



Gender Representation in EFL Textbooks: A Case of ILI Pre-intermediate Series

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Abstract

In textbooks, language functions as an ideology maker and social role determiner that lead sociolinguists to uncover reflection of gender roles and stereotypes. Numerous studies have addressed gender bias and stereotypes in ESL/EFL textbooks. The present study intends to define how social gender identity is reflected via adjectives and pictures in order to facilitate cross-cultural comparison of gender roles and to shed light on the perception and significance of gender as reflected in textbook images. The textbooks examined in this study are the ILI pre-intermediate series, a three level course. A combination of linguistic and visual analyses is used to examine the reflection of gender in the textbooks. The findings clearly indicate gender imbalance in favor of males. The findings have implications for material designers, teachers, and teacher trainers and provide suggestions for further research.

Keywords: gender, gender bias, textbook analysis, linguistic analysis, visual analysis

INTRODUCTION

It is commonly accepted that “every human being is born with a sex and into a gender, which is a formation of roles molded by society and culture” (Söylemez, 2010, p. 751). Gender identity is a social construct that is formed as individuals go through socialization process in their society and culture. Schooling naturally plays a pivotal role in this process and textbooks are part of schooling. Educational system in any country is shaped and affected by the prejudices, values, and traditions held by the society, which are reflected in course books.

As a part of educational system, textbooks and teaching materials are of paramount significance. Much attention was given in the early 1900s to assessing various manifestations of sexism and gender bias in foreign language textbooks, mainly English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks. Since then, studies on language and gender have been carried out extensively. Numerous content and linguistic analyses of ELT textbooks as regards their representation of gender uncovered different aspects of sexism, in texts and visuals.

From the 1970s on, numerous sociolinguistic studies been conducted concerning gender and its reflection in textbooks (Sunderland, 1992; Otlowsky, 2003; Mirza et al., 2004;

Kereszty, 2009; Bahman and Rahimi, 2010; Söylemez, 2010; Atay and Danju, 2012; Mohamad Subakir et al., 2012). In textbooks, language functions as an ideology maker and social role determiner that lead sociolinguists to uncover reflection of gender roles and stereotypes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Holmes says "Gender describes the social expectations, rules and norms attached to femininity and masculinity" (2009, p. 18). . Blumberg (2008) considers and discusses gender bias in textbooks as an "important, near-universal, remarkably uniform, quite persistent, and but virtually invisible obstacle on the road to gender equality in education" (p. 345). He argues that since redoing textbooks and curricula is difficult it would be better to promote gender equality by exposing learners to gender bias and allowing them to counteract it. In fact, this consciousness-raising process serves both teachers and learners to combat and overcome the problem of gender imbalance in textbooks. Nayyar and Salim (2003) claim gender bias should be redressed and there must be a balance in representation of both genders in society. Bahman and Rahimi (2010) in their study attempted to examine different areas of gender-bias in representation of women and men in 3 volumes of English textbooks taught in the high schools of Iran. The areas which were investigated were: 1. the frequency of names, nouns, pronouns and adjectives attributed to women and men, 2. first-place occurrences in instructions, exercises and sentences, 3. reading passages to find whether women and men appeared more or less equally or not, 4. Male-generics, 5. Animals. The findings revealed that the manifestation of women and men in these textbooks was not fair. In other words, the presence of men was more highlighted than that of women regarding names, nouns, pronouns and adjectives attributed to them. In regard to firstness, also, male-attributed terms came first more frequently than those of females. In reading passages, male characters appeared more frequently than female characters. Moreover, these textbooks contained many male-generics in which women were almost invisible. Also, sexism was detected in regard to animal representations. Söylemez (2010) attempted to find out how social gender identity is constructed in the reading passages in two sets of course books, Face 2 Face and English File, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate. To collect the data, the reading texts in these course books were scanned and the adjectives used to describe both genders were identified and categorized to determine what kind of characteristics have been attributed to male and female and how their social identities have been constructed. Adjectives were classified into four main categories -namely physical appearance, personality, feelings and other- in order to make the data collection and interpretation easier and more to the ground. Although the adjectives seem to have been chosen randomly, writers of the books reflected the general outlook on females and males; that is, deliberately or not, course book writers have a tendency to use some adjectives with one gender rather than with the other. To overcome the imbalance, samples that include adjectives without gender specification should be placed in the course books.

Ifegbesan (2010) conducted a study on the Nigerian post-primary school teachers' gender-stereotyped beliefs and perception in classroom practices. Based on the results he recommended that a gender perspective must be integrated into teacher education curricula and teachers should be provided with opportunities to acquire gender sensitivity knowledge. Kōzōlaslan (2010) attempted to obtain senior English language student teachers' own perceptions of particular "gender-critical points" in primary level ELT textbooks. Student teachers' views were probed by means of a survey which asked two open-ended questions and the survey was supplemented by focus group interviews. Findings revealed that ELT student teachers in this study passed over a potentially progressive feature of a text, let alone deal with gender bias in the latter. It would, therefore, be important for teacher educators to deal with the questions of treatment of progressive and gender biased texts in sessions on materials selection, evaluation, design and use. In these sessions, student teachers can be shown that a gender-biased text does not have to mean gender biased teaching. This study also identified an urgent need for teacher educators to gender-sensitize ELT student teachers. It seems clear that ELT textbooks still contain sex-stereotypes which may have profound effects on young people's affective and cognitive development. Atay and Danju (2012) investigated whether the textbooks used in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) schools carry stereotyped images and whether students view stereotypical representations of gender on personal traits are different with the respect of their gender and grade level. For the aim of this study, the primary 1st and 5th and 17 grade school textbooks were read in detail to find out gender stereotypic representations that matched with the categories of personal traits. The questionnaire were developed to see the primary 1st and 5th grade students' view about gender role related to personal trait. Female and male are generally represented in a stereotyped way in the school textbooks; The numbers of personal traits representations were evaluated, "being brave", "being dependent", "independent", "clever", "leader", "creative", "supportive", "rich", "hardworking", and "lazy" were for male personal traits. "Beautiful", "sweet", "emotional", "happy", "sad", "surprised" and "friendly" were given for female personal traits according to the school textbooks content. "Active", "passive", "aggressive", and "sensitive" were equal for these two gender representations. The findings showed that female personal traits seem to be more weak (being dependent, passive, emotional, sensitive, sad) than male personal traits. Male personal traits seemed to be strong and powerful (Being brave, active, rich, hardworking, aggressive). Students' views with the respect of their gender showed the similar results with the textbooks. Female students saw most of the personal traits for both gender however male students' views reflected the stereotype personal traits in gender roles in society.

Stockdale (2006) in her examination of the representations of men and women in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbook realized the existence of gender bias. In another study, Mukundan and Nimehchisalem (2008) attempted to describe the representation of gender in English language textbooks in Malaysian secondary schools. The results indicated an absolute gender bias with males outnumbering females.

Saarikivi (2012) investigated gender representation in two Finnish EFL textbook series and the analysis revealed that the analyzed textbooks were gender-biased in line with hegemonic ideas of gender in Finnish society.

Oyebela (2003) looked at gender balance in illustrations of a selection of upper primary textbooks. The results showed that all the analyzed textbooks contained illustrations that were gender imbalanced. Mohamad Subakir et al. (2012) in their study addressed gender biasness found in visual images in school textbooks, i.e., the treatment of one gender over the other, especially of women and girls. The project adopted three widely used approaches for analyzing visual images; content, socio-semiotic, and ethno-methodology analyses. This study however highlighted its preliminary analysis focusing on image analysis based on participation, gender and representational meanings. Its aim was to identify the types of images and the representation of gender biasness and stereotyping found in the textbook. The preliminary findings should expose the sexism and gender biasness in the visual images of a sampled textbook; i.e. an English school textbook that is abound with visual images that sometimes, more so than written texts, can articulate more forcefully social and cultural meanings. The image analysis carried out on the textbook revealed a clear gender imbalance in favor of males mostly. The analysis revealed that the domain relegated to female participants is still the private sphere while male participants are predominately represented in the public sphere usually outdoors. In the textbooks analyzed, stereotypical gender roles of wives, mothers and nurturers were allotted to women and they were largely confined to the private world of the home, represented by equally private spaces such as the garden and the back yard. Finally this study suggested that a gender perspective must be integrated into teacher education and training programs so that educationists may play a crucial role in addressing the issues of gender, inclusiveness and equality, providing valuable input for the formation of gender equitable curriculum, pedagogy and policies. Materials developers, textbook writers, editors, illustrators and those directly involved in producing educational textbook, resources and materials may also benefit greatly from a gender perspective. Input by parents is equally important especially those that bring gender concerns to the fore in the process of nurturing the mindsets of their children.

In a case study in Jordan, Hamdan (2010) conducted a content analysis of EFL textbooks which indicated gender asymmetry and culturally-prevalent gender bias. Lee (2006) examined twenty EFL textbooks taught in Hong Kong to determine whether there have been changes in the nature of gender representation over the past decade. He found that gender stereotyping was still a prevalent problem in textbooks despite the changes in the status of women in Hong Kong society. Mutekwe and Modiba (2012) evaluated gender sensitivity in a number of textbooks in the Zimbabwean secondary school curriculum followed by a focus group interview carried out with a purposive and gender stratified sample of students. The study revealed that the analyzed textbooks contained gender biases, imbalances and stereotypes and a great deal of patriarchal values and ideologies were embodied in them. The interview supported the idea that textbooks shape the minds of learners and showed that students were overtly and covertly affected by the

gender representations in textbooks. Chick (2006) examined gender balance in K-12 American history textbooks. The results indicated that male figures outnumbered the female ones in both texts and pictures.

Kobia (2009) examined the portrayal of gender images in primary school English textbooks in Kenya. The findings indicated under-representation of female gender in authorship, editorship, typesetting, photography and that male appearances outnumbered the females in usage of characters portrayed in illustrations, photographs, names and titles used to refer to the genders. Alemi and Jafari (2012) attempted to analyze gender and culture bias and the visibility thereof in a somewhat different approach by investigating and tallying the gender and cultural origin of personal proper nouns in 10 local and global EFL textbooks. The findings showed that females are less visible in these textbooks than males and that the global textbook series analyzed was not very global. Gharbavi & Mousavi (2012) looked at language gender bias in four EFL textbooks taught in the Iranian high schools. The results indicated women were less visible than females both in texts and pictures and that males work in more diverse occupational roles than females as represented by the textbooks. Porreca (1984) examined the problem of sexism in ESL materials. The finding revealed that sexism continued to flourish in ESL materials.

Healy (2009) examined EFL textbooks to show what differences there are in the speech patterns between female and male participants focusing on mixed sex conversations. The study indicated a fair representation of both genders in the analyzed textbooks. In his study, Mineshima (2008) attempted to examine both quantitatively and qualitatively how an EFL textbook currently used in upper secondary English classes in Hong Kong displays the two genders. The results revealed fairly egalitarian representations of the two genders in terms of gender visibility, character attributes, and picture representations.

THIS STUDY

Language taught and used in textbooks is not only a means of transferring information, but also a way that learners get acquainted with the target language culture and values. Considering the importance of textbooks, the present study aims to determine and analyze the adjectives and pictures used in 3 volumes of English textbooks taught in ILI (Iran Language Institute) and their relations with the social roles in the texts, considering the gender. In other word, this study attempts to define how social gender identity is reflected via adjectives and pictures in order to facilitate cross-cultural comparison of gender roles and shed light on the perception about and significance of gender as reflected in textbook images of the target language.

The present study on gender representation is intended to answer the following research questions:

- Are there any differences in the adjectives used for male and female characters?

- Do male and female characters practice an equal number of images in the textbooks?
- To what extent are social roles and gender stereotypes reflected in visual images in the three levels of ILI pre-intermediate textbooks?

METHOD

Materials

The textbooks examined in this study are the ILI pre-intermediate series, a three level course. Each book contains eight units consisting of a vocabulary list, dialog, passage, spoken drill and listening section. Each unit is structured in the same way, beginning with a list of new lexical items and their meanings. Following the vocabulary list is a dialog which usually aims to present a grammar point and a language function in real life situation. Then, an informative passage is presented. Next, spoken drills have been planned to systematically expose the learners to the commonly used grammatical structures and promote accuracy with acceptable fluency. Listening section is the last part which exposes learners to authentic materials that are thematically related to the previous sections.

The ILI pre-intermediate series was chosen for its originality because it is designed and developed in Iran to satisfy the needs of Iranian EFL learners.

Procedure

A combination of content analysis and social semiotic approach is used to examine the representations of gender in the textbooks. To this end, the textbooks were scanned for adjectives used with male and female characters. Then, the male and female characters in the illustrations were checked once, no matter how many times they appear in the illustrations. Later, the total number of male and female characters was counted. Finally, some illustrations were selected to examine gender roles reflected in them.

In order to ensure accurate analysis of the data, the whole textbook series was analyzed thoroughly by the researcher for two times.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tables 1, 2, and 3 show the adjectives used for each gender as well as those used for both genders.

Table 1. Pre-intermediate 1

Male	Female	Both
talkative	busy	polite
educated	emotional	outgoing
brave	sincere	tired
reasonable	shy	calm

lazy	silly
angry	unlucky
anxious	silent
professional	pleased
cheerful	
bored	
Well-known	
healthy	
quiet	

Table 2. Pre-intermediate 2

Male	Female	Both
old	inexperienced	friendly
noisy	clever	kind
happy	angry	interesting
brave	slim	tall
polite	smart	
intelligent	quiet	
	hardworking	

Table 3. Pre-intermediate 3

Male	Female	Both
crazy	beautiful	tired
careful	young	excellent
brave		honest
courageous		dishonest
proud		kind
happy		friendly
sad		wise
anxious		intelligent
tall		clever
careless		
foolish		
nervous		
jealous		
rude		

As the tables reveal, the greatest number of adjectives in both levels 1 and 2 of the pre-intermediate series is used for males. Therefore, adjectives with negative connotation are more common with males. Upon a closer look at the adjectives, the tables show that there is a wide range of adjectives to define both genders. Most of the female-related adjectives refer to the physical appearance and personality of females such as *beautiful, slim, young, emotional, sincere, shy*, and so on. As for the adjectives used with male characters, it can be asserted that most of them refer to personality such as *talkative, brave, educated, proud, rude*, and so on.

The tables below show the number of male/female characters represented in the illustrations of the three textbooks of pre-intermediate series. As results tabulated in the three tables reveal, in pre-intermediate 1 (table 4), in 6 out of 8 units male characters outnumber the female characters, while in both pre-intermediate 2 and 3 the number of male characters is greater than the female characters, implying female invisibility. In fact, there is a significant gender imbalance in favor of males.

Table 4. Number of male/female characters in pre-intermediate 1

Unit	Male	Female	Both
1	8	2	7
2	6	2	4
3	10	2	1
4	6	8	2
5	2	3	8
6	3	1	7
7	12	3	1
8	8	1	1

Table 5. Number of male/female characters in pre-intermediate 2

Unit	Male	Female	Both
1	4	0	1
2	4	0	6
3	0	0	4
4	8	0	4
5	9	0	0
6	6	0	1
7	10	0	2
8	7	3	3

Table 6. Number of male/female characters in pre-intermediate 3

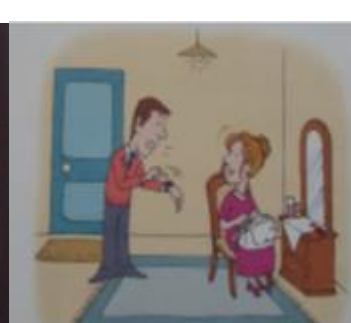
Unit	Male	Female	Both
1	8	1	3
2	5	1	3
3	6	1	6
4	10	0	1
5	2	1	4
6	11	5	4
7	17	8	2
8	10	2	4

The next part deals with gender visibility in images by analyzing some images to examine gender roles reflected in them. The analysis will begin with depiction of participants in the images and the representational meanings of their actions to indicate gender bias and stereotypes, if any.

Figures 1 shows the 'cooking' action in a kitchen, implying the gender stereotypic act of women being the ones to accomplish tasks in the kitchen. Figure 2 depicts an image of mother and daughter in the kitchen with the mother wearing apron which indicates perhaps the stereotyping of women to be more suited to wear aprons than men. Figure 3 shows mother and baby with the mother preparing milk to feed the crying baby, depicting the stereotyping of women as the ones with the responsibility to feed and nourish babies.

Fig. 1**Fig. 2****Fig. 3**

Figure 4 displays a woman being fined for parking her car in a no parking area, implying the common stereotype of women being careless drivers. Figure 5 shows two female characters, one of whom is a fortune-teller and the other, a woman who has gone to a fortune-teller, indicating that women are the ones who believe in superstition and fortune telling. In figure 6, there are a male and a female characters, a couple, showing that women are the ones who are late and waste a lot of time wearing make-up

Fig. 4**Fig. 5****Fig. 6**

The following images (figures 7, 8, and 9) illustrate more masculine tasks. In fact, they show that men are more suited for outdoor activities that require management (Fig. 7), confidence and preparation (Fig. 8), and physical strength (Fig. 9), implying that females lack these abilities in comparison with males.

Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Based on the results reported above, the linguistic and semiotic analyses of the ILI pre-intermediate series indicates gender imbalance in favor of males. The image analysis carried out on the intended three textbooks reveals that stereotypical gender roles of mothers, wives, and nurturers and domestic activities are associated with women, delegating them to private sphere. On the contrary, males are predominantly displayed in public sphere, doing a wide range of activities.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the researcher attempted to shed light on one of the main obstacles to educational equality which is gender bias in textbooks. Textbooks, as a source that reflect the ideology of the society regarding males and females, shape the minds of future generations. The results revealed the existence of gender bias and stereotyping in the ILI pre-intermediate series through linguistic and semiotic analyses. Further research is required to investigate this issue in greater detail.

This study has practical implications for teacher trainers, teachers, material developers, textbook writers, and illustrators. Teacher trainers should provide teachers with a gender perspective to address the issues of gender bias and inequality in teaching materials. Accordingly, as gender cannot be eliminated totally from textbooks, teachers should be able to use and manipulate biased materials. Material developers and textbook writers, as well, should examine every aspect of the textbook to ensure gender balance. Finally, illustrators should attempt to assure a fair representation of both male and female characters in future textbooks.

Gender roles and stereotypes are a product of socialization. Therefore, educators should guide learners in this process to form effective self-images in society. This study was carried out on one series of textbooks which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future researchers can extend the scope and include textbooks from different level. Furthermore, they can conduct contrastive analysis of gender representation in textbooks written by Iranian and foreign writers.

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