is, when an occupation is stated, it is usually assigned a male character name, e. g. Peter is a teacher. Furthermore, linguistic analyses of textbooks show that verbs associated with females represented ‘some of the traditional behavioral patterns’ (Hellinger,1998,p.2) e.g. Mary is weeping.

Another difference between female and male characters that existed in the EFL textbooks is the lack of ‘euphemistic terms for the women’ (Lakoff,1975,p.20) which should be taken more seriously.

Still another aspect existing in EFL materials which represents gender-bias is the use of ‘generic masculine’ terms such as ‘he’ or ‘his’ when referring to both females and males, e.g., “An American drinks his coffee

black”(Hellinger & Bubmann, 2002, p. 10). It is believed that in this way, women are excluded from EFL materials and become invisible.

In addition, in English when both female and male referents come together, male referent comes before the female referent, that is, EFL materials writers are “... often using fixed collocations where the male referents occur first-as in ‘he or she’, ‘husband and wife’, ‘men and women’”(Goddard & Patterson, 2000, p. 75).

Materials writers can represent ‘non-traditional gendered practices’ in the textbooks as Taylor and Sunderland (2003,cited in Sunderland,2006,p.72) and Mcilhenny (1995, cited in the same work) state “... when men become pre-school teachers...” or “... when women become combatants in the army...”.

Analysis of language represented in textbooks shows that language is not something neutral; rather, it is the ‘bearer of messages’, especially the cultural ones.

Literature in the evaluation of representation of gender in textbooks includes different dimensions: Hartman and Judd(1978, cited in Farooq,1999,p.3) investigated “... three areas of sexist language: omission including title and first names; first-place occurrences or firstness and occupations”. Porreca (1984,cited in the same work) added “... nouns,