

## Textbook Evaluation: A Critical Discourse Analysis of *Talk Time Series*

**Maryam Jeddi Kazerooni \***

Department of English, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

**Omid Tabatabaei**

English Department, Najafabad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Najafabad, Iran

### Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate how English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks portray males and females according to their social roles and subject positions. To this end, *Talk Time*, which is one of English language textbook series currently used in many English language institutes in Iran, was selected to examine to what extent equality exists between genders in this textbook. In fact, attempts were made to analyze the series in terms of nine major aspects of gender: female and male's characters, pictorial representations, titles, activities, and firstness in mixed gender dialogues, gender focus of textbook themes or content, as well as gender relations. Additionally, in order to extract the ideology behind these textbooks, Fairclough's (2001) three dimensional model was utilized. The results indicated that the series equally displays both males and females. The result also revealed that there was no sexism in the textbooks and friend-friend relations were mostly presented which is the norm of the society. Actually, in this study, a more comprehensive description of textbook evaluation with ideological basis was presented. The findings of this study can assist teachers to pay more attention to the evaluation of textbook and consequently select an appropriate book according to the learners' expectations, needs, and interests.

**Keywords:** critical discourse analysis, gender, ideology, sexism, textbooks

### INTRODUCTION

There is a long history in investigating ELT materials, which presents different viewpoints and methods. There are different materials to teach English, like textbooks, video tapes, graded reading passages, and a plethora of other materials. EFL textbook markets are full of various appealing materials. Therefore, textbooks might be too flexible and/or biased to be used directly as instructional materials. Thus, evaluating textbooks is highly important in the field of teaching and learning. Good textbooks help teachers as well as students and, in fact, facilitate the process of teaching and learning for the learners. Many researchers have evaluated different textbooks through the

application of checklists and questionnaires. One of the important factors involved in textbooks is 'sexism'. It is one of the socio-cultural issues shaped by textbooks. This factor has attracted many researchers in the field to investigate the representation of gender bias in textbooks and the mentality behind it, because it can have adverse effects on students and may influence their perspectives quite negatively. Thus, investigating this domain can show the ideology behind the way gender is formed.

Hutchinson and Terros (1994) believed that role of textbooks in teaching and learning English n-unearths that they are very important as a material of EFL/ESL classroom in their daily usage. Textbooks involve the content and activities which happen in the classroom, so most of the teachers and learners depend on textbooks as necessary tools for teaching and learning. Also, Richard (2001) stated that sometimes textbooks present as the basis for the most of the language information which learners obtain and also for some practices of the language that happen in the classroom. Moreover, when learners cannot understand the information which teacher explains in the classroom, textbooks may help them by showing the key source of the problem. In the same path, textbook can be a guide for unexperienced teachers, and can also provide ideas on how to plan and teach lessons as well as designs that teachers can use.

The term 'textbook' is defined as a book which helps both students and teachers during the course. Tomlinson (1988) observed the textbook as vital materials for classes which contain many aspects that are needed during a learning period for students. Commonly, most of the textbooks consist of four-part activities: vocabulary information, grammatical points, comprehension exercises, and different language functions.

Sheldon (1988) suggests that textbooks are the vital part of any ELT program and they have some advantages for both teachers and learners as they are being used in the English language classes. Cunningsworth (1995) argues that teachers have a significant role for selecting good textbooks in the classroom because they spend most of their time using English textbooks. He also stated that teachers, based on the students' needs, should pay attention to the textbooks in terms of methods, purpose, materials, and value of the class. In order to optimize the learning process, teachers should pay attention in selecting, evaluating, and adjusting teaching tools to figure out what students' learning needs are. In other words, textbooks must effectively support the learning goals, so it is the teachers' charge to judge about textbooks' instructional design.

There are a variety of textbooks with different methodology, syllabus, and pictures which are used all over the world. Hence, selecting and evaluating an appropriate textbooks, which are matched with learners' needs, are significant issues. Lynch (1996) defined evaluation as a systematic effort for gathering information in terms of making judgments and decisions. Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) expressed that evaluating textbooks helps the teacher to pay more attention to the details and it helps them to have an accurate, useful, systematic and contextualized understanding of the whole nature of textbook materials. They also mentioned three types of textbook evaluation: pre-use, in-use, and post-use evaluation. Pre-use or predictive evaluation is

used to predict the potential use of a textbook. In-use evaluation is used for the materials which are currently being taught, and post use or retrospective evaluation of a textbook is used after finishing the textbook.

Moreover, Fredriksson and Olsson (2006) stated that a lot of available English textbooks have colorful covers, beautiful designs, and attractive pictures. So the selection and evaluation of textbooks are important issues to ensure that they are suitable for the level of students. Students may run into problems if the textbook is too advanced or too simple. They mentioned some criteria that should be considered in the evaluation process. Students have different backgrounds, abilities, and needs, so every school setting is unique, and the criteria will certainly be different. On the other hand, teachers' perspective and the syllabus are two indispensable criteria which should be taken into account in the evaluation process.

Tomelinson (2012) mentioned that there are some materials for language learning which facilitate the learning process such as textbooks, videos, flash cards, websites, etc. He also classified materials to some parts, including informative (gives the learners information about foreign language), instructional (leads learners how to practice), experiential (provides the experience of the language in use for learners), eliciting (encourages the learner to use the language) and exploratory (helps the learners to understand the language). There are two basic methods for evaluating textbooks (Cunningworth, 1995): First, choosing the materials form among a lot of materials which are accessible and selecting the best ones according to different procedures, principles, and educational policies. This method is based on impressionistic overview which does not pay attention to clear details. Second, it is the in-depth evaluation. This method is the same as impressionistic view in procedure, but in this method, there is a careful examination of the technical materials. These materials are examined in terms of their connection to the students' learning needs, syllabus necessities, and variety. He also offered using different checklists for evaluating the textbooks. These checklists are based on some criteria such as claims of the textbooks, sorts of materials evaluation, and the purpose of materials evaluations. He maintains that there are different parts for evaluation: 1) goals and approaches, 2) design and organization, 3) language content, 4) skills, 5) topics, 6) methodology, and 7) teacher's guide.

Littlejohn (1998) suggested a general framework for analyzing materials. This framework includes three basic concerns. First, the facets of materials that we have examined from educational perspective can be grouped based on the two main points which are publication and design. The word publication implies "concrete or physical aspects of materials and how they appear as a complete set" (p. 183). The second one includes the study of areas which show the clear purposes of the materials (like development of general English, ESP, or specific skills), the way which tasks, language, and content of materials are chosen and progressed (like a specific syllabus type and use of corpora), and the nature and focus of content in the materials (like educational content, storylines, topics). Also the nature of teaching and learning activities, which are

presented by materials, is the main significance of this part (like “whole task”, comprehension tasks, learner training, etc.).

In the same vein, Tomlinson (2003) mentioned a framework for evaluating materials. He considered that there are a lot of different variables in evaluation:

(1) the appeal of the materials, (2) the credibility of the materials to learners, teachers, and administrators, (3) the validity of the materials, (4) the reliability of the materials, (5) the ability of the materials to interest the learners and teachers, (6) the ability of the materials to inspire the learners, (7) the value of the materials in terms of short-term learning, (8) the value of the materials in terms of long-term learning, (9) the learners' perceptions of the value of the materials, (10) the teachers' perception of the value of the materials, (11) the assistance given to teachers in terms of preparation, delivery and assessment, (12) the flexibility of the materials, (13) The contribution made by the materials to teacher development, and (14) the match with administrative requirements (p. 16)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which presents studying and analyzing both written and spoken forms of language, displays diffuse sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias (Van Dijk, 1998). Critical Discourse Analysis examines the way that these diffuse sources are described and recreated within specific social, political, and historical contexts.

According to Wodak and Meyer (2008), critical discourse analysis tends to analyze both clear and unclear structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as they are being shown in language. By use of language, it also attempts to explore critically social inequality as it is described, constituted, legalized, and so on. He also stated that language is used as a medium of control and social force. In addition, it legalizes the relations of efficient power. Language is also ideological but not articulated. Wodak (2002) described that the terms of Critical Linguistic (CL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be exchanged. CDA has roots in classical rhetoric, text linguistics, sociolinguistics, and applied linguistics and pragmatics. For explaining the text, the notions of ideology, power, hierarchy and gender together with sociological variables are correlated. CDA focuses in relationship among language and power. In addition, Janks (2005) stated that an emergence of CDA is caused by critical theory of language which shows the use of language as a form of social practice. A sort of practice which connected to the particular historical contexts and extant social relations is called social practice that are consequently reproduced or contested.

Widdowson (2002) considered that Roger Fowler and his colleague were the ones who originated the CDA. Then, some other scholars developed CDA, especially Norman Fairclough. In early 1990s, in a meeting at the University of Amsterdam where the CDA emerged as a research pattern, some scholars such as Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak discussed their various theories and methodologies of discourse analysis and CDA. The book *Language and Power* (1989) by Fairclough is called the landmark of CDA's start (Bloomaert, 2005). In

addition, Ruth Wodak (1989) and Teun van Dijk (1990) published the books *Language, Power, and Ideology* and *Discourse and Society* which have been considered to be effectual in the growing and extension of CDA. According to Bloomaert (2005), CDA is a program which consists of different approaches. Aims, perspectives, principles and matters are shared by these approaches and are illustrated by discourse. In other words, in the perspective that discourse is formed by and from social construction, scholars are united, but they work independently. Similarities and differences of CDA's different approach were the point which Meyer (2001) focused. He also compared methods in different aspects which were based on their theoretical groundings, operationalization, and methodologies in data collections, analysis, and their criteria which they used to assess their research. At the end, he deduced that diversity is one of the CDA's volitional characteristics. He also stated some points about basic differences among CDA works: (1) in many aspects, CDA works related to their theoretical background, (2) there is not shared view about the principles of data collection, and (3) operationalization and analysis is problem oriented and implies linguistic expertise.

The methods of Critical Discourse Analysis share a view about the social process of power, hierarchy building, exclusion and subordination (Meyer, 2001). All these methods try to show the role of language used by powerful and dominant groups to spread the cultural and social subjections in the society. In order to attain the aims of the present study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Are there any significant differences between the representation of female and male characters in terms of discourse features in the conversations of *Talk Time* series?
2. Are there any significant differences between the representation of female and male characters in terms of social roles and subject positions in the conversations of *Talk Time* series?
3. Are there any significant differences between the picture representation of male and female in *Talk Time* series?

## **METHOD**

### **Materials**

The main material of the study was the *Talk Time* series, which is currently used as the materials for conversation/discussion courses in many language institutes in Iran. The textbooks were authored by Susan Stempleski, and include three student books along with an audio CD. The student CD consists of recordings of the conversations and listening parts which provide plenty of listening practice for students. Each book consists of twelve lessons, each of which is divided into two parts starting with a section on vocabulary. This part begins with a pattern practice and culminates in a free speaking practice. The speaking part is based on new words and formed based on two questions. After the speaking section, there is a listening part with multiple-choice questions, ordering pictures, and other exercises. The following two sections consist of a brief section on Grammar and Conversation. These conversations mostly combine

vocabulary and grammar points of the lesson, all helping the students use language in a natural context and the grammar-based syllabus and thematically related vocabularies are recycled throughout the units to build confidence. Listening and grammar are presented in separate parts allowing for plenty of speaking time and also about 80% of the activities involve speaking. Next section is devoted to communication tasks which include different exercise patterns. For less confident students, progress of communicative activities in each lesson is ideal. At the end of each book, there are some review exercises in which students can check their English, and a review page for each unit lets students check their progress.

*Talk Time* series are chosen among other ELT books because they are currently used in many language institutes. This study focused on the representation of gender in conversation, pictorial representation in terms of gender, and linguistic features.

## Procedures

As it was mentioned, exploring the ideology behind *Talk Time* series English textbooks was the major purpose of this study. *Talk Time* series were chosen among all other ELT textbooks, due to the fact that, there has been no investigation on this series in terms of sexism in Iran. For this purpose, Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model was utilized. This model consists of six categories: visibility, firstness, and mixed gender dialogues, social roles, subject positions, and female and male titles. In fact, the six factors stated above were analyzed to determine if the series is sufficiently gender-balanced or not. In addition, this study described and analyzed gender representation in conversations as well as pictorial representations in terms of sexism and linguistic features. The issues which were investigated in this study were omission and stereotyping. Additionally, other aspects which were considered were transitivity and pictorial representation.

## RESULTS

The results of the analysis of gender representation were observed in the conversations of the *Talk Time* series as well as in its pictures with a critical discourse analysis perspective. For this purpose, six factors were investigated: a) female and male characters, b) female and male pictorial representations, c) female and male's titles, d) female and male's social roles, e) activities, and f) firstness of female and male in the mixed gender dialogues, and also analysis was done to find about the existence or lack of sexism. In addition, the data were examined in order to access female and male's subject position, gender focus of textbook themes or content, and gender relations. In this regard, the data related to these nine factors were collected from the conversations.

**Table 1.** Female and Male's Frequency

Textbooks	<i>Talk Time1</i>		<i>Talk Time2</i>		<i>Talk Time3</i>		Total	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Frequency	69	88	48	65	78	65	195	218
Percentage	44%	56%	43%	57%	55%	45%	47%	53%

Investigating *Talk Time 1* showed the supremacy of males over females. Generally, 88 cases (out of 157) were related to males in forms of proper nouns and pronouns, whereas females occupied 69 cases. In fact, this textbook addresses male characters in 56% of cases and female characters in 44% of the cases. The results for *Talk Time 2* was similar to those of *Talk Time 1*, which were both different from what was observed for *Talk Time 3*.

**Table 2.** Frequencies of Pictorial Representation

Pictorial Representation	Male Only	More Males	Female Only	More Females	Equal Share	Not Identified	Total
<i>Talk Time 1</i>	56	15	37	18	41	120	287
<i>Talk Time 2</i>	38	20	29	4	30	127	248
<i>Talk Time 3</i>	44	28	26	15	45	77	235
Total	138	63	92	37	116	224	670

*Talk Time* series contain 670 pictures representing gender. Out of this number, 138, 63, 92, 37, and 116 cases manifest male only, male and females with the supremacy of males, females only, male and females with the supremacy of females, and equal sharing between females and males, respectively. Furthermore, 224 cases could not be recognized whether they represented females or males.

**Table 3.** Distribution of Both Genders in Mixed Gender Dialogues Talk

Time Series	Total No. of Mixed Gender	Male Started	Female Started
<i>Talk Time 1</i>	38	20(53%)	18(47%)
<i>Talk Time 2</i>	40	19(47.5%)	21(52.5%)
<i>Talk Time 3</i>	37	20(54%)	17(46%)
Total	115	59(51%)	56(49%)

Porreca (1984) indicated that one of the issues which can shed light on gender inequality, is "the order of mention, termed firstness" (p. 706). In effect, when two gender-related nouns or pronouns appear as a pair in a text, the one presented in the first position may denote to enjoy a higher status. This study revealed that 115 out of 145 conversations are dedicated to mixed gender dialogues. Interestingly, it was revealed that there was no significant differences between both genders. It is also obvious that the difference among firstness in mixed gender dialogues was not much biased.

**Table 4.** Female and Male's Social Roles

Social roles	<i>Talk Time 1</i>	<i>Talk Time 2</i>	<i>Talk Time 3</i>	Total
Types of social roles	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
Male-monopolized Social roles	1	4	0	5
Male-dominated Social roles	0	0	0	0
Female-monopolized Social roles	1	1	1	3

Female-dominated Social roles	1	1	1	3
Gender-shared Social roles	2	2	4	8

As the above table shows, only 19 roles presented in 72 conversations of the *Talk Time* series are almost divided equally between females and males. Nevertheless, females were engaged in social roles, such as students, doctor, salespersons, and clerks. Similarly, males were engaged in certain social roles, such as chef, clerk, student, and taxi driver.

In addition, the most notable relations in *Talk Time* series is friend-friend relations. Actually, out of 72 conversations existing in the series, 73.6% of the conversations belonged to friend-friend relations. It is indicated that the emphasis of the series was placed on the social equality between both genders along with the significance given to girlfriend or boyfriend relations as students which is a norm.

In fact, the frequency of relations was equal. It is interesting to note that the series considered both genders almost equally in terms of the relations. Additionally, 24.6% of the relations were devoted to unequal relations though these inequalities were not indicative of the superiority of one position to another. In effect, the review of the literature related to the sexism emphasizes that female characters gain a lower status than males. Accordingly, this issue needs to be considered in designing and developing any ELT textbook.

**Table 5.** Female and Male`s Titles

Titles	<i>Talk Time 1</i>	<i>Talk Time 2</i>	<i>Talk Time 3</i>	Total
Mr.	0(0%)	0(0%)	1(50%)	1(50%)
Mrs.	0(0%)	0(0%)	1(50%)	1(50%)
Miss.	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Ms.	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Total	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

In *Talk Time* series, there are no cases of using the titles of Miss or Ms. In addition, two titles of Mr. and Mrs. almost were not used in any of the conversations. As Table 5 represents, in *Talk Time 3*, the titles of Mr. and Mrs. were mentioned just once.

**Table 6.** Frequency of Activities in the Series

Activities	<i>Talk Time 1</i>		<i>Talk Time 2</i>		<i>Talk Time 3</i>		Total	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Making party/ going to party	1	1	4	6	2	0	7	7
Shopping	2	2	3	4	0	0	5	6
Going vocations	1	2	2	2	1	1	4	5
Eating in restaurant	5	3	1	1	1	1	7	5
Work	1	1	1	2	4	2	6	5
Studying/ at school	6	3	1	2	1	1	8	6
Watching TV	1	5	0	0	0	0	1	5
Engaging in social activities	0	0	2	1	8	7	10	8
Travelling	1	0	4	2	1	3	6	5
Seeing doctor	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1



Total	23	23	24	28	37	16	74	77
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In *Talk Time Series*, there was a wide range of activities summarized in Table 6. It seems that women and men had almost the same number and range of activities; nevertheless, like other investigated series, the activities women engaged in had lower status compared with those of men. In the considered series, some activities were almost equally distributed between two genders. In effect, there was not any significant difference between both males and females. In other words, they share the activities equally. Furthermore, there were some activities distributed almost equally between two genders for example, "Making party/going to party" and "seeing doctor". The chi-square table below shows whether the differences sketched in Table 6 were statistically significant or not.

**Table 7.** Chi-Square Results Comparing the Frequency of Use of Males and Females in Different Activities

	<i>Asymp. Sig.</i> (2-tailed) <i>Talk Time 1</i>	<i>Asymp. Sig.</i> (2-tailed) <i>Talk Time 2</i>	<i>Asymp. Sig.</i> (2-tailed) <i>Talk Time 3</i>	<i>Asymp. Sig.</i> (2-tailed) Total
Pearson Chi-Square	.55	.97	.43	.95
Likelihood Ratio	.41	.97	.29	.95
Linear-by-Linear Association	.76	.46	.72	.57
<i>N</i> of Valid Cases	46	52	43	141

The  $p$  value under the *Asymp. Sig.* (2-tailed) columns in front of Pearson Chi-square shows the (in)significance of the differences. If  $p$  is less than the specified level of significance (i.e. 0.05), the conclusion would be that the difference between the use of males and females for different activity types has been statistically significant. For *Talk Time 1*, the relevant  $p$  value was .55, which was greater than .05. This means that in *Talk Time 1*, there was not a statistically meaningful difference between the frequency of use of males and females for different types of activities. This was also the case with *Talk Time 2* ( $p = .97$ ) and *Talk Time 3* ( $p = .43$ ). Finally, when the total number of the use of males and females were counted, the difference was also not significant ( $p = .95$ ).

Luckily, it was shown that the series almost considered the equality between the activities performed by females and males. It is worth mentioning that monopolized activity was not significant in the *Talk Time Series*.

**Table 8.** Subject Positions

Female				Male			
Family	Societal	Commercial	Other	Family	Societal	Commercial	Other
%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
4	55	9	5	4	48	9	7

As the table above presented, the second category had the highest percentage of the four categories for both males and females. The results indicate that the position of the both genders were societal in most conversations. In these series, the societal part was

related to the friend-friend relations. In addition, the table clarifies that there was almost equality between both genders in the four categories. A Chi-square test was also conducted to find out whether the observed differences between males and females with respect to the four aforementioned categories were of statistical significance or not.

**Table 9.** Chi-Square Results Comparing Males and Females with Respect to Subject Position

	Value	<i>df</i>	<i>Asymp. Sig.</i> (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	.63	3	.88
Likelihood Ratio	.63	3	.88
<i>N</i> of Valid Cases	141		

The *p* value under the *Asymp. Sig.* (2-tailed) columns in front of Pearson chi-square turned out to be greater than the specified level of significance (.88 > .05), implying that the differences between females and males with regard to subject position did not reach statistical significance.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Investigating the six items in the series lead to the following results:

- In terms of females and males` characters, females took 47% and males about 53%; as the result indicates the distribution of gender in the series was almost balanced.
- In terms of pictorial representation, 20.5 % of pictures show only males, 13.7% only females, 9.5% more males, 5.5% more females, and 17.3% of pictures displayed males and females in equal share.
- In terms of fristness in mixed genders dialogues, the share of males was about 51% and the share of females about 49%. As it can be seen, there was no significant differences between the two genders. Therefore, the implicit message is that the males and females almost had same share to start a conversation or speak about different issues.
- In terms of social roles, there was nearly equivalence among roles of females and males and both genders had equal chances in social roles attributed to them.
- In terms of females and males` title, it seems that there was no difference between both genders. The titles of Mr. and Mrs. were only presented in *Talk Time 3* once. These types of dealing with genders shed light on the message that the relations in these series were not formal and sexism did not exist in the society in general.
- In terms of activities in which males and females participated, there was no degree of sexism. Males engaged in 51% of activities and females in 49%. In

these textbooks, both genders somehow had the same chance for contributing to the activities.

The above mentioned issues emphasize that this series consider the issue of gender into account, because the representation of gender was almost systematically balanced. Similarly, as long as titles were concerned, activities and firstness, both genders nearly had the same distribution and it showed both male and females were equal. The findings of the study confirmed the first hypothesis that there are no differences between female and male characters in terms of discourse features in *Talk Time* series.

In a nutshell, this study revealed that there was no existence of sexism in the conversations of the series. In contrast, the findings of this study were in opposition to the findings of previous comparative researches such as Farooq (1999), Sano, et al. (2001), Stockdale (2006), Piavandi (2008), as well as Johanson (2009) and Esmaili (2011). This investigation verified that gender bias is not ingrained in these materials in contrast with other explored textbooks around the world.

Analyzing the data in *Talk Time* series in terms of gender-related items revealed that there was no sexism attitude in social roles. Both genders had active roles without any limitation in social activities and both males and females behaved equally in terms of social roles.

In short, this study disclosed that both genders almost participated in three categories of family, society, and commerce equally. In effect, the results of the study discovered that there was equality between both genders in terms of subject positions. One more finding of the study is about theme or contents utilized in the conversations. This part of research showed that both genders had the same role in the conversations and most of the roles were concerned with friend-friend relations. In these series both genders participated in social roles equally.

Therefore, the series shows both genders in a way which stereotypical norms are not ingrained into learners. Additionally, these textbooks mostly show friend- friend relations, and most of the conversations are related to daily speech among them. In fact, the ideology seeks to discover and create new social relations and depicts the equality between both males and females.

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